

PE2130/E: Make it illegal to remove all the hair from a horse's tail

Animal Concern written submission, 5 November 2025

Animal Concern began looking into the practice of shaving/clipping off most of the hair from the tails of Clydesdale and Shire horses in 2023 following a call from a Clydesdale horse breeder who had long been concerned about the practice.

The practice involves shaving the hair off the tail bone leaving a “fan of hair” at the base of the dock which is tied up in a bun at shows, leaving the hairless tail bone exposed.

This matter was raised directly with the Clydesdale Horse Society (CHS), noting they'd held workshops on shaving Clydesdale tails. We pointed out the very humane option of plaiting the tail up to be in the best interest of the horses and asked them to encourage members to not deprive their horses of their tails for the show ring.

The response was that no vet had ever complained or raised it as a welfare issue, therefore they did not see it as one.

The Shire Horse Society (SHS) responded that shaving/clipping the tail was for the safety of the horse to prevent hair getting caught in the harness or straps, and that exhibitors are free to show their horses as they please to reflect the traditional style (i.e. when tails were docked prior to the ban in 1949).

The reasons given for the practice include tradition and safety.

The question stands as to whether it is ethical to remove the majority of a horse's tail hair for purely aesthetic reasons.

Two simple questions should provide the answer to this.

- 1) Is it necessary?
- 2) Is it in the best interest of the horse?

It has been demonstrated that it is not necessary. The horse's safety is not compromised in leaving the tail unshaved when in harness as plaiting/wrapping the tail achieves any purpose required for ensuring the tail is out of the way.

It cannot be in the best interest of a horse to deprive it of the important functions its natural tail provides and in fact compromises [Section 24](#) of the Animal Welfare Act (Scotland) which states, under 'Ensuring welfare of animals', that an animal's needs include being “able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns”.

The principles cited in the ban on the docking of tails in 1949 are at play with the practice of removing the majority of tail hair from a horse's dock. The tail is used by horses not just to deter flies/pests, but also to express themselves, communicate pain, fear, irritation, readiness to breed and also in friendship when standing head to tail. These behaviours are compromised when up to 90% of the natural tail is removed.

The argument of the horses' safety being cause to clip/shave off the tail hair has proven to be entirely without merit given the safe and humane alternative of plaiting the tail.

Of greater concern, evidencing that safety is not the reason for shaving/clipping off the majority of tail hair, is the sight of foals as young as 5 months old in the show ring with shaved docks protruding, as has become increasingly common.

Further evidence showing that the only purpose for shaving the tail so severely is to better show off the horse's hind end can be seen in the series [This Farming Life, \(Series 5, episode 4 at 27 minutes\)](#). In it, a Clydesdale breeder takes a one yr old filly into the barn to prepare her for a show. Pointing at the filly's hind end, he says; "She's only one. Normally you'd show them like this with a full tail. So, we think she has very good legs on her so we're going to take the tail off [...]. So instead of having hair down she'll have it up here like this, and all of this will have disappeared." he says, holding the tail hair up.

He mentions that horses that young don't normally have their tails shaved. Yet he demonstrates very clearly that the intent to show off the young filly's legs is more important than letting her keep her natural tail. He states: *"the only snag is once we do it, it takes about 3 years for it to grow back in"*.

In the past year we have approached numerous equine welfare organisations with the concern of the practice of shaving off up to 90% of heavy horses' tails.

The British Equine Veterinary Association replied: "We agree that tails are an important means of protection from flies, and carrying out a procedure which limits a horse's ability to protect itself purely for cosmetic purposes is not justified."

The RSPCA's Equine Specialist /Scientific & Policy Manager stated: "The practice of fully shaving off the tails of Clydesdale horses deprives them of their natural fly swat, and interferes with communication through body language, which is incredibly important in equines. As there are other means of ensuring that the tails of working horses do not become entangled or snagged in harness, such as plaiting of the tail, there is no benefit to the welfare of the animals which outweighs the negative impacts of the practice. Therefore it should end".

Similar responses were received from the SSPCA, the British Horse Society, the World Bitless Association and The Rare Breeds Survival Trust, where both Shires and Clydesdales are listed.

Supporting the [decision made by the organiser of the Great Yorkshire Show](#) (GYS) to implement the rule that all horses must have tails, the equine vet of GYS, Julian Rishworth, stated that tails are a "vital part of a horse's basic requirements" and "They should never be removed for aesthetic reasons."

In submission [PE2130/C](#), the Scottish Government indicated that a new Equine Code was being drafted by stakeholders from the equine sector, with World Horse Welfare and the British Horse Society leading a group of equine experts who agreed to write a new code on behalf of the Scottish Government with input from Scottish Government Animal Welfare officials. This was expected to be published at the end of summer 2025.

The matter of shaving tails was raised with Scottish Animal Welfare Committee (SAWC) at the start of this working group being formed and evidence being provided. It is unclear if the concern was addressed to include recommendations to the Scottish Government on banning the practice.

It is our stance that legislation is imperative if this practice is to stop. Guidance is not enough.