



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

# Electronic training collars for cats and dogs in England

## **Summary of responses and government response**

**August 2018**



© Crown copyright 2018

You may re-use this information (excluding logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence v.3. To view this licence visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/) or email [PSI@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:PSI@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk)

This publication is available at [www.gov.uk/government/publications](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications)

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at

**Defra**

Animal Welfare Team

Area 5B

Nobel House

17 Smith Square, London

SW1P 3JR

Email: [AnimalWelfare.Consultations@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:AnimalWelfare.Consultations@defra.gsi.gov.uk)

[www.gov.uk/defra](http://www.gov.uk/defra)

## Contents

Introduction .....	4
Background.....	4
Types and uses of e-collars .....	4
Other parts of the UK .....	4
Welfare effect of e-collars.....	5
Consultation and views sought.....	6
Summary of statistics .....	6
Citizen Space response summary .....	6
Citizen space free text responses .....	11
Further comments responses.....	14
Responses regarding satisfaction with the consultation .....	15
Email responses.....	16
Stakeholder comments .....	17
Kennel Club:.....	17
RSPCA:.....	18
The Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW): .....	19
General comments .....	20
Government response .....	26

# Introduction

This document provides a summary of responses to the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' (Defra) consultation exercise on the proposed ban on electronic training collars (e-collars) for cats and dogs in England. The consultation ran for 7 weeks from 12<sup>th</sup> March 2018 to 27 April 2018. This document provides a summary of the responses received and details the next steps for the proposals on e-collars. Given the number of responses received, it does not offer a detailed opinion on all the comments received.

# Background

Electronic training collars (e-collars) are corrective behaviour devices which enable electronic or static pulses and other signals to be given to pets by their owners.

# Types and uses of e-collars

There are generally two types of e-collar: hand held remote-controlled devices and containment systems. Remote-controlled devices are operated by the owner/handler and are used to stop unwanted behaviour such as chasing livestock. The owner or handler has a remote device which can trigger an electronic pulse (similar to a static pulse which can be varied in strength) or which can emit a noxious spray. Depending on the type of e-collar, a sound may be emitted which warns the pet that an electronic pulse or noxious spray is about to be triggered, allowing the pet to stop whatever it is about to do before the pulse or spray is generated.

Containment systems can be used to keep a dog or cat within the owner's garden reducing the chances of the animal straying into a busy road or defecating on someone else's property. In such situations the e-collar sends out an electronic pulse or a noxious spray when the animal approaches the boundary. A noise may also be emitted prior to the pulse or spray.

# Other parts of the UK

Scotland has recently announced plans to issue Scottish government guidance which highlights the welfare effects of e-collars and clarifies what offences may apply in relation to their use. In Wales, the use of such e-collars was banned in 2010 via regulations introduced under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. In light of growing concerns regarding the use and potential misuse of e-collars in England, and in order to protect the welfare of cats and dogs, we wish to ban their use here by

introducing regulations under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. We propose to update the statutory Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs and of Cats in England (dog and cat codes) following the adoption of these proposed new regulations and also in light of the Scottish government guidance.

## **Welfare effect of e-collars**

Defra-funded research published in 2014 showed that e-collars can have a detrimental welfare effect on dogs and can cause harm and suffering. The research also showed that many owners did not read the manufacturers' instructions prior to use. Many animal welfare organisations, veterinary representative groups, the Kennel Club and many dog trainers and behaviourists are opposed to the use of e-collars, not just on account of the harm they can cause, but also because they are a negative form of training. Many consider that dogs should only be trained with positive reward methods (e.g. offering morsels of food to encourage correct behaviour). Many consider that negative forms of training which inflicts some form of punishment do not necessarily work, can be counterproductive and can cause the dog to exhibit other problems or dangerous behaviour.

It has also been suggested that e-collars might have a beneficial impact for example in preventing dangerous and harmful behaviour by dogs which are out of control, and that e-collars might be a last resort measure for poorly behaved dogs which would otherwise be put down. Relatively little evidence has been provided to support these suggestions, although evidence about the harm e-collars inflict on pets has been growing.

Weighing up the evidence which has been emerging about the impact of e-collars, and taking account of public concerns that we should treat all our pet animals with appropriate reward and respect, Defra has concluded that the time is now right to adopt a legal ban on the use of e-collars in England. This would bring the law in England into line with the law in Wales where they are already banned.

