

Welsh Assembly All Party Group on Animal Welfare – 30.01.07

In Attendance:

Lorraine Barrett AM (Lab, Cardiff South & Penarth)
Brynle Williams AM (Con, North Wales)
Roy Peckham – Pit Pony Sanctuary
Leslie Thomas – Greyhound Rescue Wales
Lionel Ford – Donkey Sanctuary
Phillip Jones – International League for the Protection of Horses
Sian Edwards – Dogs Trust
Lucy Merredy – Researcher for Lorraine Barrett AM
Barbara Windsor - Personal Assistant to Lorraine Barrett AM
Karen Browne - RSPCA
Claire Lawson – Public Affairs Manager for Wales, RSPCA
Holly Lee – Kennel Club
Phil Buckley – Kennel Club
Lord Duncan McNair – Electronic Collar Manufacturers Association
Roger Matthews – Petsafe
Heather Jones – Dog owner
Heather Irish – Labour Group Assembly staff
Alexandra Saris – Labour Group Assembly staff
Alun Streeter – OCVO
Alain Thomas – Greyhound Rescue Wales
Suzanne Campbell – Protect Our Wild Animals
John Campbell - Protect Our Wild Animals
Helen Bradley – Plaid Group Assembly staff
Daisy Meyland-Smith – Conservative Group Assembly Staff
Ifan Lloyd – British Veterinary Association
Paul Pavia - Conservative Group Assembly Staff
Wendy Davies – British Horse Society Cymru
Joe Allen - Morgan Allen Moore
Rahel Jones - Morgan Allen Moore
Eleri Lloyd – Morgan Allen Moore

Item 1: Chair’s Welcome and Introduction

Lorraine Barrett AM opened the meeting by welcoming everyone, and confirmed that the one topic for discussion was the use of electric shock collars. Representatives from the Electric Collar Manufacturers Association (ECMA) and the Kennel Club were invited to give their presentations.

Item 2: Topic for Discussion: Electric Shock Collars

Roger Matthews (Petsafe/ECMA):

- Stated that there were presently 10 manufacturers making training aids in the UK and 350,000 products had been sold in the UK in the past 10 years.
- Declared that, of those 350,000 it was estimated that 11,000 collars were currently in use within Wales.
- Revealed that 6 manufacturers had formed ECMA in order to agree on trading standards and to widen awareness of the true nature of their products.
- Claimed that opposition to the collars was “sensationalist” and was based on “emotion and not science”.
- Said that the products were designed to be used in a reward context and that the figures presented demonstrated that their use was limited.

- Highlighted that the collar allowed freedom for dogs and also allowed owners to interrupt a dog's train of thought.
- Stated that a beep or a vibration was usually sufficient to correct a dog's actions.
- Informed members that dog owners typically report that only a few static shocks are necessary to correct a dog's behaviour and claimed that there were no negative effects on the dog.
- Noted the Government's position that policies must have a basis in science and added that he was looking forward to the findings of a Defra report on the issue.
- Expressed confidence that in any investigation into the use of dog collars "the plusses would outweigh the minuses".
- Pointed to the high cost of the collars as evidence that collars were bought on a considered basis.
- Claimed that there were no documented abuse cases.
- Argued that the collars are vital in saving dogs from death and serious injury.
- Acknowledged his commercial interest in opposing a ban and introduced Heather Jones - a member of the public who has trained her dogs using an electronic collar.

Heather Jones:

- Stated that she was a "huge dog lover" and a "strong supporter of the RSPCA".
- Told the meeting that she owned a Doberman dog that had begun to chase sheep and that other kinds of corrective training had failed to alter the dog's behaviour.
- Declared that she tested the collar on herself before using it on her dog in order to ensure that the shock was not excessive.
- Claimed that the collar worked immediately and that the dog did not pursue a sheep again for eight years.
- Asserted that without the collar she would not have been able to allow her dog to run free and that the dog would have had to have been destroyed.

Lorraine Barrett AM:

- Invited the representatives from the Kennel Club to present their views on the issue

Holly Lee (Kennel Club)

Phil Buckley (Kennel Club):

- Began by noting that the sale of electronic collars had been banned at Kennel Club shows since 1997.
- Highlighted the fact that a Private Members Bill was put before Parliament by David Rendell, the former Liberal Democrat MP for Newbury to ban electric shock dog collars, but that it did not pass due to a lack of Parliamentary time.
- Claimed – in response to the argument that the collars were an effective behavioural management tool - that the collars worked in theory but not in practice.
- Stated that in order for the collar to be effective the shock must be administered at precisely the right moment and that this came down to a matter of luck and not skill or judgement.
- Argued that dogs should be kept on leads around livestock and that the use of a flexi-lead was more appropriate than a collar in this context.
- Contended that the argument that electronic collars do not hurt was also flawed - if they did not hurt the dog they would not be effective.
- Suggested that positive behavioural training was the only comprehensive way of dealing with a dog's behaviour problems and that, at £50 per session, it was also cheaper and more accessible than a collar.
- Stressed that collars failed to address the underlying and fundamental behavioural problems.
- Added that the collar masks the temperament of the dog's breed.
- Noted that the Home Office and the Police Force have both banned the use of these collars when training their dogs and argued that this proved that the best trained dogs were trained positively.
- Stated that the aim of the Kennel Club was to stop the growth of the market in electronic collars.

