



K9andSports e.V.  
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## **Ban on Working Dog Sports in Austria**

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Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

K9andSports e.V. ("**K9andSports**") is a registered association in Germany dedicated to preserving operational and healthy working dogs.

### **1. K9andSports**

K9andSports operates across organizations and borders. In certain jurisdictions where dog sports hold particular significance, legally independent but cooperating associations now exist under the name K9andSports (Country), which share the same goals as K9andSports. Such a legally independent organization also exists in Austria.

The active work of K9andSports is carried out by approximately 100 K9andSports "Ambassadors". Each of these ambassadors brings exceptional expertise relevant to the field, whether it be due to their roles in associations or law enforcement agencies, their success as dog sport athletes, or their backgrounds as scientists or veterinarians specializing in relevant areas. K9andSports is supported by more than 7,000 "Supporters" who have registered on the website since its establishment six months ago.

In Germany, the Working Group of Law Enforcement Agencies with Service Dogs supports the activities and goals of our association. This includes the adaptation of breeding goals and the definition of desired service and working dog characteristics to maintain an operational working dog. The convened working group is under the German Ministry of the Interior and is composed of representatives from the Federal Police, Federal Armed Forces, Customs, as well as representatives from the federal states.

K9andSports also maintains close coordination with the Military Working Dog School of the Bundeswehr, whose commander is veterinarian Dr. Esther Schalke. Additionally, close contacts with law enforcement dog services exist in other jurisdictions, such as Switzerland and Finland.

Among our ambassadors are...

- Christa Bremer, Vice President of VDH (Verband für das Deutsche Hundewesen), representing approximately 600,000 members.
- Roswitha Dannenberg and Daniele Strazzeri, President and Vice President of Verein für Deutsche Schäferhunde – SV (Association for German Shepherd Dogs) with approximately 60,000 members.
- PhD Erin O’Shea, President of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute and 2-time WUSV Universal Champion.
- Trisha Harper, Homeland Security Trainer, USA.
- Sharon Ronen, Biologist and Police Dog Handler in Israel.
- Vadim Plotzker, Board Member of WUSV (World Union of German Shepherd Dog Clubs), and many more.

You can view the complete list of ambassadors at <https://k9-and-sports.com/wer-steht-dahinter/>.

A ban on the practice of association-regulated working dog sports, including its Section C, would have serious consequences for

- the international breeding of working dogs, which numerous law enforcement agencies rely on;
- the appropriate care of working dogs that now live in families;
- the existence of countless clubs dedicated to dog training, enabling smooth coexistence of humans and animals;
- the advancement of animal welfare-compliant training methods; and
- society, as a means of engagement in close human-animal interaction is lost.

## **2. Negative consequences of a ban on working dog sports include**

### **The Role of Working Dogs in Society**

Working dogs<sup>1</sup> fulfill important roles in society: serving as service dogs for law enforcement agencies (police, military, customs, and judiciary), as protection dogs for individuals and objects, as search dogs, as rescue dogs in search and rescue teams, and in deployment with security companies, to name just a few.

### **The use of service dogs is more important than ever**

Their deployment is indispensable. When used in protection roles, they provide early warning to handlers and have a significant deterrent effect, which would only be replaceable by a large number of human personnel. Thus, the use of service dogs effectively de-escalates situations. Many conflicts can be resolved or mitigated by the presence of service dogs. In disaster areas and search operations, there are still no alternatives to the flexibility of dogs, which can be deployed in almost any environment.

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<sup>1</sup> Working dogs in this sense, as defined by the FCI, include German Shepherds, Belgian Shepherds, Rottweilers, Boxers, Dobermans, Airedales, Bouviers, Hovawarts, and Giant Schnauzers. In practice, Dutch Shepherds are also utilized, as well as Labradors in pure search work.

Due to the increasingly tense security situation worldwide, K9 units in almost all countries are striving to expand their teams and are facing significant challenges in meeting their needs.

### **Working dog sport athletes and breeders play a central and indispensable role in the procurement of suitable dogs for service**

Law enforcement agencies have traditionally and predominantly relied on private breeders or former sport dog handlers when purchasing future service dogs.

Establishing a government-owned breeding program in a capacity sufficient to meet demand is not feasible or realistic because a) only a portion of dogs from a litter are suitable for service, and b) successful breeding requires a wide gene pool. The associated costs and time required for such a comprehensive breeding program are prohibitive. In order for law enforcement agencies to source working dogs from private breeders, these breeders must promote the inheritance of behaviors beneficial for service and exclude dogs from breeding that pass on behaviors leading to unsuitability for service.

### **Working dog sports as a tool for breeding selection**

Against this backdrop, working dog sports emerged over 100 years ago: clubs began using sports to assess the quality of future service dog breeding. Accordingly, the examination regulations of working dog sports still require a dog to demonstrate the physical constitution and characteristics necessary for deployment.

