

## **P-04-445 – Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Committee, 27.01.2014**

### **Save our Welsh Cats & Dogs From Death on the Roads**

I am very pleased to respond back to the Chair of the Petitions Committee Williams Powell AM in respect of the concerns raised by the RSPCA in its letter dated 20<sup>th</sup> January 2014.

#### **Animal Welfare (Electronic Collars) 2010**

Before the 2010 ban, the animal-activated electronic boundary fencing was in use for decades in Wales without any adverse reports from the Police, Animal Welfare organisations or the veterinary community and no prosecutions have ever been brought under the Animal Welfare Act of 2006 throughout the UK.

#### **RSPCA's Scientific Evidence**

2009: Seksel (Australia)  
1993: Blackwell & Casey, (UK)  
1998 Beerda Schilda Van Hoof & Mol (Holland)  
2005: Schalke E., Stichnoth J & Jones-Baade (Germany)  
1982: Tortura D.F. (Columbia)

The above studies were conducted exclusively for human-activated training collars for dogs. All of them were undertaken between 9 to 32 years ago using the then prevailing technology. Some carried far more powerful outputs than the British standard maximum; specifically the Schalke study with German technology used Telekat micro 3000 which exceeds the British technical standard maximum by a magnitude of 8 times.

#### **Misuse (RSPCA Point 1e)**

As there is no human input into operation of the animal-activated fencing system, there is zero potential of misuse.

Most pet owners adore and cherish their pets as one of the family and the cost of professionally installed invisible fencing system is around £600 which compares favourably with vets' bills for road casualty pets. If any pet owner is intent on deliberate cruelty there are far simpler ways.

#### **Electronic Training Devices**

Human-activated training collars for dogs are completely different from animal-activated fencing collars as:

- a) they do not carry any warning alerts
- b) the human can repeatedly activate the correction.
- c) are used to train dogs in more complex tasks than simply remaining within the animal's home territory.

#### **Retreat from Stimulus (RSPCA Point 1c)**

In practice, once the pet is trained, it doesn't receive a correction again as it doesn't come close to the warning zone. This was clearly demonstrated in the campaign film I provided.

#### **Livestock fences and Rehoming**

The RSPCA accepts that aversive live electric shocks from livestock fencing can contain animals safely when managed correctly as there is no viable alternative. Similarly, there would be a significant reduction in the reported 3,400 healthy cats and dogs destroyed by the RSPCA in 2012 for non-medical reasons such as the lack of available space in kennels, catteries and suitable homes. Electronic fencing systems installed in homes with gardens situated near a busy road would dramatically increase the availability of homes. Electronic boundary fencing with a low static impulse is a viable alternative for this shocking slaughter of innocent cats & dogs.

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It would free up the RSPCA's resources to concentrate on the real culprits of appalling animal neglect and cruelty, images of which are shown so graphically on its website and thoroughly deserving of a prison sentence.

**RSPCA Point D:** The more recent DEFRA research, Cracknell, Hardiman, Mills Cooper concluded after the 3 year study period that a ban on these dog collars could not be justified because the research provided no evidence that these collars posed a significant risk to dog welfare. Furthermore, there is no evidence at all that there the correction is painful. A vet's injection is painful and the pet does either yelp or caterwaul.

More importantly from the perspective of this petition, there were no proposals from DEFRA to place any restrictions on the use of animal-activated fencing collars.

The RSPCA cites the APBC which say that electronic boundary systems can compromise welfare and may lead to aggression, but there are approximately 170 different types of electronic collars available in the world ([www.smarttraining.com](http://www.smarttraining.com)) but the APBC it doesn't say a) when the study was undertaken b) which system was evaluated and c) who were the scientists involved. There is only one collar in the British accredited standard.

**RSPCA's Point 2b** saying that a nip of a fencing e-collar "*can be altered in intensity and duration to such a level that physical lesions can be caused*" is wildly incorrect as the impulse is activated by the pet's own behaviour.

To suggest that an animal will voluntarily subject itself to a sufficiently high impulse for any length of time is palpable nonsense and not 'evidence' at all. It demonstrates a complete lack of understanding by the RSPCA of how the animal-activated fencing collars work.