- Provided examples of the collar being misused and also an example where it had become faulty and had caused electrical burns to the neck of a dog.
- Argued that the collar can create further behavioural problems in dogs – for instance when it is used to prevent a large dog attacking a smaller dog the pain caused by the electric shock can be associated in a dog's mind with the small dog itself. This can lead to aggressive behaviour in the future.
- Claimed that the collar caused significant discomfort and pain for dogs but highlighted the problems that DEFRA had in building an evidence base due to ethical constraints on testing the collar.
- Noted that DEFRA had issued a more limited tender in calling for evidence on the issue.
- Welcomed Carwyn Jones' statement of intent to ban the collars.

Brynle Williams AM:

- Argued that the collar was not sufficient to control a dangerous dog.
- Affirmed that once a dog starts killing sheep it is impossible to stop it.
- Stated that he felt that it was 'deplorable and distasteful' that the collar was used.
- Said that dogs should not be allowed to run free amongst livestock.
- Concluded that, as a farmer, he could not support the use of the collars.

Phillip Jones (International League for the Protection of Horses):

- Asked where this issue fitted under the new Animal Welfare Act.

Alun Streeter (OCVO):

- Confirmed that section 12 of the Act will allow the Assembly to make the appropriate legislation.

Sian Edwards (Dogs Trust):

- Highlighted the significant number of dog owners who use the collar in Wales and stressed how easy it was to get hold of a collar through eBay and other internet sources.
- Claimed that the collars were being used in environments where the welfare of the animal was not at the forefront of owners' minds.

Lorraine Barrett AM:

- Added that there was a possibility that owners could lend the device to friends.

Wendy Davies (British Horse Society Cymru):

- Asked whether it was accurate to compare the electric shock collar to ECG treatment on humans.

Roger Matthews (Petsafe/ECMA):

- Stated that the collars were not comparable to ECG and that the static discharge was at a very low level.

Phil Buckley (Kennel Club):

- Said that he had tested the product on himself and claimed that it did hurt.

Phillip Jones (ILPH):

- Asked whether the level of shock was increased in wet weather.

Roger Matthews (Petsafe/ECMA):

- Responded that it depended on the situation – if the skin was wet the level should decrease but if the contact points became moist then the level may rise.
- Contested the case studies presented by the Kennel Club and claimed that the demonstration case was 'ridiculous' and misrepresented damage done by an electric collar when, in fact, it was the result of long-term collar use, which was not recommended.

Suzanne Campbell (Protect our Wild Animals):

- Asked why people would spend money on such an expensive item when other options are available.
- Expressed concern that the collars would be seen as a toy or a “source of fun”.
- Stated that a lot of owners need retraining.

Brynle Williams AM:

- Noted that cattle prods have been legislated against.
- Spoke of his worry that electric collars merely served to mask the true behaviour of dogs and that this true nature would re-emerge.
- Said that he felt that people were “too idle” to train dogs properly.

Daisy Meyland-Smith (Conservative Assembly Group):

- Expressed the fear that long term use of the collar could lead to damage to a dog’s neck.

Roger Matthews (Petsafe/ECMA):

- Said that the collars were not intended to be used 24 hours a day.

Ifan Lloyd (British Veterinary Association):

- Stated that the BSAVA opposed the use of collars for training.

Wendy Davies (British Horse Society Cymru):

- Asked what training was given to people who bought the collar.

Roger Matthews (Petsafe/ECMA):

- Confirmed that written instructions were included when a collar was purchased.

Alain Thomas (Greyhound Rescue Wales):

- Argued that the collars were of “limited benefit”.
- Pointed out that collars could be used deliberately to provoke dogs in the context of dog fighting and added that a £200 cost would not be a deterrent to the individuals involved.
- Asked what other precautions were in place to prevent misuse.

Roger Matthews (Petsafe/ECMA):

- Acknowledged that there are no controls on the use of the collars but added that there were no controls on *any* products other than guns.

Roy Peckham (Pit Pony Sanctuary):

- Stated that he used electric fences as a method of control.
- Likened electric collars to air rifles – in that they always end up in the wrong hands.
- Affirmed that he would not use a collar to train a dog.

Roger Matthews (Petsafe/ECMA):

- Stressed that the collar need only be used two or three times before a dog learns.

Lorraine Barrett AM:

- Argued that the association process that the collar relies on is problematic as the owner must be very careful that dogs associate the shock with their proximity to sheep and nothing else.
- Stated that the fundamental problem rested with the owner and not the pet.
- Welcomed the Kennel Club’s comments about ‘nipping the growth of this product in the bud’.

Holly Lees (Kennel Club):

- Highlighted that the key difference between an electronic fence and an electronic collar was that a dog could move away from the fence but could not escape the arbitrary shocks administered by a collar.

Suzanne Campbell (Protect our Wild Animals):

- Made it known that she was distressed by Heather Jones' practice of putting a dog in a pen with a ram.

Brynle Williams AM:

- Said that he was 'disturbed' that the collars were being used as a control mechanism for dangerous dogs and asserted that they were not effective in such a context.

Lord Duncan McNair (ECMA):

- Argued that the training products such as the electric shock collars had more benefits than disadvantages and expressed the hope that, in time, this would become apparent.

Item 3: Dates of Future Meetings

Lorraine Barrett AM:

- Thanked all the contributors.
- Noted that the next meeting of the group was on 20.03.07 and that it would be the last meeting before the Assembly election in May.

Any Other Business

Wendy Davies (British Horse Society Cymru):

- Asked what progress had been made on the Animal Welfare Act

Claire Lawson (RSPCA):

- Stated that commencement was expected before the end of March 2007.