The selection process is entirely different from what is known for breeds where appearance is evaluated. In working dog breeding, only dogs that have passed specific tests are used for breeding. For example, a working dog trial cannot be passed if a dog does not display indifference to gunfire during the trial. Indifference to gunfire is a highly heritable trait. The evaluation of temperament traits in sport occurs in three disciplines: search work, obedience, and protection work. A dog that is successful in working dog sports has already demonstrated comprehensive predispositions required for service.

### **Breeds specific traits are genetically unstable.**

In recent years, research into the genetic foundations of behaviors has advanced. It has been demonstrated that breed-specific traits must be rigorously selected if they are to be preserved.<sup>2</sup> If selection criteria change or are abandoned, a trait can quickly be lost.<sup>3</sup>

### **A performance-oriented breeding of working dogs is not possible without working dog sports**

The abolition of working dog sports would result in the loss of the majority of customers (private individuals active in working dog sports) for breeders of working dogs. Breeding, which is often more of a hobby than a source of income in this area, would no longer be profitable. It can already be assumed that

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<sup>2</sup> Feddersen-Petersen (1992) u.v.a.

<sup>3</sup> Svartberg bei einer Datenerhebung von 13.000 Hunden aus 31 Rassen: Breed-typical behaviour in dogs-- Historical remnants or recent constructs? Applied Animal Behaviour Science, 96(3-4), 293–313.

a large portion of private breeders would disappear, and authorities would run out of suppliers.

Above all, a performance-oriented breeding, which promotes behavior conducive to deployment, would simply not be possible for private individuals without working dog sports, as the means of assessing temperament traits would be eliminated. The quality of working dogs in Austria would decline rapidly.<sup>4</sup>

### **Quotes from the ranks of law enforcement agencies**

Ralf Meins, police officer from Hamburg: *"A voice against working dogs is also always a voice against law enforcement agencies."*<sup>5</sup>

Sicherheit Nord: Security company of the Bundeswehr: *"We support the mentioned working dog sports because they form the basis of a functioning breeding program. Only if the mentioned dog sports continue to be practiced and promoted will private breeders have an incentive for their activities. Only then will there continue to be a selection through sports that places sufficient value on the temperament and physical condition of the dog. For the maintenance of the use of service dogs in the security service of the Bundeswehr, it is essential that a performance assessment and training is possible, ensuring that the tested dogs can withstand the demands of real-life situations."*<sup>6</sup>

Trisha Harper, TSA Security Specialist, Department of Homeland Security, USA: *"Working dog sports have all emerged with the goal of evaluating the quality of breeding for future service dogs. If we were to lose even one of them, we would be doing a disservice to the K9 handlers. And it's not uncommon for the lives of our K9 handlers to depend on their partners, the service dogs."*<sup>7</sup>

Adi Hazut, Retired K9 Handler, Israel Defense Forces: *"The dogs that fight alongside us against terrorism come from the world of dog sports. We, essentially everyone worldwide responsible for security, rely on the latest training insights from dog sports. They receive the dogs from sport breeders who will later stand by their side in service. If dog sports were ever to disappear, the military, security forces*

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<sup>4</sup> For example, the gunshot neutrality/sound sensitivity in general family dogs vs. working dogs: while in the German Malinois Club (DMC), only five dogs were denied breeding approval due to noise sensitivity in ten years, the Vienna Veterinary Monthly Journal in 2022 noted an increasing noise sensitivity in family dogs. 68% of household dogs suffer from severe panic, which sometimes requires treatment with psychotropic drugs. The tendency of noise sensitivity is increasing in household dogs. This example highlights the significant difference between breeding focused on temperament traits and the prevalent breeding in household dogs, which emphasizes the appearance of the dog.

<sup>5</sup> <https://k9-and-sports.com/2023/11/20/ralf-meins-polizeibeamter-aus-hamburg-eine-stimme-gegen-gebrauchshunde-ist-auch-immer-eine-stimme-gegen-die-diensthundhaltenden-behoerden/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://k9-and-sports.com/2023/11/18/sicherheit-nord-sicherheitsfirma-der-bundeswehr-wir-unterstuetzen-die-genannten-gebrauchshundesportarten-deshalb-weil-dies-die-grundlage-einer-funktionierenden-zucht-bildet/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://k9-and-sports.com/2023/11/18/adi-hazut-diensthundefuehrer-a-d-israel-defense-forces-wenn-wir-den-hundesport-verlieren-werden-polizei-und-militaer-weltweit-grosse-einbussen-haben/>

*and police forces worldwide would suffer significant losses. It would greatly impair their capabilities."*<sup>8</sup>

Vika Bezus, Ukrainian National Guard, Breeder: *"Our working dogs are important for our society. Dog sports ensure that there are enough good dogs available. I'm not sure if everyone realizes the connection between sports and service."*<sup>9</sup>

### **The effects of a ban are not limited to Austria alone**

The breeding of working dogs relies on a very limited number of dogs. The breeding populations (i.e., the dogs used for breeding by a breed club) achieve the necessary genetic diversity by utilizing stud dogs of the corresponding breed from outside their own population and even from abroad. If the worldwide breeding population of working dog breeds loses even just the population of one nation, a significant loss in genetic diversity can be expected over a few generations. This is especially true for a nation like Austria, which is one of the strongest working dog sport nations and consequently has many breeding facilities.

