1 Summary
OneKind welcomes the debate on Motion S5M-08960 in the name of Maurice Golden MSP. The experience of dog behaviour experts and scientific studies alike provide clear evidence that the use of e-collars is unnecessary, inhumane and can lead to long-term behaviour problems for dogs. We believe that the use of electronic training devices (“e-collars”) that make use of electric shocks, chemical sprays (such as citronella) and/or are automatically activated (“anti-bark” collars) must be ended as soon as possible. To that end, we welcome the announcement by the Scottish Government on Wednesday 24 January, in response to Question S5W-14028 by Ben Macpherson MSP, that it intends to introduce guidance under s.38 of the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 which will effectively ban the use of e-collars by specifying that their use is completely unacceptable in terms of the Act. A consultation on the draft guidance has been made available¹.

2 Background
E-collars are used on dogs for training and control, to discourage barking, and for confinement or fencing. For cats, they are generally used to reduce straying by delivering a shock if the cat crosses a boundary, such as a wire buried at the edge of the garden.

With collars intended for dog obedience training or to stop unwanted behaviour, the shocks are delivered via a remote-control handset operated by the owner or trainer. With anti-bark collars, a sensor on the collar detects barking and activates the shock mechanism. Where shocks are used as an ‘invisible fence’ or ‘freedom fence’ to deter dogs from leaving a property or going to a particular location, the shock is triggered by a signal from a boundary wire.

E-collars vary greatly in price and complexity. One model seen on sale over the internet offered “50 groups of warning tones (of different frequencies), 10 levels of vibration corrections, 99 levels of static pulse stimulation corrections. The static stimulation at Level 1 is very mild for sensitive healthy dogs. Level 99 is a lot stronger compared to Level 1 for stubborn healthy dogs.” Untrained owners were left to decide how “sensitive” or “stubborn” their dog might be, and thus which level to apply.

3 Why shock collar use must end

3.1 Shock collars cause unnecessary suffering

Electric shocks are usually referred to in manufacturers’ literature as “impulses”, “stimulation” or “correction”. However, even dog training professionals who accept the use of e-collars admit that

¹ http://www.gov.scot/Topics/farmingrural/Agriculture/animal-welfare/AnimalWelfare/companion/electronictrainingaids
strong electric shocks can cause significant distress and emotional harm to a dog. This suffering is unnecessary because there are alternative ways in which training can be achieved, mainly through understanding dog behaviour and the use of reward-based training, as recommended by the Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors (APBC)\(^2\) and the Animal Behaviour Training Council (ABTC)\(^3\).

Studies at the University of Utrecht published in 2004\(^4\) found that the immediate reactions of dogs to electric shocks suggested stress, fear or pain (lowering of body posture, high pitched yelps, barks and squeals, avoidance, biting, flicking their tongues). Dogs that had been shocked were also more likely to show long-term stress-related behaviour.

More recent DEFRA research\(^5\) has highlighted variable outcomes between individual dogs trained using e-collars. The main project found that the use of e-collars in training “is associated with behavioural and physiological responses that are consistent with negative emotional states. It is therefore suggested that the use of e-collars in training pet dogs leads to a negative impact on welfare, at least in a proportion of animals trained using this technique.” In a second DEFRA study\(^6\), there was behavioural evidence that the use of e-collars negatively impacted on the welfare of some dogs during training, “even when training was conducted by professional trainers using relatively benign training programmes advised by e-collar advocates”.

3.2 Misuse of e-collars

Unregulated sale, often over the internet, means that a tool with the potential to cause significant pain and distress to an animal is available without any follow-up control whatsoever. The DEFRA researchers commented:

"Manuals were clear on operation, but gave varying levels of information on using the e-collar in training. Generally they did not adequately explain their full potential, for instance with respect to using the tone or vibrate functions. Advice in manuals was not always taken up by end-users as evident from responses in owner questionnaire [...]"\(^7\).

However good the manufacturer’s instructions – assuming they are read and understood - they can have no control over how the device is used after it has been sold. Levels of electric shocks are controlled by the user, who may well be unskilled, possibly frustrated or angry, all of which leads to serious concerns about the potential misuse of these devices.


\(^3\) [http://www.abtcouncil.org.uk/images/EthicalDogTraining.pdf](http://www.abtcouncil.org.uk/images/EthicalDogTraining.pdf)


\(^5\) *Effect of pet training aids, specifically remote static pulse systems, on the welfare of domestic dogs* - AW1402

\(^6\) *Studies to assess the effect of pet training aids, specifically remote static pulse systems on the welfare of domestic dogs; field study of dogs in training* - AW1402A

\(^7\) *Effect of pet training aids, specifically remote static pulse systems, on the welfare of domestic dogs* - AW1402
3.3  **Shock collars are ineffective**
Timing the shock effectively is acknowledged to be difficult. Even experienced trainers have been observed to give shocks immediately after a command without giving the dog time to respond, so that the dog is confused and associates the command itself with the shock. Some owners repeatedly shock a dog for running off even after the dog has started to return.