In actual fact, in the Australian Veterinary Journal the Society refers to, it was a story that the RSPCA in Australia had claimed that an Innotek collar had burned a dog and in 2002 it was proven in court in that this was physically impossible and the RSPCA had to pay several hundreds of thousands in costs.

In addition, the British accredited fencing collar is not capable of producing sufficient power to damage an animal's skin.

The RSPCA has muddled up the human-activated training collars for dogs with the animal-activated fencing collars.

#### Points 3 & 4 Electronic boundary fencing for cats and dogs:

The boundary fencing provides a safe and secure environment for the pet to avoid external dangers and roam freely as it is its natural instinct. As the Companion Animal Welfare Council has concurred, "the element of the Welsh ban that extends to the boundary fencing system is not conducive to good welfare and may in fact be increasing animal suffering".

#### Threat /Social Interaction.

A vast majority of cat owners have cat flaps in their homes. In the event of a perceived threat within its home garden, a cat will instinctively flee to the home base (or up a tree) and it is highly unlikely a pursuing threat would proceed into another's house. In practice though, I have seen a cat rear up, claws extended hissing furiously at a visiting dog which crouched in submission until it was taken away by the owner. I have also witnessed cats becoming pals with other cats in the neighbourhood and similar feline behaviour was also highlighted in the BBC Horizon programme "The Secret Life of Cats". No single cat shares the same personality with another.

We have no personal experience of owning dogs.

#### Training

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The gentle training regime initially involves switching the impulse of the animal-activated fencing collars off and placing marker flags around the garden to indicate the position of the boundary and in most cases it will follow major geographical features of the garden, i.e. trees, fences, buildings and shrubs. The warning alerts cut in several feet before the electronic impulse is triggered and after training and reinforcement at a low level impulse, the cat or dog comes to recognise the area where the warning alerts start and does not proceed further.

#### [RSPCA Points 10 & 12.](#)

Viable alternatives such as cages or enclosures as suggested by the RSPCA (Point 3a) do not respect an animal's natural physical and psychological instincts to roam and seem to be contra to Section 9 (c) of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 which requires the need of a pet to exhibit normal behaviour patterns.

#### [Regulation](#)

Regulation for what? Accredited suppliers of animal-activated fencing systems will only supply and install their systems with on-site training for the pet. As in livestock fencing, humans are not involved in the operation of the fence.

#### [RSPCA](#)

I did speak to RSPCA's Chris O'Brien in early December having sent in late November an email including the campaign films to Clare Lawson who forwarded them over to him. We had pleasant, open conversation. Amongst other things, I enquired as to whether the RSPCA Cymru had been in touch with their former Chief Veterinary Officer Chris Laurence who has been using an invisible fencing system for his cat and dogs for years and years at his home near Chippenham Wiltshire. (We have links to him and his wife Mary through friends in England).

Unfortunately, RSPCA Cymru have not been in touch with their former colleague and I feel strongly this should be a priority for the RSPCA Cymru's understanding the British animal-activated fencing system.

#### [Visit](#)

In his capacity as Member of the Environmental and Sustainability Committee, at my own cost I would like to invite the Chair, William Powell AM to accompany me to visit a domestic dwelling which has an accredited electronic fencing system just across the Severn Bridge

#### [Copy of a recent email from a petitioner in North Wales to his Assembly Member](#)

**"I am writing to ask for your support in lifting the ban on invisible fencing which is the only way we can protect our dogs.**

**I understand that the Minister, Alun Davies, has agreed to a review of this legislation in the summer. My wife and I have lived in this area of North Wales for 20 years. Our property is in gardens of 6 acres. We own two little dogs, who are very precious to us. We are surrounded by sheep farming land on all sides. Our dogs are too little to make all our fences secure.**

**For example, if a rabbit digs under the fence our dogs can follow. Our dogs do not chase the sheep, however the sheep run from our dogs. This is enough to make them abort when they are in lamb. The farmers have every right to shoot our dogs, as this is their livelihood. Our invisible fence is the only possible way to protect our dogs, and be responsible citizens living in this area"**

I trust that the Petition Committee can appreciate huge differences between both types of collar.

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Monima O'Connor  
24<sup>th</sup> January 2013