

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee  
Wednesday 26 November 2025  
18th Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)

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

### Introduction

**Petitioner** James A Mackie

**Petition summary** Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce a ban on the removal of all hair from a horse's tail to leave a bare stump, other than for medical reasons.

**Webpage** <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2130>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 5 March 2025.](#) At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received new written submissions from the Scottish Government, the petitioner and Animal Concern, which are set out in **Annexe C**.
4. [Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's webpage.](#)
5. [Further background information about this petition can be found in the SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
6. [The Scottish Government gave its initial response to the petition on 8 January 2025.](#)
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 55 signatures have been received on this petition.

### Action

8. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

**Clerks to the Committee**  
**November 2025**

## **Annexe A: Summary of petition**

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

#### **Petitioner**

James A Mackie

#### **Date Lodged**

4 December 2024

#### **Petition summary**

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce a ban on the removal of all hair from a horse's tail to leave a bare stump, other than for medical reasons.

#### **Background information**

The tail is an extension of the horse's spine, made up of two parts: the dock, the skin and muscles covering the vertebrae; and long hairs (the skirt) that fall below the dock. It is a vital part of the horse's anatomy serving several functions: balance and temperature regulation, pest deterrence, and communication of the horse's mood.

The practice of completely docking a horse's tail was banned in 1949.

Many horse breeders try to present their horses in a "historic manner". As they cannot dock the tail, they remove all the hair from the tail, leaving the bare stump. That practice is cosmetic and can cause the horse stress, as well as exposing the horse to, or hiding, other conditions.

An alternative to removing tail hair is braiding which keeps the hair out of harm's way and can be undone easily allowing the tail to function as it should.

## **Annexe B: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE2130 on 5 March 2025**

**The Convener:** The first new petition is PE2130, which has been lodged by James A Mackie. It calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce a ban on the removal of all hair from a horse's tail, leaving a bare stump, other than for medical reasons.

As Mr Mackie notes in the background information that he provided, the tail is a vital part of a horse's anatomy that serves several functions. The tail assists in temperature regulation, is a mechanism for balance by subtly influencing the alignment of the horse's hind, deters pests and is a vital communication centre for relaying messages about the horse's mood, health, energy and locomotion.

The SPICe briefing notes that horses are protected animals under the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006, which includes general offences such as causing a protected animal unnecessary suffering and carrying out a prohibited procedure on an animal. The act permits the Scottish ministers to make codes of practice for protecting animals, and the "Code of Practice for the Welfare of Equidae" was published in 2009. I note that the code does not include anything specific on tail hair removal.

The petitioner and others, such as Animal Concern, suggest that there are alternatives to removing tail hair, such as braiding or bandaging, which keep the hair out of harm's way and can be undone easily, allowing the tail to function naturally.

In response to the petition, the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity states that the Scottish Government does not support or recommend the complete removal of a horse's tail hair. However, the Government is of the view that a ban on the removal of hair from horse tails would be an unnecessary and disproportionate response. Instead, it suggests that the issue should be addressed in updated equine guidance, and it notes that new guidance is currently being developed.

We have received a submission from Mr Mackie in which he responds to the minister's comments. He notes that, as guidelines are not enforceable, legislation is required. The submission includes quotes from a House of Lords debate that took place in 1938 ahead of the introduction of the tail docking and nicking ban, and Mr Mackie suggests that the arguments that were made in that debate are just as relevant today.

The Scottish Government has given a view on its likely course of action, and I doubt that there is much time left for primary legislation in the current parliamentary session. What are colleagues inclined to suggest?

There is a rush of enthusiasm to identify how we might proceed. Do you have any views, Mr Ewing?

**Fergus Ewing:** If equine guidance is currently being developed, perhaps we could ascertain when it will be produced and provided, and allow the petitioner the opportunity to comment once it has been produced. I know that he argues that guidance in itself will be insufficient, because it would not outlaw practice that he

believes to be injurious. There seems to be a fair amount of evidence to support that; indeed, the minister talks about injurious ill-health side effects.

To be fair to the petitioner, if guidance is to be produced, he should be given an opportunity—given all the work that has been done subsequent to his lodging of the petition—to see whether the guidance cuts the mustard.

**The Convener:** Let us not try to find appropriate metaphors, Mr Ewing.

**Fergus Ewing:** “Hair today, gone tomorrow” comes to mind. However, I had better not stray into facetious territory, because, to be fair, the petitioner has raised a point about which he and other people feel strongly. For that reason, I do not think that we could close the petition yet; we should allow it serious consideration.

**The Convener:** Since you are keen to make hay with the petition, we will keep it open, if colleagues are content with that proposal. We will seek clarity from the Scottish Government on the timetable for the equine guidance, which is much anticipated, and we will then invite the petitioner to comment. Does the committee agree?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## **Annexe C: Written submissions**

### **Scottish Government written submission, 8 April 2025**

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

A new Scottish Government Equine Code is currently being drafted by stakeholders from the equine sector. World Horse Welfare and the British Horse Society are 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. We are therefore confident that there is a sufficiently wide-ranging and varied base of equine expertise contributing to the development of the new code.

Publication is anticipated by late summer 2025. The National Equine Welfare Council will be meeting early in April and an update on the progress of the code will be provided to Scottish Government officials following the meeting.

#### **Animal Welfare Policy**

### **Petitioner written submission, 30 October 2025**

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

I would like the Committee to note that the Great Yorkshire Show, a very large agricultural and equine show, has now banned all horses with shaved tails from any competition and/or exhibition. I have had informal information that the Scottish Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals is possibly supportive of the proposed ban. I was surprised that the Committee had not written to them previously asking their opinion, as they are the largest animal welfare charity in Scotland. Animal Concern is a charity that has been campaigning for a ban on shaving tails as well and has submitted a similar petition to the Westminster Parliament. There is a growing public demand to have the practice stopped as it has no medical reason for it to continue.

### **Animal Concern written submission, 5 November 2025**

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

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.