Another known risk is that the dog can make unexpected associations between the shock and something in the environment at the moment the shock is received, resulting in an increase, rather than decrease, in problems such as aggression, non-cooperation or phobia. The unintended association could be another dog or other animal, a person or something inanimate such as a location. Rather than obedient, the dog may well become angry, defensive or fearful.

3.4  **Shock collars are unnecessary**
Modern and humane methods of dog training take advantage of a dog’s natural motivation to cooperate and to seek human acceptance and praise. Training to deal with problem behaviour is also based on an understanding of dogs’ natural motivations and the various reasons for problems such as excessive barking, chasing, aggression and chewing. Distracting the dog’s attention is used rather than punishment, such as by removing the dog from a problem situation, or by the use of mildly aversive signals such as an unexpected noise or a puff of compressed air.

In the case of anti-bark e-collars, it should be remembered that barking is part of a dog’s natural behaviour and is a means of communication with humans and other animals. Barking is not abnormal behaviour: a dog should not be punished with an electric shock or a chemical spray when it barks. In practical terms, positive reward-based training is likely to be just as effective, if not more so.

4  **Support for a ban**
In 2016, OneKind carried out a survey of dog trainers across Scotland and asked their views on the use of different types of electronic training aids (full survey results are annexed to our response to the Scottish Government consultation). Of the total number of dog trainers that responded to the survey (23 out of 52 contacted), 91% supported a ban on shock collars and 83% supported a ban on anti-bark collars. Not only did the majority of trainers feel that shock and/or anti bark collars were entirely unnecessary when reward-based training methods work just as well, many had had dogs referred to them with longer term welfare issues apparently caused by the use of shock collars or citronella spray anti-bark collars.

As the Motion states, many animal welfare organisations, including the Kennel Club, the Scottish Kennel Club, the Scottish SPCA, the RSPCA, the Dogs Trust, Guide Dogs for the Blind, the Blue

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9  OneKind response to the Scottish Government consultation on Potential controls or prohibition of electronic training aids in Scotland (2016)
Cross, the APBC and the ABTC condemn the use of e-collars for dog training and call for them to be banned. Like OneKind, these organisations believe strongly that dogs need to be trained, but that shock collars are an unacceptable method. The APBC advises that the use of devices that rely on pain or discomfort to modify behaviour is inappropriate as “they have the potential to seriously compromise the welfare of dogs, and ruin their relationship with their owners”.

5 Legislation in other countries
E-collars are banned in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Germany and Wales. The Welsh ban on the use of collars that emit an electric shock sets an encouraging example for the Scottish Parliament as it has withstood legal challenges from the e-collar industry and was found to be a justifiable measure of social policy aimed at animal welfare.

6 The way ahead
Motion S5M-08960 puts down an important marker regarding the unacceptability of causing pain and distress to dogs in the name of training. OneKind also welcomes Motion S5M-09760 in the name of Ben Macpherson MSP, which calls on the UK Government to ban the distribution or sale of any electronic training devices for dogs that are capable of causing pain or distress, and further calls on the Scottish Government to use its devolved powers to ensure that it is an offence to cause pain or distress to dogs through the use of such devices.

At present, the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 makes it an offence to cause unnecessary suffering to an animal or to fail to meet its welfare needs but at present, it would be difficult to meet the standard of evidence required to prosecute on these grounds for using an e-collar. The proposal to issue clear guidance under the Act, clarifying that aversive techniques can compromise dog welfare, lead to aggressive responses and worsen the problems that they aim to address, and that this includes the use of electronic collars, anti-bark collars and devices that squirt noxious oils or other chemicals that interfere with the dog’s sense of smell, will add essential clarity to the Act and make prosecution a more realistic prospect.

The cross-party support attracted by both Motions is very welcome and we look forward to strong, clear guidance under the 2006 Act, reflecting the modern, humane approach to animal welfare espoused by the Scottish Parliament, and effectively banning the use of inhumane training devices.

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10 Shock Collars - The Shocking Truth  Inga MacKellar MSc CCAB  and Mat Ward BSc MVS CCAB
11 Animal Welfare (Electronic Collars) (Wales) Regulations 2010
12 R. (on the application of Petsafe Ltd) v Welsh Ministers, Queen’s Bench Division (Administrative Court) [2010] EWHC 2908 (Admin); [2011] Eu. L.R. 270