



You may or may not be aware that tail health in cattle is monitored by MPI veterinarians when they go through the slaughterhouse.

Tail health is an indicator for animal welfare. Since 1st October 2018, docking of cow and dog tails in New Zealand has been illegal. There is a nationwide move to promote care of cattle tails.



## Animal Welfare

Breaking tails is one of the most common issues in cattle-related welfare complaints that come to court in New Zealand.

The use of tails to move cattle or to restrain them is a sign of poor welfare and is outright cruelty if it results in a fracture of the tail. This is because it is painful for the cow (calf or heifer). The recommended best practice in the New Zealand Dairy Cattle Code of Welfare is that tails are neither twisted nor lifted.

The human analogy is to imagine what it feels like if your fingers are either dislocated or fractured (bent over backwards, crushed etc) – OUCH! This is what the cow feels when her tail is twisted too far resulting in a vertebral dislocation and or a fracture. It has long term effects in causing areas of thickening and fibrosis, distorting the shape of the tail and altering the way it swings.

The cow uses her tail for fly control, to indicate she is in oestrus and other communication.



## Tail Handling

To avoid damaging cattle tails people need to think about how they restrain and move cattle around the cowshed, cattle races and other areas where close restraint is employed.

Research has shown that injury of tails by machinery or equipment (eg rotary milking platform) is rare and that it is almost always caused by human handling.

To help farmers, DairyNZ have a great resource "Every Cow has a Tale to Tell" which can be downloaded or ordered from their website: <https://www.dairynz.co.nz/media/5793828/every-cow-has-a-tail-to-tell-a4-resource-dnz50-042.pdf>

## Tail breaking on-farm

If a cow has a freshly broken tail, she should receive anti-inflammatories for pain relief and the injury should be seen and recorded by a veterinarian.

Whole herd tail monitoring can be carried out with your veterinarian and there is an official recording method. Annual audits will encourage staff that they are heading in the right direction with a reduction in tail injuries.

If you would like to improve the tail health in your herd, please ask your veterinarian, we are happy to help you.