

COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE BRIEFING NOTE



The Voice of the Countryside

ELECTRIC COLLARS

Westminster Hall Debate

“Use, sale and distribution of electric dog collars” (Ross Thomson, Con, Aberdeen South)

Wednesday 14 March, 11.00am

Background:

- Electric collars are mainly used by dog trainers to correct behavioural problems. They are most frequently used by farmers, gamekeepers, and other land managers, who are training dogs around livestock and gamebirds, where a dog out of control could cause serious harm to itself and/or other animals.
- Electric collars are also used increasingly as part of boundary fence systems to keep farm and domestic animals away from danger. These systems work by giving the animal wearing the collar a small shock when it approaches a wire buried underground. The use of these systems allows animals more freedom and greater safety when being kept outdoors, particularly near busy roads or other dangers. This operates on the same principle as electric fencing which is widely used by the livestock sector.
- In England, users of electric collars must do so in accordance with the Animal Welfare Act 2006 which makes it an offence to cause unnecessary suffering to any animal. Defra has recently updated the statutory Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs and strengthened the form of wording on the use of negative training methods. The draft Code, which is currently before Parliament, makes it clear that anyone who uses training techniques that include physical punishment they risk being prosecuted under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 for causing unnecessary suffering to an animal
- Regulation on the use of electric collars is a devolved matter. There are different arrangements in place across the UK as set out below:
 - The Welsh Assembly Government banned the use of all electric collars in 2010.
 - The Scottish Government carried out a consultation on electric collars in 2015 and responded by recommending further regulation. However, earlier this year the Cabinet Secretary for the Environment, Roseanna Cunningham MSP, announced plans to introduce a ban.
 - The Secretary of State for the Environment, Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, has announced his intention to introduce a ban in England.
 - There are no plans to change the law in Northern Ireland where a government has yet to be formed following the Assembly elections last year.
- The use of electronic training devices, including both collars and boundary fence systems, can bring very real benefits to animals that might otherwise have led very restricted lives, or for which euthanasia would have been a likely or only option. This may include animals for which other training methods had not worked. This includes specific types of dogs, including some working dog breeds, which have a very strong instinct to chase other animals and which may not respond to other training methods.

Countryside Alliance Position:

- The existing legislation in England is sufficient to protect animals, and focus should be on education and enforcement. The misuse of electric collars would already be an offence under existing legislation.
- Electric collars should not be used routinely but only as a method of last resort to prevent serious problems arising, such as sheep worrying, which in some cases could otherwise necessitate the destruction of a dog.
- Moves to ban electric collars should be a last resort for government and must consider the implications of removing these training devices from dog trainers, particularly those involved in training working dogs.
- Moves to introduce a ban in England must involve public consultation and consideration of alternatives to an outright ban such as further regulation, a licensing system, or statutory controls on the quality and specification of the devices available. One option could be devices only being available under supervision and/or after training from a licensed or regulated practitioner.
- Any ban on electric collars should exclude boundary fence systems which help to keep farm and domestic animals away from danger. These systems operate on the same principle as electric fencing which is widely used by the livestock sector.

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