

The Truth About Canine Ear Cropping, Tail Docking, Dewclaw Removal and ‘Debarking’

Ear cropping, tail docking, and dewclaw removal are long-accepted animal husbandry practices that can protect the health and safety of many dogs and preserve breed character.

In the same way, bark softening – often imprecisely called “debarking” – is a humane, minor veterinary procedure whereby the volume of a dog’s bark is softened. It’s an option for excessively noisy dogs when training to quiet them fails that can prevent a dog from ending up in a shelter or being euthanized.

These procedures can greatly benefit the lives of dogs and should not be banned. However, appropriate veterinary care and oversight should be provided.

These procedures can protect the health and safety of many dogs.

Ear cropping, tail docking, and dewclaw removal can help some dogs better and more safely perform the tasks for which they are bred. In certain breeds, docking a tail prevents it from being snagged, caught, or damaged. This is especially important for search and rescue dogs, police dogs, hunting dogs and other working dogs that may have to go through thick brush, under a fence, or other tight places where a tail could get caught and harmed. In addition, a dewclaw is essentially an extra claw on dogs that serves no function. These can get pulled or torn, causing injury and great pain.

Among other benefits, cropping ears can help enhance the hearing of certain breeds. According to the Doberman Pinscher Club of America, the proven hearing enhancements assist in search and rescue and other tasks for which these dogs are bred.*

*Theresa Mullen, DPCA Public Education Committee, “Living with a Dobe”, published on <https://dpca.org/publiced/living-with-a-dobe/ears/>

Banning or arbitrarily regulating the procedures could put dogs in danger.

Removing the dewclaw shortly after birth protects the dog from a more serious injury later. Tail docking and dewclaw removal are performed shortly after birth before a puppy’s nerves have fully developed, and before pain is strongly felt. For this reason, laws should never mandate that these procedures be performed under full anesthesia or other similar arbitrary and potentially life-threatening requirements. Waiting until the dog is older could be much more traumatic and painful.

Breed standards are developed by breed experts.

Official standards for each breed are carefully established and maintained by a national AKC breed club. The members of these national parent clubs represent centuries of expertise in their chosen breed. Their goal is to protect the health and welfare of the breed, as well as preserve the function the dog was bred to perform. Ear cropping, tail docking, and dewclaw removal are accepted animal husbandry practices, and not merely an aesthetic whim.

Bark softening can prevent noisy dogs from losing their loving homes and prevent euthanasia.

Bark softening is a minor, minimally-invasive veterinary procedure that lowers the volume of a dog’s bark. This may be a viable option for owners when all other attempts at training have failed. Softening a bark can make a dog less offensive to neighbors, thereby allowing the owner to keep the dog in a loving home rather than being forced to relinquish their pet to a shelter where it could eventually be euthanized.

The American Kennel Club supports laws that target irresponsible and cruel owners and establish good standards for dog care. Ear cropping, tail docking, and dewclaw removal are long-accepted animal husbandry practices. Bark softening is a humane, viable, and safe procedure that can keep pets in loving homes. These humane procedures should be permitted with appropriate veterinary oversight and care.