

Tail Docking and Tail Biting

Feed back & discussion

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Council Directive 2008/120/EC

- Tail-docking, tooth-clipping and tooth-grinding are likely to cause immediate pain and some prolonged pain to pigs.

→ *However..... This is not the real problem!*



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→ *Pigs are intelligent
and very curious*



→ Docking is painful... but the real problem is the reason why pigs bite tails: frustration and boredom

Picture: WLR

Council Directive 2008/120/EC

- Neither tail-docking nor reduction of corner teeth must be carried out routinely but only where there is evidence that injuries to sows' teats or to other pigs' ears or tails have occurred.

→ *Docking is allowed, but not routinely*

→ *... and only after evidence that biting occurs!*

Council Directive 2008/120/EC

- Before carrying out these procedures, other measures shall be taken to prevent tail-biting and other vices, taking into account environment and stocking densities.
- For this reason inadequate environmental conditions or management systems must be changed.

→..... *which will tackle the root of the biting problem!*

The issues CA's are struggling with

1. How to do a risk assessment?
2. Farmers do not dare to stop docking
3. Changing a farm (and a farmer!) is very difficult

1. The performance of risk assessment

Commission Recommendation EU 336/2016 recommends in Art 2A-2:

Member States should ensure that farmers carry out a risk assessment of the incidence of tail-biting based on animal and non-animal based indicators

- Not legally binding, but carry “legal weight”
- Recommendation was agreed by MS and pig sector

1. The performance of risk assessment

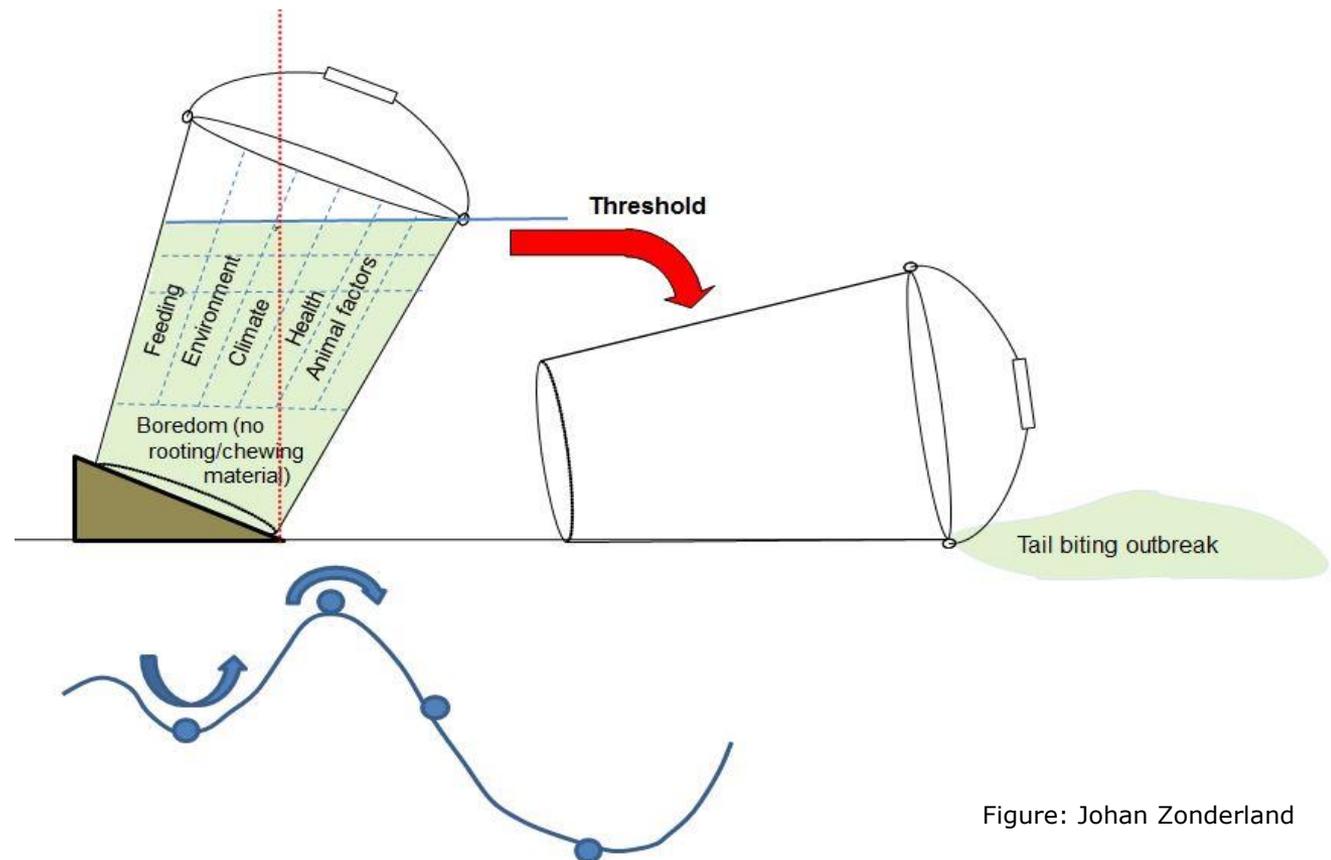
- Underlying motivation: exploration / foraging
 - Tail biting ≠ aggression

