

PE1555/A

OneKind Letter of 6 May 2015

Dear Ms Peat

Public Petition PE01555: Electric Shock and Vibration Collars for Animals

I would be grateful for the opportunity to submit a parliamentary briefing from OneKind in connection with the above Petition.

The briefing was circulated to MSPs for the Member's Debate introduced by Christine Grahame on 8 January and supports a full ban on electric shock collars.

OneKind (formerly Advocates for Animals) has long campaigned for a ban on electric shock collars in Scotland.

I hope this information will be of interest to the Committee and will be pleased to submit further comments if required.

With best wishes,

Libby Anderson
Policy Director
OneKind

PARLIAMENTARY BRIEFING
Member's Debate Motion S4M-11431
Thursday 8 January 2015



S4M-11431# Christine Grahame: A Shocking Way to Treat a Dog—That the Parliament commends the Welsh Assembly for passing in 2010 a ban on the use of electronic collars on cats and dogs and setting a penalty of a fine of up to £20,000 or six months in prison; notes that there are bans in, inter alia, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Germany; understands that, when the Scottish Government consulted on their use in 2007, most animal welfare organisations including the Scottish SPCA, the Scottish Kennel Club and the Dogs Trust supported a ban, as did ACPOS; considers that the Scottish Government's reliance on guidance on usage and manufacturing standards is insufficient given that a range of devices is readily available online, that many users dispense with the guidance and that, in any event, research by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs demonstrates that there are long-term negative impacts on dog welfare, and notes the view that the Scottish Government should reconsider its position and follow Wales's lead and ban the use in Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale and throughout Scotland.

Support for a full ban on electronic training devices

OneKind welcomes the debate on Motion S4M-11431 and supports a complete ban on the sale, distribution, possession¹ and use of electronic training devices for cats and dogs. These devices were defined in the Scottish Government consultation in 2007 as “any collar, mat, lead or other device used, or designed or intended to be used, to train or control an animal by means of transmission of an electric current or other electric impulse which causes shock, pain or other stimulus to an animal wearing, or otherwise in contact with, the device”. For simplicity we will refer to them as “e-collars” from now on.

Use of e-collars

E-collars are used primarily on dogs, and for three main purposes: for training and control, to discourage barking, and for confinement or fencing. For cats, they are generally used to reduce straying by delivering a shock if the cat crosses a boundary, such as a wire buried at the edge of the garden.

When intended for dog obedience training or to stop unwanted behaviour when it occurs, the shocks are delivered via a remote control handset operated by the owner

¹ We appreciate that there will be some issues round the disposal of devices which it has hitherto been legal to possess. However, it would be a fairly simple matter to arrange for owners to hand collars in to their vets, to police stations or to Scottish SPCA offices, or indeed to destroy them.

or trainer. Where shocks are used with the intention of preventing barking, a sensor on the collar detects barking and activates the shock mechanism. Where shocks are used as an 'invisible fence' or 'freedom fence' to deter dogs from leaving a property or going to a particular location, the shock is triggered by a signal from a boundary wire.

(There is a difference between these items and livestock boundary fences because an animal cannot escape from a collar, whereas if it moves away from the fence it has some control over the effect. Fences offer visible clues which animals may associate with the shock and it appears that they learn to avoid them.)

E-collars vary greatly in price and complexity. One model on sale over the internet offers "50 groups of warning tones (of different frequencies), 10 levels of vibration corrections, 99 levels of static pulse stimulation corrections. The static stimulation at Level 1 is very mild for sensitive healthy dogs. Level 99 is a lot stronger compared to Level 1 for stubborn healthy dogs." OneKind would suggest that it should not be left to untrained owners to decide how "sensitive" or "stubborn" their dog may be, and which of these levels is appropriate.

Unnecessary suffering

The proponents of e-collars claim that the devices are safe, effective for training and control and non-harmful to the dog in both the short and long term. There is no doubt that some dog owners believe that these devices have solved their problems in dealing with their dogs' undesirable behaviour or in controlling their dogs, with relatively little cost in time and money. But these claims fail to stand up to scrutiny on the grounds of either effectiveness or animal welfare. The experience of dog behaviour experts and scientific studies both provide clear evidence that the use of e-collars is unnecessary, inhumane and can lead to long-term behaviour problems for dogs.

Proponents of e-collars deny that they cause pain to the animal and electric shocks are usually referred to in manufacturers' literature as "impulses", "stimulation" or "correction". However, even dog training professionals who accept the use of e-collars admit that strong electric shocks can cause significant distress and emotional harm to a dog. This suffering is unnecessary because there are alternative ways in which training can be achieved, mainly through understanding dog behaviour and the use of reward-based training, as recommended by the Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors (APBC).

Animal welfare organisations, including the Kennel Club, the Scottish Kennel Club, the Scottish SPCA, the RSPCA, the Dogs Trust, Guide Dogs for the Blind, the Blue Cross and APBC have long condemned the use of e-collars for dog training and have called for them to be banned. Like OneKind, all these organisations believe strongly that dogs need to be trained, but that shock collars are an unacceptable

method. The APBC advises that the use of devices that rely on pain or discomfort to modify behaviour is inappropriate as “they have the potential to seriously compromise the welfare of dogs, and ruin their relationship with their owners”². Studies at the University of Utrecht published in 2004³ found that the immediate reactions of dogs to electric shocks suggested stress, fear or pain (lowering of body posture, high pitched yelps, barks and squeals, avoidance, biting, flicking their tongues). There was also evidence that dogs that had been shocked were more likely to show long-term stress-related behaviour such as lowered ears, tongue-flicking and lifting front paws, during free walking or in training.

