

# NZDJA NZ Dog Judges Association Inc

## Judging traditionally docked breeds

by Lavina Diamanti

Tail docking in New Zealand has been banned since 2018 and the flow-on effect of that legislation is becoming apparent, with puppies and young dogs of traditionally docked breeds now being exhibited sporting tails. This isn't new, of course, since tail docking was banned in Australia and many parts of Europe some time ago and we have seen a number of imported dogs with tails. But we haven't previously seen the numbers that we are now.

If you have judged outside New Zealand then you will be more familiar with seeing these breeds with tails. If you haven't yet had that opportunity, then the first time you judge an exhibit with a tail that has been traditionally docked, you may find yourself wondering what to do. And that isn't at all surprising since only a few of our breed standards give clear direction as an alternative on what you should be looking for in the tail where it is no longer docked.

When faced with this situation in the ring there are a number of trains of thought. One could just imagine that the tail isn't there or alternatively imagine that the tail is docked to the traditional length. That might work for some, but it didn't cut the mustard for me. I wanted to know more about the correct set and carriage, the thickness, how much hair it should have, and how long it should be. All these things affect the overall balance of the dog.

Without clear direction in our breed standards I believe we have two options:

- Ignore the tail as part of the assessment of the dog or
- Equip ourselves with knowledge that is sourced from our breeders and from breed standards of other countries.

In assessing these options, I considered a number of factors. My expectation when I am exhibiting my own breed is that the judge considers the tail length and carriage as part of the overall assessment of the dog. So why wouldn't exhibitors of traditionally docked dogs that now have tails expect any less? But when I go searching for direction in the breed standards for judging tails on our traditionally docked breeds, I find quite a variation in information. Some standards are very descriptive, and others give little direction at all, and this applies equally to standards from Australia, FCI and other countries.

The other important thing to take into consideration is that when we are judging in NZ, we are judging to a Breed Standard that, in most cases, is silent on the tail for a traditionally docked dog. But, as with so many other facets of judging, lack of direction in the written word should not equate to lack of understanding of what is ideal. Changing our breed standards to reflect the change in legislation is a huge undertaking. The Breed Standards Committee is tasked

with this and to date have only dealt with some breeds as they have been requested to. So if you are a breeder and/or exhibitor of a traditionally docked breed there is an opportunity for you to encourage your breed clubs to make a submission for the breed standard to be changed to reflect the change in legislation.

Where to from here? With Australia being our closest neighbour, it makes sense for us to look to the Australian breed standards for direction until our own standards are updated. If you haven't already discovered the Extended Breed Standards on the Australian National Kennel Council website ([www.ankc.org.au](http://www.ankc.org.au)), then I highly recommend that you take a look. They're not available for all breeds but are a valuable source of information, including breed history and development, and delve much deeper into the judging of the relevant breed than can be gained from just studying the standard. A word of caution though: some Australian breed standards are different to ours so make sure you identify and understand these differences.

Other sources of information are our own breeders. Martyn Slade has done a good presentation on this subject and his PowerPoint slides are on the NZDJA website, [nzdogjudge.com](http://nzdogjudge.com), under Member Resources/ Training and upskilling/ Training tools and articles. Talk to other judges, talk to breeders, research as much as you can, and remember that when judging in New Zealand, we are judging to our standards.

As this crazy year of 2020 draws to a close and we reflect on the disruptions to our lives, and the hardships and challenges many of us have faced, we can also be grateful for the support of family and friends and the opportunities that have been presented for some.

The Board of NZDJA wishes everyone a peaceful and happy Christmas and a prosperous 2021. Happy judging. 🐾

### National Board

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### Important Dates

|                     |                              |
|---------------------|------------------------------|
| 12 January 2021     | Theory exams                 |
| 20-21 February 2020 | Auckland Practical exams     |
| 13-14 March 2021    | Christchurch Practical exams |