



Committee Secretariat
Petitions Committee
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

28 March 2024

By Email

Submission on the petition of Kylee Kelly: Ban the use of shock collars on dogs

The New Zealand Veterinary Association Te Pae Kīrehe (NZVA) is the largest membership organisation representing veterinarians in New Zealand. We support members through leadership, education, standard setting and wellbeing support.

The Petitions Committee is considering the petition of Kylee Kelly and has invited the NZVA to make a written submission commenting on the issues raised by the petitioner. The Companion Animal Veterinarians Branch of the NZVA (CAV) is making this submission on behalf of members.

The petitioner states that the reason for their petition is their belief that shock collars are cruel and unnecessary in dog training and behaviour modification because they cause confusion, psychological distress to dogs, increased cortisol levels and increases in heart rates. The petitioner believes the sale of these devices should be stopped since there are much less aversive methods available for training and behaviour modification.

The NZVA and CAV do not support the use of electronic behaviour modifying collars (e-collars) that deliver aversive stimuli for the training or containment of dogs, as is evidenced by the NZVA Policy on this subject. These collars have the potential to harm both the physical and mental health of dogs. They are an aversive training method that have, in some studies, been associated with significant negative welfare outcomes.

Positive reinforcement training methods are an effective and humane alternative to electronic behaviour modifying collars. This is supported by recent research conducted in the UK that showed that training with an electronic collar was no more effective than training without, and positive reinforcement was the most effective method. This study concluded that dog training with electronic collars causes unnecessary suffering and an increased risk of compromise to a dog's well-being without good evidence of improved outcomes ([DOI: 10.3389/fvets.2020.00508](https://doi.org/10.3389/fvets.2020.00508)).

The following potential negative welfare consequences have been identified with shock collar use:

- **Infliction of stress and pain:** Electronic stimulation devices deliver a frightening and painful stimulus to a dog. The unpredictable nature of the shock can cause fear and anxiety.
- **Global suppression or 'shut-down':** A dog repeatedly subjected to shock-collar training may go into a state of 'shut down' or a global suppression of behaviour. In extreme cases, dogs may refuse to perform any behaviour at all, known as learned helplessness.
- **Escalation:** If a change in behaviour is not seen immediately, shock-collar users may increase the frequency, duration or intensity of the application. This can result in the dog attempting to escape or avoid the stimulus with even greater intensity, compounding or exaggerating the problem behaviour for which the collar was applied. The dog could also experience redirected aggression, posing a danger to those in the immediate vicinity.
- **Suppressed aggression:** Shock collar use to control aggression has been suggested to encourage dogs to hide signs of aggression. If a dog habitually hides external signs of aggression, people and other pets may receive no warning before the dog resorts to biting.

- **Risk of abuse:** Due to ease with which pain can be administered using a shock collar, these have been suggested to increase the risk of abuse by users.

NZVA Guidelines

Shock collar use in dogs with predatory aggression

While some may view shock collars as a simple method that can be effective for training specific dogs with predatory aggression, they inflict pain and risk negative welfare outcomes. The use of pain to train dogs is no more acceptable or humane when it is administered by remote control, than if it was delivered as a physical blow such as a punch or kick.

Training methods to manage recall in the presence of livestock and other dogs, based on positive reinforcement have been shown to be as effective, or even superior to shock collar methods. In addition, positive reinforcement training methods do not pose any risk to the wellbeing of the dog.

As there exists an effective humane alternative training method for predatory aggression, the use of shock collars to manage this problem, even when euthanasia is a possible alternative, is not supported.

Anti-bark collars

Electronic anti-bark collars that deliver aversive stimuli such as a shock or citronella spray have been shown to have limited efficacy in controlling excessive barking. Veterinarians, dog owners and trainers should seek to identify when anxiety, loneliness, hunger or illness are contributing to excessive barking and address these issues to manage problem barking. Protocols to help owners understand causes of barking and educate them about ways to shape and reinforce quiet behaviour may provide better long-term solutions for this widespread behaviour problem.

Electronic boundary fences

Using a pain response to contain a dog is not supported by the NZVA when other humane and more reliable options are available. Electronic boundary fences are not considered to be reliable means of containment, as dogs in a high state of arousal are easily able to cross it. Dogs receiving shocks from boundary fences can also exhibit dangerous aggressive responses, putting owners and others at risk. The invisible sonic boundary makes it difficult for dogs to associate the electrical stimuli with the invisible boundary causing further distress from their inability to avoid receiving a shock. This contrasts with electric fences used to contain livestock that have a visible barrier to aid learning. For these reasons the animal welfare cost is likely to exceed the benefits from use of electronic fencing systems in dogs and is not recommended.

Recommendations

To protect dog welfare, the NZVA recommends that:

- owners do not use e-collars on their dogs; instead, we recommend owners use positive reinforcement training methods, or seek assistance from a trainer skilled in these methods.
- local and regional councils do not promote the use of shock or citronella collars to manage nuisance barking in dogs. Instead, owners should be encouraged to address underlying reasons for problem barking. Councils may need to allow additional time for owners to use other methods to prevent nuisance barking.
- kiwi aversion training schemes consider moving to higher welfare positive reinforcement methods for training dogs.
- electronic boundary fences with no visible barrier are not used to contain dogs.

The NZVA's submission and current Policy and Guidelines aligns with the petition of Kylee Kelly. There is sufficient evidence to demonstrate the negative welfare outcomes associated with electronic behaviour modifying collars that their use should be banned.



Your sincerely,

Nāku iti noa, nā,

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