



NZVA Standardised Tail Scoring System

Possible observations

D – Deviated

Check for:

- Visible deviations

T – Trauma/swelling

Check for:

- Visible damage to skin /soft tissue
- Soft swelling
- Hard swelling/callus (not deviated)

S – Shortened

- Tail has been shortened/ amputated/docked

**Note: In 2018 tail amputation became a veterinarian-only procedure – record reason for any amputation identified at tail scoring*

N – Normal tail

No visible or palpable lesions

Tail zone

Zone 1

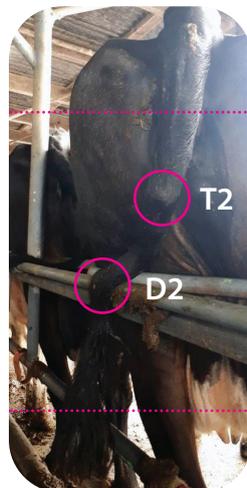
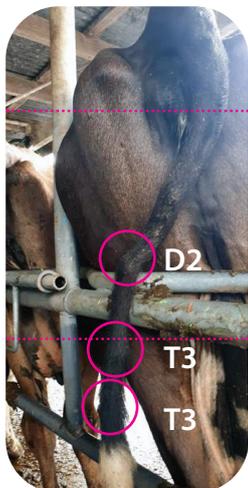
Top third of tail (tail head to bottom of vulva)

Zone 2

Middle third of tail (bottom of vulva to 2/3rds down tail)

Zone 3

Bottom third of tail (2/3rds down tail to tail tip)



Veterinary practices around the country have been assessing the tail condition of dairy cattle for many years. Many clinics will be using their own existing protocols to do this. As on-farm animal welfare assessment continues to become more important, there is value in having a consistent method by which tail scoring is undertaken.

The Dairy Cattle Veterinarians' Branch of the NZVA has attempted to standardise these protocols into a common scoring system, to enhance consistency across the veterinary profession. This will enable us to clearly communicate with the dairy industry about what is 'normal', and to improve our ability to report tail condition on a national level.

How to score

The value of tail scoring comes from observation of **trends** – single point observations are difficult to interpret.

It is recommended that herd tail scoring be undertaken **at least annually**. Aim to score the herd as soon as the heifers enter, as their first score is important in establishing a timeline of when tail damage may be occurring.

There are many ways tail score may be recorded – on paper, by creating 'groups' in herd management software (e.g. MINDA), or through individual animal records in herd management software (e.g. Infortet). An example of a paper-based recording sheet is on the reverse of this page.

The tail must be palpated – many dislocations/breaks are not visibly displaced, and therefore are easily missed if relying on observation only.

Ensure the entire tail is palpated, right to the tip. Where multiple pathologies are found, all pathologies should be recorded.

Whichever recording system you use, ensure that you can compare individual animal results year-on-year – otherwise you will not be able to identify when damage is occurring.

There are currently very few national-level studies on tail damage in dairy cows. However, the body of data continues to grow each year. Currently, the estimated herd average of all tail damage categories is approximately 20%, with an annual herd prevalence of tail breaks of 10–12%.

If you are concerned with the results of a herd tail score you've undertaken, there are several ways to approach a solution. It is recommended you communicate with senior colleagues at your practice or call the NZVA for advice on 04 471 0484.

NZVA Standardised Tail Scoring System (continued)

Tail scoring form

Farm/client name

Jane Smith

Farm dairy number

12345

Assessed at (circle one)

Milking

Vaccination visit

BSC visit

Other

Assessment date

25 August 2019

Assessor

John Doe
JD Veterinary Services
Johntown

Animal tag # Tail score 1 Tail score 2 Notes

Animal tag #	Tail score 1	Tail score 2	Notes
195	N		
72	T2		Swelling above calving marker tape – advised Jane and staff to use spray markers to identify colostrum cows instead of insulation tape.
239	N		
216	S3		R5 cow – docked prior to regulation
115	N		
116	D2	T3	