

U.K. vets ask gov't to ban tail docking of dogs

LONDON (AP) Defying the strong views of Princess Anne, the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons on Thursday called for the government to protect every dog's right to a full-length tail.

The college said the routine snipping of poodles' and bulldogs' tails for cosmetic reasons is "disgraceful conduct," and threatened to lift the licenses of vets who do it.

Docking puppies' tails is "an unjustified mutilation and unethical" except to treat or prevent disease or injury, the college's 40-member council declared.

President Judy MacArthur Clark said the college does not have the power to ban docking, but it will ask the government to do so.

"In the meantime, we are

giving members very, very strong guidance that the vast majority of the profession wish to seek an end to docking," she said.

The college, with a worldwide membership of 16,500, issued the guidelines because only qualified vets will be able to crop or remove dogs' tails in the United Kingdom beginning July 1.

Some 1.3 million of Britain's 7.5 million dogs have had their tails docked — in most cases by breeders. About 50 of the 185 breeds registered with the Kennel Club traditionally have their tails snipped, including corgis, boxers, Dobermans, old English sheepdogs, poodles and rottweilers.

The college's patron, Queen Elizabeth II, owns a bevy of

the stubby corgis, and The Times of London reported Thursday that Her Majesty "is thought privately to oppose" the docking ban.

But her daughter, Princess Anne, recently barked at the British Veterinary Association for "getting so uptight" about docking. She argued that a wagging tail is vulnerable when a dog is working in brambles or brush.

"My own experience of working dogs suggests it is sound preventative treatment in the first place to remove the bit that is going to get damaged," she told the association's annual meeting last month.

Docking began with the Romans' mistaken notion that it prevented rabies, and has persisted for reasons of fash-

ion and safety.

Breeders say it is painless, improves hygiene in long-haired breeds and protects working dogs from injury.

Robert Killick of the 3,000-member Council of Docked Breeds accused the veterinary college of "gross interference with the liberty of the individual."

"A dog is fundamentally a man-made creature. We design them with specific uses in mind," said Killick, who breeds Welsh terriers.

In a recent letter to the Daily Telegraph, Jane Grievson defended the liberty of the individual pooch. "After all, a dog lives to wag its tail as a sign of pleasure," she wrote. "What could be more unkind than to deprive it of that simple right?"

ST 30 May 1993