



PE1555/E

The Kennel Club and Scottish Kennel Club response to the Public Petitions Committee - PE1555 (electric shock and vibration collars for animals) call for evidence

Summary

PLEASE NOTE THAT FOR THE PURPOSES OF THIS CONSULTATION RESPONSE. WHEN WE REFER TO 'THE KENNEL CLUB' WE ARE REFERRING TO THE KENNEL CLUB TOGETHER WITH THE SCOTTISH KENNEL CLUB

The Kennel Club has long campaigned for a ban on the use and sale of electric shock collars in Scotland.

Key statistics from recent research on electronic shock collars –

- 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, 2013)
- 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, 2013)
- 73% of the Scottish public disapprove of the use of electric shock collars on dogs (Kennel Club commissioned survey, 2014)
- 82% 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 Scottish public would support the government to introduce a ban on electric shock collars (Kennel Club commissioned survey, 2014).

The Kennel Club

The Kennel Club is the largest organisation in the UK devoted to dog health, welfare and training, whose main objective is to ensure that dogs live healthy, happy lives with responsible owners. We offer all dog owners and those working with dogs an unparalleled source of education, experience and advice on dog breeding, dog health, dog acquisition, dog training and responsible dog ownership. We also run Petlog, the UK's largest lost and found database for microchipped pets.

Introduction

The Kennel Club welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Public Petitions Committee in response to petition PE1555. It is important to note that this

submission focusses solely on the use and sale of electric shock collars. While some electric shock collars will have a vibration function, the use of vibration and electric shock collars are distinct issues.

The welfare implications from the use of electric shock collars have been widely studied, and there is a substantial evidence basis to support legislative change in Scotland.

Electric shock collars

Electric shock collars (ESCs) 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.

ESCs train dogs through a fear of further punishment, having received the shock when it does not perform what is asked of it, rather than from a natural willingness to obey.

Electric shock collars are not effective because they either fail to address underlying behavioural problems or can cause further behavioural complications. Any negative method employed to prevent a particular behaviour in dogs has to be extremely aversive and painful enough in order to stop the undesired behaviour from reoccurring.

Dogs have a natural inbuilt flight or fight response when put in a situation that causes pain and fear, meaning the dog either escapes from the source of pain (flight) or becomes aggressive in response (fight). As a consequence, electric shock collars can cause further behavioural problems in addition to the one(s) being treated. The risk is that the dog can develop 'superstitious fears' to objects in its environment that were heard or seen at the time of receiving the electric shock. This is why cases of dogs attacking other dogs, their owner or another animal close by at the time of the shock are quite common.

Research on the effects of shock collars on dogs

Existing research has highlighted the detrimental impact ESCs may have on dog welfare. These studies have focused on the physiological effects, psychological effects and the impacts on learning through the use of electric shock collars. The following studies have all indicated the negative impact that ESCs can have on the welfare of the animal.

- Tsevtkov et al. (2002), Sang et al. (2003) and Lindsay (2005) concluded that electric shock collars can cause high levels of distress and emotional harm to dogs and further contribute to intense anxiety disorders, including post-traumatic stress disorder which makes fears instilled in animals resistant to elimination.
- Schilder et al. (2004)'s study found signs of stress, high-pitched yelps, barks and squeals, avoidance and redirected aggression as well as a continued display of stress when there was no ESC on the dog while in the company of their handler. The researchers concluded that shock collar training is stressful, receiving shocks is a painful experience to dogs and that the shock group of dogs evidently

learned that the presence of their owner announced the reception of shocks, even outside of the normal training context.

- Hilby et al. (2004) studied the effectiveness of positive and negative training methods and concluded that the results showed when using rewards, the incidence of problematic behaviours, including aggression toward people and other dogs, fear, repetitive behaviours, overexcitement, anxiety and separation issues were greatly reduced in comparison to when the electric shock collar was used.
- Reisner's (2003) study examined aggression in dogs and the author argued that in order to reduce aggression, all circumstances, provocations, and aversive interactions associated with the dog's aggression need to be avoided. Many aggressive dogs are anxious or fearful, and punishment of any kind should be avoided. The author states that aversive tools such as electric shocks can increase anxiety and therefore increase the risk of biting; in addition, they are likely to lead to treatment failure.