- Risk factors ('external')
 - Nothing to explore > boredom ●●●●●●●●
 - Suboptimal or changing climate ●
 - Low space allowance ●●
 - Low number feeding places, restricted feeding ●●
 - Management: transport, cross fostering, herd size ●
 - Health problems (postweaning mortality, respiratory diseases, carcass) ●
 - Nutrition: protein, amino acids, minerals ●



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1. The performance of risk assessment



1. The performance of risk assessment

- The risks for tail biting are laid down in COM REC 336.
 - Enrichment materials
 - Cleanliness
 - Thermal comfort & air quality
 - Health status
 - Competition
 - Diet

→ *Check out the EURCAW-Pigs website for a presentation and discussion of the risk areas*

1. The performance of risk assessment

Countries (in previous regional meetings) are developing their own assessment systems

- a 'SchwIP light', based on 6 areas of the COMM REC
- a system designed with farmers and vets
- a new experimental system



1. The performance of risk assessment

One country is investigating the possibility of having a risk assessment service by advisors, paid for by the government.

→ *questions of frequency and costs to be resolved.*

Another suggests that industry drivers can be used to complement legal requirements.

→ *can you include risk assessment in a quality assurance programme?*

2. Farmers do not dare to stop docking

- If you don't dock and tail biting starts, the welfare consequences are disastrous
- Docking is the **cheapest and easiest way** to avoid a tail biting outbreak!



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2. Farmers do not dare to stop docking

2. Farmers do not dare to stop docking

- Farmers are reluctant to take the risk
- They want a 'safety net'
- *Remove the biter, improve the circumstances*

- "When is it OK to tail dock the whole farm?"
- *Of course this should never be OK*

2. Farmers do not dare to stop docking

- Several countries do not have a threshold level. Maybe it is too early to set a threshold: “we’re not ready yet”
- 2% damaged tails at the abattoir was suggested as an average.
 - This is in docked pigs (presumably!)
 - Please note that abattoir data will underestimate the true prevalence
- ➔ Methods to assess tail biting in the abattoir can be automatised
- ➔ *it's better to check on farm if you can*

2. Farmers do not dare to stop docking

- One country suggested to look at thresholds in relation to efforts made to reduce biting.
 - It would require farmers to record biting:
Measuring = Knowing = Increased awareness
 - More biting means more pressure on a remedial action plan?

→ *Use a threshold as a **means to move forward**, and work with the farmer towards 'no routine docking'*



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3. Making a change



Picture: WLR

3. Making a change is possible

- Farms that do not dock can be found in Sweden and Finland
- They have
 - Solid floors and straw (straw was present on all farms that did not dock, and was absent on farms that docked)
 - Trough feeding (wet feed) instead of dry pellets
 - Cleaner pigs
 - Less mild and serious skin lesions



3. Making a change is possible

- We have several examples of farms outside these countries that earn money with undocked pigs
- **Coming soon:** our 'Demonstrators' on the website



3. Making a change.... in perception

- But technical solutions are not the main answer
- A change of perception is also needed!



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3. Making a change.... in perception

- It is important that farmers know that it is technically possible
- They should know that pigs are sentient beings, maybe more clever than dogs
- Docking reduces tail biting.... but tail biting still costs money!



3. Making a change

- Tail damage can lead to:
 - slower growth
 - costs of extra treatment
 - secondary carcass damage resulting from infections
- Important:
 - the proportion of tail damage
 - the level of damage.





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3. Making a change

- Tail biting happens on 50% of farms
- Prevalence: 2.1% in weaned piglets and finishing pigs (**with docked tails!**)
- Costs per pig
 - Weaner piglet: 7.63 €
 - Finishing pig: 9.09 €



3. Making a change

- Costs at farm level
 - Sow farm (500 sows): 2,142 €
 - Finishing unit (4000 finishers): 2,383 €
- Total costs for Dutch pig sector:
8 million € / year

Zonderland et al., 2011

→ *In 2019 EURCAW-Pigs update this figure to 13 million € / year*



3. Making a change, one step at a time

Progressive action is needed:

“Before carrying out docking, other measures shall be taken to prevent tail-biting and other vices, taking into account environment and stocking densities”.

