



## Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

**Petition Number:** [PE1555](#)

**Main Petitioner:** Siobhan Garrahy

**Subject:** Electric Shock and Vibration Collars for Animals

Calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to ban the cruel and completely unnecessary use of electric shock and vibration collars on animals in Scotland.

### Background

The purpose of the petition is to ban the use of electric shock collars in animals as a training and compliance tool. The petitioner argues that they are not necessary and that any good animal behaviourist will promote reward base training methods that are appropriate and effective.

Electric shock collars are worn around a dog's neck and deliver an electric shock either via a remote control or an automatic trigger, for example, a dog's bark.

### Arguments for electric shock collars

The [Electronic Collar Manufacturers Association](#) argues that –

“Dog training must be humane. However dogs are not human beings, they are pack animals. They need an established pack order. Effective training demands that you must be the pack leader.

Teaching your dog to do something or breaking him of a bad habit can only be done by creating nice feelings associated with good behaviour (reward training) or by creating small unpleasant feelings associated with bad behaviour (aversive training).

Most successful training involves a balanced and appropriate blend of both reward and aversive training. Electronic training is most effective as part of just such a balanced training regime.

Aversive training can only be effective if the aversive stimulus is proportionate, getting the animals attentions by being sufficiently unpleasant but causing no harm or lasting effects.”

### **Arguments against electric shock collars**

[The Kennel Club](#) set out key statistics from research into Electric Shock Collars on their website:

- 1 in 4 dogs showed signs of stress compared to less than 5% of dogs in the non-electric shock collar control group (Defra commissioned study AW1402, 2007)
- 1 in 3 dogs yelp at the first use of electric shock collar and 1 in 4 yelp at subsequent uses (Defra commissioned study AW1402, 2007)
- 73% of the public disapprove of the use of electric shock collars on dogs (Kennel Club commissioned survey, 2014)
- 79% of the public agree that positive reinforcement training methods can address behavioural issues in dogs without the need for negative training methods (Kennel Club commissioned survey, 2014)
- 74% of the public would support the government introducing a ban on electric shock collars (Kennel Club commissioned survey, 2014)

### **DEFRA funded research on electric shock collars**

A Defra funded project ([AW1402](#)) which reported in 2010 assessed the welfare of dogs trained with pet training aids, specifically remote static pulse collar systems. The final report “suggested that the use of e-collars in training pet dogs leads to a negative impact on welfare, at least in a proportion of animals trained using this technique.”

A Defra funded project ([AW1402a](#)) which reported in 2011 had a single aim, namely to assess the impact of use of remote static pulse electric training aids during the training of dogs in comparison to dogs referred for similar behavioural problems but without e-collar training. It concluded that –

“The results of this study show that [both] the trainers’ general approach and the tools they use in training affect the dog’s emotional

responses to training... Nevertheless the study did find behavioural evidence that use of e-collars negatively impacted on the welfare of some dogs during training even when training was conducted by professional trainers using relatively benign training programmes advised by e-collar advocates.”

## **Legislation in Wales**

[The Animal Welfare \(Electronic Collars\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2010](#) came into force in Wales on 24 March 2010. They prohibit a person from attaching an electronic collar to a cat or dog which includes collars used in association with electronic boundary fencing systems. Such fences send a signal to a collar fitted on the dog, if the animal goes beyond the set boundary.

Subsequently a petition ([P-04-445](#)) was introduced into the Assembly in January 2013 calling for the use of electronic collars linked with electronic boundary fencing to be permitted under the legislation. This was with the aim of preventing cats and dogs straying onto roads. In [correspondence](#) to the Petitions Committee in September 2013 Alun Davies indicated that the Welsh Government would be reviewing the legislation over summer 2014. The outcome of this review has not been announced.

In response to the petition the RSPCA, who wish for the legislation to remain in place as currently drafted, conducted a [review of scientific information](#) available on the potential effects of electronic boundary fencing and submitted their findings to the Petitions Committee on 20 January 2014.

## **Scottish Government Action**

The use of electric shock collars is legal in Scotland as long as they do not cause unnecessary suffering.

[The Animal Health and Welfare \(Scotland\) Act 2006](#) places a duty of care on pet owners and others responsible for animals to ensure that the welfare needs of an animal are met. All pets (including cats, dogs, rabbits, rodents, birds, horses, ponies, fish, snakes and other reptiles) are protected by the Act.

The duty of care placed on an animal owner or keeper is based on the ‘Five Freedoms’ originally recommended by the Farm Animal Welfare Council, but now generally accepted to cover any animal for which a person is responsible:

- its need for a suitable environment
- its need for a suitable diet
- its need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
- any need it has to be housed with, or apart from, other animals, and
- its need to be protected from suffering, injury and disease.

With respect to protection from unnecessary suffering, section 19 of the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 provides:

(1) A person commits an offence if–

- (a) the person causes a protected animal unnecessary suffering by an act, and
  - (b) the person knew, or ought reasonably to have known, that the act would have caused the suffering or be likely to do so.
- (2) A person who is responsible for an animal commits an offence if–
- (a) the person causes the animal unnecessary suffering by an act or omission, and
  - (b) the person knew, or ought reasonably to have known, that the act or omission would have caused the suffering or be likely to do so.
- (3) A person (“person A”) who is responsible for an animal commits an offence if–
- (a) another person causes the animal unnecessary suffering by an act or omission, and
  - (b) person A–
    - (i) permits that to happen, or
    - (ii) fails to take such steps (whether by way of supervising the other person or otherwise) as are reasonable in the circumstances to prevent that happening.
- (4) The considerations to which regard is to be had in determining, for the purposes of subsections (1) to (3), whether suffering is unnecessary include–
- (a) whether the suffering could reasonably have been avoided or reduced,
  - (b) whether the conduct concerned was in compliance with any relevant enactment or any relevant provisions of a licence or code of practice issued under an enactment,
  - (c) whether the conduct concerned was for a legitimate purpose, for example–
    - (i) the purpose of benefiting the animal, or
    - (ii) the purpose of protecting a person, property or another animal,
  - (d) whether the suffering was proportionate to the purpose of the conduct concerned,
  - (e) whether the conduct concerned was in the circumstances that of a reasonably competent and humane person.

The Scottish Government has produced a [code of practice for the welfare of dogs](#), outlining the requirements of this legislation and good practice for the care of these animals. The code does not mention electric shock collars.

### **Scottish Parliament Action**

Question S4W-07334: Jim Hume, South Scotland, Scottish Liberal Democrats, was lodged on 21/05/2012. The question was -

To ask the Scottish Executive what its position is on the delay to research into the use of electric shock collars and whether it will discuss with the Welsh Assembly Government the evidence that it considered when legislating against the use of such devices.

It was answered by Richard Lochhead on 07/06/2012 -

The Defra-funded research project was due to finish in November 2011; the Scottish Government received a draft final report in July 2011. The research has been completed and the project is currently being peer reviewed. Peer review is an important part of the research process as it ensures that the results reported have arisen from suitably structured scientific research and analysis and are not biased. This process should be completed later this year, at which point the Scottish Government will consider whether any further action is required on electronic shock collars.

The Scottish Government is aware of the evidence that the Welsh Government considered when legislating against the use of electronic shock collars; however, we do not consider that the studies that have been published to date are sufficiently robust to impose a ban or regulation at this point in time. Scottish Government policy is that such regulatory burden should only be imposed where there is clear evidence that doing so will improve animal welfare in the most proportionate manner.

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**Senior Research Specialist**  
**25 February 2015**

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