The DEFRA research referred to in the Motion⁴ highlighted the very variable outcomes between individual dogs when trained using e-collars. The main project found that the use of e-collars in training “is associated with behavioural and physiological responses that are consistent with negative emotional states. It is therefore 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.” In a second study, there was behavioural evidence that the 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”⁵.

Liability to misuse

The consequences of less benign use can potentially be much greater and the Motion makes the important point that, following purchase, users may ignore the guidance provided by manufacturers. The DEFRA researchers commented: “Manuals were clear on operation, but gave varying levels of information on using the e-collar in training. Generally they did not adequately explain their full potential, for instance with respect to using the tone or vibrate functions.

² *Shock Collars - The Shocking Truth* Inga MacKellar MSc CCAB and Mat Ward BSc MVS CCAB
<http://www.apbc.org.uk/articles/shockcollars>

³ M B H Schilder and J A M van der Borg. *Training dogs with help of the shock collar: short and long term behavioural effects*. Applied Animal Behaviour Science 85:319-334 (2004)

⁴ *Effect of pet training aids, specifically remote static pulse systems, on the welfare of domestic dogs - AW1402*
<http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Default.aspx?Menu=Menu&Module=More&Location=None&Completed=0&ProjectID=15332>

⁵ *Studies to assess the effect of pet training aids, specifically remote static pulse systems on the welfare of domestic dogs; field study of dogs in training - AW1402A*
<http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Default.aspx?Menu=Menu&Module=More&Location=None&Completed=0&ProjectID=17568>

“Advice in manuals was not always taken up by end-users as evident from responses in owner questionnaire [...]”⁶.

However good the manufacturer’s instructions, they can have no control over how the device is used after it has been sold. Levels of electric shocks are controlled by the user, who may well be unskilled, possibly frustrated or even angry, all of which leads to serious concerns about the potential misuse of these devices.

The consequence is that a tool with the potential to cause significant pain and distress to an animal is available without any follow-up control whatsoever.

Theoretically it might be possible to use the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 to prosecute an owner who used an e-collar excessively and deliberately caused suffering, but it would be very difficult indeed to obtain the necessary evidence for such a case.

Ineffective

Timing the shock effectively is acknowledged to be difficult. Even experienced trainers have been observed to give shocks immediately after a command without giving the dog time to respond, so that the dog is confused and associates the command itself with the shock⁷. Some owners repeatedly shock a dog for running off even after the dog has started to return.

Another known risk is that the dog can make unexpected associations between the shock and something in the environment at the moment the shock is received, resulting in an increase, rather than decrease, in problems such as aggression, non-cooperation or phobia. The unintended association could be another dog or other animal, a person or something inanimate such as a location. Rather than obedient, the dog may well become angry, defensive or fearful.

Similarly, when dogs get shocks from ‘invisible fences’ at their garden boundary, they may learn to associate any people or dogs approaching the boundary with the shocks and begin to threaten, fear or even attack approaching individuals.

Unnecessary

In the case of the remote control and anti-bark e-collar, it should be remembered that barking is part of a dog’s natural behaviour and is a means of communication with humans and other animals. Barking is not abnormal behaviour: a dog should not

⁶ *Effect of pet training aids, specifically remote static pulse systems, on the welfare of domestic dogs - AW1402*
<http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Default.aspx?Menu=Menu&Module=More&Location=None&Completed=0&ProjectID=15332>

⁷ M B H Schilder and J A M van der Borg. *Training dogs with help of the shock collar: short and long term behavioural effects*. Applied Animal Behaviour Science 85:319-334 (2004)

be punished with an electric shock when it barks. In practical terms, positive reward-based training is likely to be just as effective, if not more so.

Modern and humane methods of dog training take advantage of a dog's natural motivation to cooperate and to seek human acceptance and praise. Training to deal with problem behaviour is also based on an understanding of dogs' natural motivations and the various reasons for problems such as excessive barking, chasing, aggression and chewing. Distracting the dog's attention is used rather than punishment, such as by removing the dog from a problem situation, or by the use of mildly aversive signals such as an unexpected noise or a puff of compressed air.

Conclusion

OneKind promotes responsible dog ownership and welcomes the current drive towards this in Scotland. Dogs and people need to be kept safe and must be able to live harmoniously in their shared environment, so that the many benefits of canine companionship can be enjoyed by all. We accept that that is much easier said than done. Measures such as microchipping, positive training programmes and a general dog licence can all play their part in improving standards of care, welfare and safety. However we cannot see any place for the simplistic approach exemplified in the use of negative and aversive methods such as e-collars.

We hope that Members will support Motion S4M-11431 and urge the Scottish Government to reconsider its position and ban the sale, distribution, possession use of e-collars throughout Scotland.

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