- Their success can be measured in terms of improved environment, or management, decrease percentage tail biting/other parameters.

→ *The ultimate indicator is a curly tail!*

3. Making a change, one step at a time

- CA's in previous meetings agreed that asking farmers to build a new farm goes too far...
- However, in your country:
 - ➔ *What can be done at the planning stage of new farms?*
 - ➔ *How much consideration do farm builders and advisors give to welfare legislative requirements?*

3. Making a change, one step at a time

- We discovered that most of the countries actually do not ask for meaningful optimization measures...!
 - E.g. increasing space allowance is not a legal requirement and would not hold in court, when challenged.
 - But does it have to be a big 'all or nothing'?
- *One suggestion was to start small: what can you do to keep the tails on in a few pens only....?*



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3. Making a change, one step at a time

- Make a small change, and monitor progress!



Husbandry



Tail docking and tail biting

- Tail injuries
- Tail docking
- Lameness
- Fouling
- Suitability enrichment materials
- Signs of enrichment use
- Skin lesions
- Body condition
- Permanent access to water
- All factsheets

Transport



Climate control and space allowance

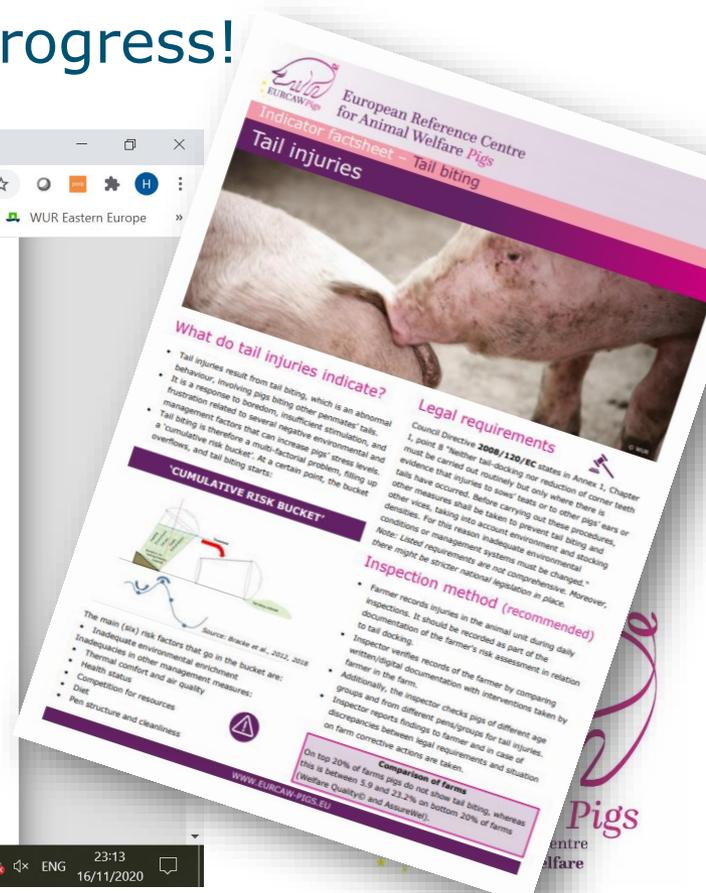
- Panting and pumping
- Huddling and shivering
- Dead on arrival (DOA)
- Fatigue
- All factsheets

Slaughter and killing



Handling in lairage

- Huddling, shivering and panting
- Fatigued and dead pigs
- Skin lesions
- Lameness
- Access to water and food
- All factsheets



3. Making a change, one step at a time

- What do other CA's do?
- Preparation: ask yourself what has to be inspected and how?
- Checklists and decision trees are used by some CA's. They even have a dedicated protocol or handbook for welfare inspections

➔ *Their advice is that this should be detailed / specific enough!*

3. Making a change, one step at a time

- One country has good experience with a team of 'specialised inspectors' in another area of enforcement:
 - Training a small group is easier than a large group
 - They quickly gain experience because they focus

3. Making a change – you are important

- Technical solutions are not the main answer
- If the **farmer** does not want to change.... it will not happen
- If his **advisors** do not see the need... it will not happen
- If the **inspector** does not see it... nothing is going to change!

3. Making a change – you are important

The inspector's perception is important:

- Pigs are sentient beings
- Tail docking is masking a bigger, hidden problem
- Tail biting costs a lot of money
- Keeping pigs with intact tails is possible
- One step at a time..... and monitor the progress!

- Stop routine docking: *it's the law*

To summarise.....

- Understand the risk factors on a farm
 - What is in the bucket + how can risks be tackled?
- Farmer, veterinarian & feed advisor need to work together to make changes
 - All have to support the aim, and agree the approach
- Monitor improvements
 - Check benefits of small steps: are things getting better?



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