### **A ban on working dog sports worsens the conditions for working dogs**

The working dog sport serves not only as a selection process for dogs intended for breeding but also provides appropriate mental and physical stimulation for working dogs living in families. These dogs learn to act in a controlled manner in high drive situations and to respond to the handler's commands. Their fitness levels are high, whereas the fitness of pure household dogs tends to decline over the years, with the need for medication and even psychotropic drugs increasing. Estimates suggest that about 40% of pets in industrialized countries are overweight. It doesn't take long to realize that banning organized sports for both humans and animals is certainly not the right approach if one aims to promote the well-being of animals in coexistence with humans.

## **3. The purpose of the ban, protection against biting incidents, is not achieved by prohibiting working dog sports**

It would be expected that a ban of such magnitude, affecting the service sector, the breeding of working dogs, and of course, the members of approximately 500 dog training sites across various Austrian associations along with their dogs, should serve a specific purpose.

The aim of the ban on working dog sports is presumed to be the protection of the public/physical integrity by preventing biting incidents. The impetus for the proposal to ban working dog sports was a tragic biting incident involving dogs of the American Staffordshire breed. To our knowledge, these dogs had not undergone regulated and association-based training in working dog sports. Furthermore,

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<sup>8</sup> <https://k9-and-sports.com/2023/11/17/adi-hazut-former-commander-at-the-israeli-armys-k9-in-ordert-to-protect-peace-and-order-around-the-world/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://k9-and-sports.com/2023/11/17/vika-bezus-unsere-gebrauchshunde-sind-wichtig-fuer-unsere-gesellschaft-ukrainische-nationalgarde-zuechterin/>

<sup>10</sup> Forschung und Wissen, Mehr als die Hälfte aller Hunde in Deutschland leiden an Übergewicht, 2021: <https://www.forschung-und-wissen.de/nachrichten/biologie/mehr-als-die-haelfte-alle-hunde-in-deutschland-leiden-an-uebergewicht-13375410>.

Moreover, this breed is not typically found in dog training sites; namely, working dogs with special suitability for working dog sports.

**Regardless of this tragic isolated incident, dogs trained in working dog sports are demonstrably less involved in biting incidents than untrained family dogs.**

After evaluating expert opinions on dogs involved in biting incidents in Bavaria<sup>11</sup>, dogs trained as protection dogs appeared in the evaluation at a subordinate percentage: males at 2.2%. Females were not involved in biting incidents at all. The most frequently involved dogs in biting incidents were family dogs that had not attended any dog training school. A interviewed judge in Germany said regarding this:

*"That in connection with the subject of protection dog sports or generally among dog owners who train their dogs - regardless of the area - there is an increased incidence of violations of animal welfare laws, I cannot confirm from my experience as a criminal judge. In all those years, I never had a single case on my desk in which someone from this group of people was accused of violating animal welfare laws. The cases involving dog owners all dealt with abuse of household dogs, whose owners acted out of overwhelm, ignorance, or sheer brutality. With the right help, education, connection to clubs, and meaningful engagement, many of these cases could surely have been avoided."*

Well-trained sport and protection dogs do not pose a risk. On the contrary, it can be assumed that the abolition of training and exercise opportunities increases the potential for biting incidents.

This is also confirmed by veterinarians, such as Dr. Marianne Fischer from Großrudestedt.

*"At my practice, I encounter various dog owners with their four-legged companions daily. In my opinion, dog owners who spend their leisure time in clubs and at dog training sites are much better equipped to assess and understand their dogs properly. The dogs exhibit good obedience, and the atmosphere during routine examinations is more relaxed. Living with dogs that can express their instincts in a controlled manner, for example, through working dog sports, while also learning obedience, is far less concerning than many other forms of dog ownership."*

*"So-called working dogs are loyal family companions and at the same time protectors of home and property. These are all traits that have been preserved and continuously improved through years of selective breeding."*

Dr. Simone Stroh, Landsberg am Lech:

*"Anyone who has actively engaged with the topic of working dog sports knows: it's not about aggression, violence, or causing harm. On the contrary, the dog is trained in areas such as impulse control (protection work), obedience (subordination), and controlled prey drive (tracking), which leads to much more exuberant and 'controllable' dogs. Training in protection work has many benefits for both humans and dogs and should not be generalizedly banned based on isolated exceptions."*

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<sup>11</sup> Mikus, Statistische Auswertung von Sachverständigengutachten über Hunde mit Beissvorfällen in Bayern, 2006.

<sup>12</sup> Kathrin Heldt, Amtsgericht Herford.

In summary, we would like to emphasize that a ban on working dog sports would have significant negative consequences for service agencies, working dog breeds, and the relationship between humans and dogs. Furthermore, such a ban would not be effective in preventing bite incidents, as engaging in these sports does not increase the likelihood of such incidents; rather, it reduces them.

We are available at any time for any questions you may have.

