



PE1555/G

Dogs Trust Response – Consideration of Petition PE1555 (Electric Shock and Vibration Collars for Animals)

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

Introduction

Dogs Trust is the UK’s largest dog welfare charity. We have twenty rehoming centres nationwide, including two in Glasgow and West Calder, and invest substantial resources in information services, education on responsible dog ownership, and training. We have 32 employees specialising in training and behaviour across our network of rehoming centres and in the community. Dogs Trust offers ample training advice (using positive award-based methods) at our rehoming centres, community events, and on our website.

Dogs Trust completely agrees with this petition and is also calling for a ban on the use and sale of electric shock collars in Scotland. Dogs Trust believes the use of electric shock devices is both irresponsible and ineffective. Every dog should be trained using kind, fair and reward-based methods. Under no circumstances do we condone the use of equipment or techniques that use punishment, pain or fear to train a dog.

The use of such aversive training techniques is likely to compromise the welfare of dogs and may in fact worsen behavioural problems. We believe that every dog should be trained using kind, fair and reward-based methods.

Electric Shock Collars

Electric training devices – or ‘shock collars’ – are worn around a dog’s neck and work by delivering an electric shock to the dog (either via a remote control or delivered automatically) to ‘correct’ an undesirable behavior.

An electric shock collar trains a dog to respond out of fear of further punishment – receiving a shock when it does not perform what is asked of it – rather than from a natural willingness to please its owner.

Electric shock collars are not effective because they either fail to address underlying behavioural problems or can cause new ones. As a dog will have no idea what has caused the pain, it is far more likely to associate it with something in its immediate environment than to connect it with its own behaviour at the time. This is why cases of dogs attacking other dogs, their owner or another animal close by at the time of the shock are common, as is the dog developing ‘superstitious’ fears to things in the environment (such as birds, wind and grass or even children) that were heard or seen at the time of the shock.

Existing Bans

Electric shock collars are already banned in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Australia (in most states), Austria, Germany, Switzerland and Slovenia.

The Welsh Government also banned electric shock collars in 2010 through secondary legislation under the Animal Welfare Act. The Animal Welfare (Electronic Collars) (Wales) Regulations 2010 were subsequently challenged under Judicial Review brought about by the Electronic Collar Manufacturer's Association (ECMA). However, the Royal Courts of Justice ruled that the Welsh Assembly did have the power to enact the legislation.

It is worth noting that the Welsh ban only extends to the use of electric shock collars, but not their sale. Dogs Trust would like to see the Scottish Government go one step further and legislate for a ban on both their use and sale.

Defra Funded Research Studies

In 2013 the Department for the Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs published the outcomes of two research studies that they had funded (AW1402 and AW1402a). The first Defra study concluded that there was great variability in how electric shock collars were used on dogs and showed that owners worryingly tended to neither read nor follow the advice in the manuals. The main conclusion was that there were significant negative welfare consequences for some of the dogs that were trained with electric shock collars in the study.

The second study was designed to use electric shock collars on dogs by trained professionals according to industry standards. For this reason, the ECMA were asked to design both the training protocol as well as recommend industry trained professionals to take part in the study. The research project concluded that there was enough evidence to argue that the use of electric shock collars even by industry trained professionals who followed ECMA training procedure still had a negative impact on dog welfare.

The results of these two research studies clearly show that electric shock collars have a detrimental effect on dog welfare. Dogs Trust is therefore greatly discouraged by Defra's continued refusal to implement a ban – they have instead proposed the development of best practice guidance for their use.

Kennel Club Scottish Opinion Survey

An independent survey commissioned by the Kennel Club – with whom Dogs Trust is united in calling for a ban – earlier this year found that 73% of the Scottish public are against the use of electric shock collars and 74% would support the Scottish Government to introduce a ban on their use.

Dogs Trust and Kennel Club Scottish Parliament Event

In January 2015, Dogs Trust and the Kennel Club held an event in the Scottish Parliament, to raise awareness for our joint campaign for a ban on the use and sale of electric shock collars. This photocall, which was sponsored by Chair of the Cross-Party Group for Animal Welfare, Christine Grahame MSP, attracted 14 MSPs on the day. Most of these MSPs were brave enough to try an electric shock collar on the palm of their hands, and all agreed that the pain was intolerable. A debate on the issue, led by Christine Grahame MSP, was held on the same day. At this debate, the Minister for Environment, Climate Change, and Land Reform, Aileen McLeod MSP committed the Scottish Government to further discussion on the issue. However, we are yet to receive an update from the Scottish Government on this issue.

Conclusion

Dogs Trust strongly believes that with all the positive alternative training methods, tools, and advice available to the public, there is simply no need for electric shock collars to be on the market. The mission of Dogs Trust is to bring about the day when all dogs can live a happy life, and it is clear that a dog trained through fear is not a happy dog. We therefore greatly support this petition calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to ban the cruel and completely unnecessary use of electric shock and vibration collars on animals in Scotland.