



**VETERINARY IRELAND**

**POLICY DOCUMENT**

**ON**

**PERFORMANCE OF PAINFUL**

**PROCEDURES ON ANIMALS**

**2024**

**RATIFIED BY**

**VETERINARY IRELAND NATIONAL COUNCIL**

**20<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2024**



**GENERAL PRINCIPLE:**

ANY PROCEDURE THAT INVOLVES INTERFERENCE WITH THE SENSITIVE OR BONE STRUCTURE OF AN ANIMAL, AND THEREFORE MAY BE REASONABLY ASSUMED TO CAUSE PAIN TO AN ANIMAL, SHOULD ONLY BE PERFORMED WHEN THERE IS A GOOD REASON TO DO SO AND ONLY THEN BY A **PERSON COMPETENT\*** AND QUALIFIED TO DO SO, IN COMPLIANCE WITH NATIONAL LEGISLATION, USING APPROPRIATE TECHNIQUE AND ANAESTHESIA AND/OR ANALGESIA SO AS TO MINIMISE PAIN AND RISK.

**Specific Principles:**

- 1) A person should not perform any procedure that involves interference with or incision of the sensitive tissue or bone structure of an animal unless its performance is:
  - in the interest of the health, safety or welfare of that animal,  
or
  - to control the breeding and reproduction of animals to the benefit of the general animal population or society  
or
  - specifically allowed by national legislation e.g. disbudding, dehorning, tail-docking, methods of identification – see Statutory Instruments of relevance below.
- 2) If, having met the standard above, such a procedure is to be performed then it should only be performed by a **person competent\*** to do so.
  - Notwithstanding specific allowances for non-veterinary personnel to perform certain routine husbandry procedures on their own or their employer's farm animals, only a veterinary practitioner should perform surgical procedures on animals.
- 3) In all cases, irrespective of whom is performing the procedure, adequate anaesthesia and analgesia should be used so as to prevent any pain during and minimise any pain after the procedure.
  - a) It is the role of the veterinary profession to determine the optimum type, dose and duration of anaesthetics and analgesics to achieve this aim.
  - b) In all circumstances the veterinary profession in general, and the prescribing veterinary practitioner specifically, should follow scientific evidence and current best practice when determining the optimum type, dose and duration of anaesthetics and analgesics.
  - c) Where there is no scientific evidence to prove otherwise, when determining the optimum type, dose and duration of anaesthetics and analgesics the assumption must always be made that the animal will feel at least the same degree of pain or discomfort as a human would if that procedure were to be performed on a human. ("The Precautionary Principle".)



- 4) In addition, appropriate technique and sterility must be employed to reduce to a minimum the risk to the health and welfare of the animal.
  - The veterinary profession should take the lead in researching and educating as to what is optimum technique for each procedure.
- 5) Under no circumstances should a procedure be performed on an animal:-
  - for cosmetic reasons,
  - to attempt to conceal its identity,
  - to hide the animal's true genetic status, or
  - to enhance by deception its value for sale, breeding or showing in competition.
- 6) Where possible the environment should be adapted to the needs of the animal so as to reduce the need for the performance of surgical procedures.
- 7) The veterinary profession should strive to ensure that wherever practicable there should be an improvement of the genetic makeup of animals so that surgical procedures are not routinely necessary to correct underlying genetic failings of a certain species or breed.
- 8) Notwithstanding any of the above, no person should perform any procedure on an animal except in accordance with national legislation and, in the case of a veterinary practitioner or veterinary nurse, in accordance with ethical guidelines as prescribed by the Veterinary Council of Ireland.

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\* As per [S.I. No. 127 of 2014 \(Animal Health and Welfare \(Operations And Procedures\) \(No. 2\) Regulations 2014\)](#), “**Competent**” in relation to a person performing an operation or procedure on an animal means —

- a) being familiar with,
- b) having the necessary training and experience to successfully carry out,
- c) having the technical skill to successfully carry out,  
and
- d) having the requisite equipment to successfully carry out, the operation or procedure.

**Statutory Instruments** of relevance (correct as of 01/11/2024):

- [S.I. No. 107 of 2014 \(Animal Health and Welfare \(Section 17\) Regulations 2014\)](#)
- [S.I. No. 108 of 2014 \(Animal Welfare \(Electro-Immobilisation\) Regulations 2014\)](#)
- [S.I. No. 127 of 2014 \(Animal Health and Welfare \(Operations And Procedures\) \(No. 2\) Regulations 2014\)](#)
- [S.I. No. 128 of 2014 \(Prohibition on Tail Docking and Dew Claw Removal \(Dogs\) Regulations 2014\)](#)
- [S.I. No. 225 of 2014 \(Prohibition on Tail-Docking \(Bovines\) \(No. 2\) Regulations 2014\)](#)
- [S.I. No. 304 of 2017 \(Prohibition On Tail Docking and Dew Claw Removal \(Dogs\) Regulations 2014 \(Amendment\) Regulations 2017\)](#)
- [S.I. No. 412 of 2023 – \(Ear-Cropping of Dogs Regulations 2023\)](#)



**Relevant Websites:**

- Veterinary Ireland: [www.veterinaryireland.ie](http://www.veterinaryireland.ie)
- Irish Statute Book: [www.irishstatutebook.ie](http://www.irishstatutebook.ie)
- Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE): [www.fve.org](http://www.fve.org)
- Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine (DAFM) [www.agriculture.gov.ie](http://www.agriculture.gov.ie)



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