

A ban on electronic training collars for cats and dogs in England

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Contents

Overview.....	1
Electronic collars for cats and dogs – a ban on their use in England	2
Welfare effect of e-collars.....	2
Scope of a ban	3
Impact on e-collar suppliers and manufacturers.....	3
Next steps	3
How to respond.....	4
After the consultation.....	4

Overview

Electronic training collars (e-collars) are corrective behaviour devices which enable electronic or static pulses and other signals to be given to pets by their owners.

Types and uses of e-collars

There are generally two types of e-collar: hand held remote-controlled devices and containment systems. Remote-controlled devices are operated by the owner/handler and are used to stop unwanted behaviour such as chasing livestock. The owner or handler has a remote device which can trigger an electronic pulse (similar to a static pulse which can be varied in strength) or which can emit a noxious spray. Depending on the type of e-collar, a sound may be emitted which warns the pet that an electronic pulse or noxious spray is about to be triggered, allowing the pet to stop whatever it is about to do before the pulse or spray is generated.

Containment systems can be used to keep a dog or cat within the owner's garden reducing the chances of the animal straying into a busy road or defecating on someone else's property. In such situations the e-collar sends out an electronic pulse or a noxious spray when the animal approaches the boundary. A noise may also be emitted prior to the pulse or spray.

Other parts of the UK

Scotland has recently announced plans to issue Scottish government guidance which highlights the welfare effects of e-collars and clarifies what offences may apply in relation to their use¹. In Wales the use of such e-collars was banned in 2010 via regulations introduced under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. In light of growing concerns regarding the use and potential misuse of e-collars in England, and in order to protect the welfare of cats and dogs, we wish to ban their use here by introducing regulations under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. We propose to update the statutory Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs and of Cats in England (dog and cat codes) following the adoption of these proposed new regulations and also in light of the Scottish government guidance.

¹ "Training which includes unpleasant stimuli or physical punishment can cause pain, suffering and distress. These techniques can compromise dog welfare, lead to aggressive responses and worsen the problems that they aim to address. Particular methods to avoid include: physical punishment, including the use of electronic collars to administer an electric shock; anti-bark collars, which may mask or aggravate underlying behavioural or health issues; and any device that squirts noxious oils or other chemicals that interfere with your dog's acute sense of smell. Causing unnecessary suffering is an offence under the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006. This includes suffering caused by inappropriate training methods."

Electronic collars for cats and dogs – a ban on their use in England

We are proposing right now to make it an offence to use an e-collar, or even to put one on a cat or dog, or be in charge of a cat or dog that is wearing one. This will dry up sales of these punitive devices.

We will consider all consultation responses carefully, and want to hear views about what these proposals will mean for the sale and retailers of e-collars and whether any further restrictions will be required beyond what the government is proposing in order to deliver our objective to end their use. Tell us what you think.

Welfare effect of e-collars

Defra-funded research published in 2014² showed that e-collars can have a detrimental welfare effect on dogs and can cause harm and suffering. The research also showed that many owners did not read the manufacturers' instructions prior to use. Many animal welfare organisations, veterinary representative groups, the Kennel Club and many dog trainers and behaviourists are opposed to the use of e-collars, not just on account of the harm they can cause, but also because they are a negative form of training. Many consider that dogs should only be trained with positive reward methods (e.g. offering morsels of food to encourage correct behaviour). Many consider that negative forms of training which inflicts some form of punishment do not necessarily work, can be counterproductive and can cause the dog to exhibit other problems or dangerous behaviour.

It has also been suggested that e-collars might have a beneficial impact for example in preventing dangerous and harmful behaviour by dogs which are out of control, and that e-collars might be a last resort measure for poorly behaved dogs which would otherwise be put down. Relatively little evidence has been provided to support these suggestions, although evidence about the harm e-collars inflict on pets has been growing.

Weighing up the evidence which has been emerging about the impact of e-collars, and taking account of public concerns that we should treat all our pet animals with appropriate reward and respect, Defra has concluded that the time is now right to adopt a legal ban on the use of e-collars in England. This would bring the law in England into line with the law in Wales where they are already banned.

² <http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Default.aspx?Module=More&Location=None&ProjectID=17568>

Users and manufacturers of e-collars argue that when used correctly they might enable difficult dogs that do not respond to more traditional positive reward training to be trained and controlled. They also argue that containment systems can keep cats and dogs within a defined area where alternative methods are not realistically possible, for the benefit of their safety and also to prevent unwanted behaviours occurring in other places.

Scope of a ban

A proposed ban could apply to the use of e-collars on cats and dogs. As in Wales, regulations could be introduced under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 which make it an offence to:

- attach an electronic collar to a cat or a dog;
- cause an electronic collar to be attached to a cat or a dog; or
- be responsible for a cat or a dog to which an electronic collar is attached.

An appropriate level of penalty could be attached to such an offence, i.e. maximum imprisonment of six months and/or an unlimited fine.

If Defra proceeds with such a legal ban, the statutory dog and cat codes in England would be amended to align them with the regulations banning the use of e-collars after their adoption. In addition the statutory dog and cat codes could be amended to align them with the language on e-collars proposed by Scotland in their government guidance. This provides a more explicit summary of the devices which should not be used.

Impact on e-collar suppliers and manufacturers

As a consequence of the proposed ban on the use of e-collars we expect that pet owners and handlers will instead use other means of managing their pet's behaviours. Businesses which supply and manufacture e-collars may experience a reduction in profits. However, we would expect a rise in demand from the suppliers and manufacturers of other pet training aids and implements. The suppliers and manufacturers of e-collars themselves may consider whether to focus on other markets where these devices can still be used.

Next steps

We would welcome comments on the proposal to introduce an offence to attach an e-collar to a cat or dog, to cause an e-collar to be attached to a cat or dog, or to be responsible for a cat or dog which has an e-collar attached. Please feel free to comment on all aspects of the proposals including the expected impacts.

How to respond

Should you wish to comment, please e-mail AnimalWelfare.Consultations@defra.gsi.gov.uk by **27 April 2018**.

Or in writing to:

Animal Welfare Team
Area 5B Nobel House
17 Smith Square,
London
SW1P 3JR

After the consultation

A summary of the responses to this consultation will be published and placed on the government website at www.gov.uk.

The summary will include a list of names and organisations that responded but not personal names, addresses or other contact details. Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be subject to publication or release to other parties or to disclosure in accordance with the access to information regimes e.g. Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and the Data Protection Act 1998.

If you want information, including personal data, that you provide to be treated as confidential, please say so clearly in writing when you send your response to the call for evidence why you need to keep these details confidential. If we receive a request for disclosure under the FOIA, we will take account of your explanation, but we cannot provide an assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by our IT system will not, if itself, be regarded as a confidentiality request.

This consultation is being conducted in line with the “Consultation Principles” as set out in the Better Regulation Executive guidance which can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consultation-principles-guidance> If you have any comments or complaints about the consultation process, please address them to: Consultation Co-ordinator, Room 629, Millbank, 17 Smith Square, London SW1P 3JR Or email: consultation.coordinator@defra.gsi.gov.uk.



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