

# Animal Welfare Electronic Collars (England) Regulations

## Background

- In April, the Government announced a very welcome ban on the use of electronic collars.
- **However, there is currently a delay in passing the regulations as no date has been set for the final stages of the legislation.**
- The RSPCA strongly supports the banning of the use of electronic collars.
- From our data, more than 9 in 10 UK adults agree that the UK Government should urgently ban the use of shock collars in England.
- The Government had previously announced a ban in 2018, we therefore welcome the regulations which are due to come into force next year.
- **We want to see the legislation passed through the Commons as soon as possible and would urge you to contact the Minister to ensure the ban comes into force.**

## Electronic Collar Impact on Welfare

Electronic collars work by delivering an electric pulse to suppress unwanted behaviour. They work on the principle of positive punishment: applying an aversive stimulus to inhibit behaviour and are also referred to as aversive training techniques.

Electronic collars can compromise the welfare of cats and dogs by increasing their fear or anxiety about the situation in which it is used.

They also decrease a dog's ability to learn and can cause the associating of other coincidental events with a fear provoking event which can lead to other behavioural issues, such as aggression, developing. Crucially, and with all punishment based methods which do not address the root causes, they do not teach the animal what is actually required of them and therefore do not generate long term resolution.

DEFRA's [Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs](#) in England specifically states that you should; "only use positive reward based training. Avoid harsh, potentially painful or frightening training methods."

## Livestock Worrying

Electronic collars are frequently being referred to as a means to prevent livestock worrying by dogs. This argument is deeply flawed, illogical and unsafe for the following reasons:

- There is no scientific evidence at present to support the idea that training using an e-collar can reliably create the degree of aversion that would be required for a dog to avoid livestock and in the absence of an owner or carer.
- Typically, an operator is required to deliver the electrical stimulus to inhibit the unwanted behaviour when in the presence of sheep. However, data suggests that **the majority of livestock worrying is undertaken by unaccompanied dogs.**
- There is only one reliable way to ensure the safety of livestock and that is to keep dogs on a lead when in the vicinity of livestock. Using a lead is both simple and effective and



encourages a culture of responsible dog ownership. It's also important to keep dogs safely secure when they are in a home environment as most livestock worrying is caused by unaccompanied dogs.

- It is also the method of preference for farmers as highlighted in the [Scottish government's white paper](#) on sheep attacks and harassment, with 90% of surveyed farmers favouring a requirement for dogs (except working dogs) to be on lead when in defined areas of the countryside.

## Deaf Dogs

- Electronic Collars are not suitable to use when training deaf dogs. This experience can be frightening and confusing for a dog which already has challenges in life.
- Also, it has been found that a number of deaf dogs ignore the sensations from shock or vibration collars.
- Deaf dogs can be taught recall using other techniques which would not impact welfare and are more effective such as sign language or a light signal. [Watch this video for more information.](#)

## Training

- Like many other evidence-based organisations, the RSPCA believes not only that the use of electronic training collars is unacceptable from a welfare perspective, but also that this type of approach is not necessary for the modification of animal behaviour.
- Trainers and behaviourists all over the UK use reward-based methods to train and modify animal behaviour very effectively and without subjecting animals to training techniques which may cause pain or distress.
- ***“Shock collars cause pain to the animal as part of the training process. The Animal Behaviour and Training Council believes deliberately causing pain is both ethically wrong and ineffective as a means of training an animal when training by reward is both more effective and kinder. We fully support the proposed ban.”*** Chris Laurence FRCVS, Animal Behavior and Training Council

## Military Working Dogs

- Under existing MOD policy, e-collars must not be used on any Military Working Dog (MWD), either in the UK or overseas, unless explicit approval has been provided.
- Exemptions to this policy are only ever granted in extremis and limited to situations where e-collars are required for the recall of a MWD working remotely from their handler in dangerous and chaotic environments, and where a MWD may be at significant risk of injury or death.
- Whilst the Armed Forces will be exempt from the new regulations should the legislation be approved, this will be a specific and limited exemption to ensure that national security and public safety capabilities are retained, however will not negate from strict internal MOD approvals process.