The findings of Defra funded studies published in 2010 and 2011 (AW1402 and AW1402a) are also significant. The first Defra project concluded that there was great variability in how electric shock collars were used on dogs and showed that owners worryingly tended to either not read or 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 ESCs on dogs by trained professionals according to industry standards. For this reason, the Electronic Collar Manufacturers Association (ECMA) were asked to design both the training protocol as well as recommend industry trained professionals to take part in the study. The study concluded that even when ESCs were used by professionals following an industry set standard, there were still long term negative impacts on dog welfare. Lastly, the studies also demonstrated that positive reinforcement methods were effective in treating livestock chasing, which is the most commonly cited justification of their use.

“Even with best practice as advocated by collar manufacturers and trainers, there were differences in the behaviour of dogs that are consistent with more negative emotional states (including anxiety and aversion) in some dogs trained with e-collars....Further, the results indicate that there is no statistically significant nor clinically relevant differences in the efficacy of an e-collar training protocol combined with rewards and a reward based programme that does not use an e-collar for the management of dogs presented with comparable levels of livestock chasing, which is one of the most commonly advocated justifications for the necessity of e-collar training”.

The academics from the University of Lincoln who conducted the Defra study subsequently conducted some re-analysis as a result of drawing on studies not available at the time of the original project. The findings have been published in a peer reviewed, scientific journal – but this has not been publicised by Defra and cannot be found on the Defra website. The published article concludes:

“(Accordingly), it seems that the routine use of e-collars even in accordance with best practice (as suggested by collar manufacturers) presents a risk to the well-being of pet dogs”.

“Dogs showed a number of additional changes in behaviour in the period following electric stimulus presentation, compared with behaviour prior to stimulus presentation. Dogs showed an increase in vocalisation, with none recorded prior to first stimulus compared to a total of 13 “yelps” and 5 “whines” after exposure. There was a change in tail carriage from principally an elevated carriage prior to exposure (with only 2% of time was the tail between legs) to the tail being between legs 20% of the time following exposure. Prior to stimulus application the dogs were generally described as being in a neutral (40% of time) or investigatory (20%) state with only 10% of time described as tense; whereas afterwards, dogs were tense for 50% of the time and spent only 5% of their time engaged in investigatory behaviour. A small number of yawns and paw lifts were observed after stimuli, but none seen before exposure. Bouts of lip licking and body shaking were recorded before and after exposure at approximately the same rate”.

“Taken together (with the findings of the preliminary study), these results are consistent with exposure to a significant short term stressor in the form of an aversive and probably painful stimulus during training”. (The Welfare Consequences and Efficacy of Training Pet Dogs with Remote Electronic Training Collars in Comparison to Reward Based Training, Jonathan J. Cooper, Nina Cracknell, Jessica Hardiman, Hannah Wright, Daniel Mills , PLOS, September 3, 2014).

This reinforces our view that shock collars should not only be banned, but that even working with the industry to draw up guidance for dog owners and trainers to advise how to use e-collars ‘properly’ would be unwise given the inconsistencies in how even professional dog trainers use them, and also that they are not necessary in dog training in the first instance.

In the later study by the University of Lincoln, three out of four randomly selected professional dog trainers did not follow manufacturer’s best practice. Therefore it is reasonable to expect that a significant proportion of shock collar users do not follow ideal practice.

Existing bans

The Welsh Assembly has already introduced a ban as part of the Animal Welfare Act, after the Welsh Assembly agreed that there was enough evidence to prove that banning the devices would improve animal welfare.

The Animal Welfare (Electronic Collars) (Wales) Regulations 2010 were subsequently challenged under Judicial Review, brought about by the ECMA in late 2010, however the Royal Courts of Justice found in favour of the Welsh Assembly and ruled that they were within their powers to enact the legislation.

Electric shock collars are also banned in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Austria, Switzerland, Slovenia, Germany and in some states in Australia.

Scottish public opinion on the use of electric shock collars

The Kennel Club previously commissioned an independent survey into the Scottish public's opinion of electric shock collars, which found that:

- 73% of the Scottish public disapprove of the use of electric shock collars on dogs
- 82% agree that positive reinforcement training methods can address behavioural issues in dogs without the need for negative training methods
- 74% of the Scottish public would support the government to introduce a ban on electric shock collars

The Kennel Club position on Electric Shock Collars

The Kennel Club believes that there are many positive training tools and methods that can produce dogs that are trained just as quickly and reliably, with absolutely no fear, pain, or potential damage to the relationship between dog and handler. The best trained dogs which include police dogs, armed forces dogs and assistance dogs are never trained with electric shock collars. We therefore ask the Scottish Petition Committee to call upon the Scottish Government to introduce a ban on the sale and use of electric shock collars in Scotland.