Users and manufacturers of e-collars argue that when used correctly they might enable difficult dogs that do not respond to more traditional positive reward training to be trained and controlled. They also argue that containment systems can keep cats and dogs within a defined area where alternative methods are not realistically possible, for the benefit of their safety and also to prevent unwanted behaviours occurring in other places.

## Consultation and views sought

Views on the proposals for e-collars were sought during a seven week public consultation period from 12th March 2018 to 27 April 2018. Responses were received via a Citizen Space survey, by post and by email.

A total of 7,334 responses to the consultation were received with 6,705 of these, being submitted via Citizen Space.

## Summary of statistics

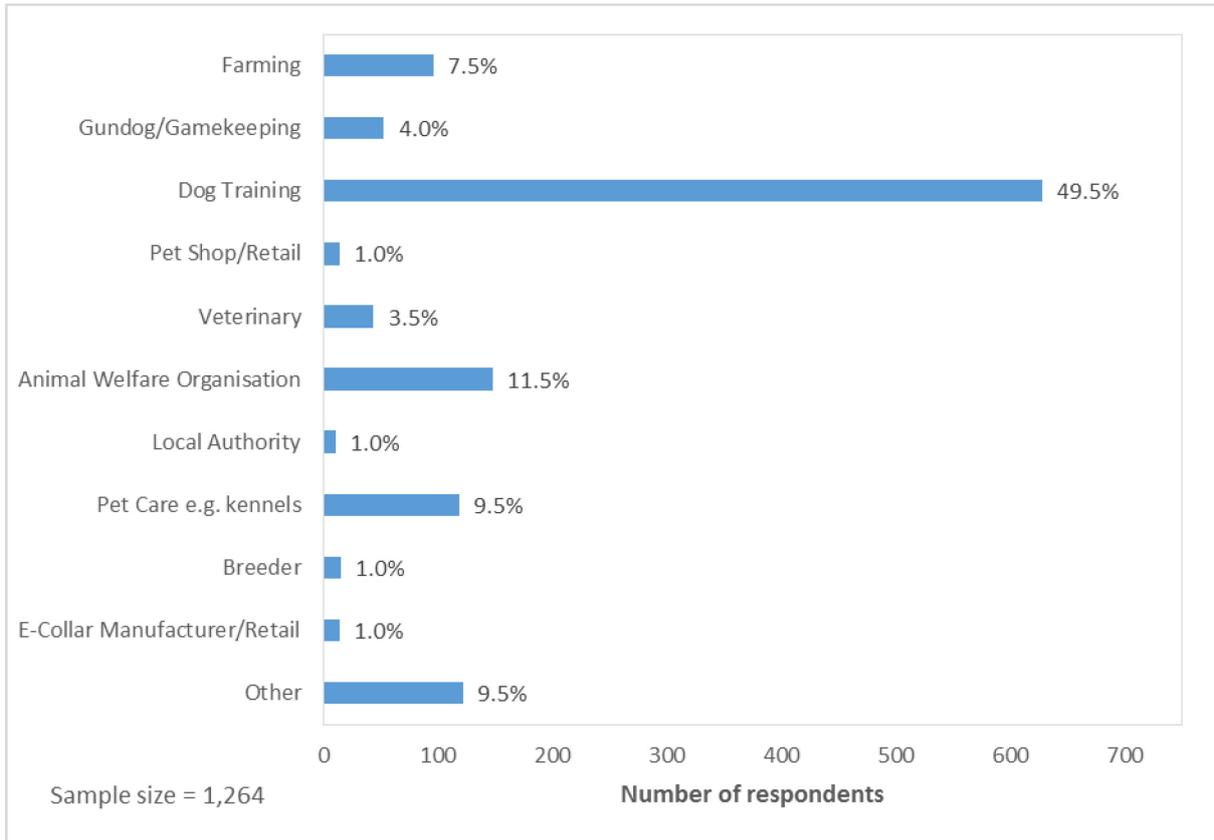
Defra received 7,334 direct responses to the consultation of which 6,021 (82.09%) were from members of the public. The remaining 1,313 responses were from organisations or individuals associated with a sector of relevance to e-collars e.g. dog trainers or veterinarians. All statistics have been rounded to the nearest 0.5%.

## Citizen Space response summary

**The first two questions asked for the consultee's name and e-mail address.**

### **Question 3: What is your organisation?**

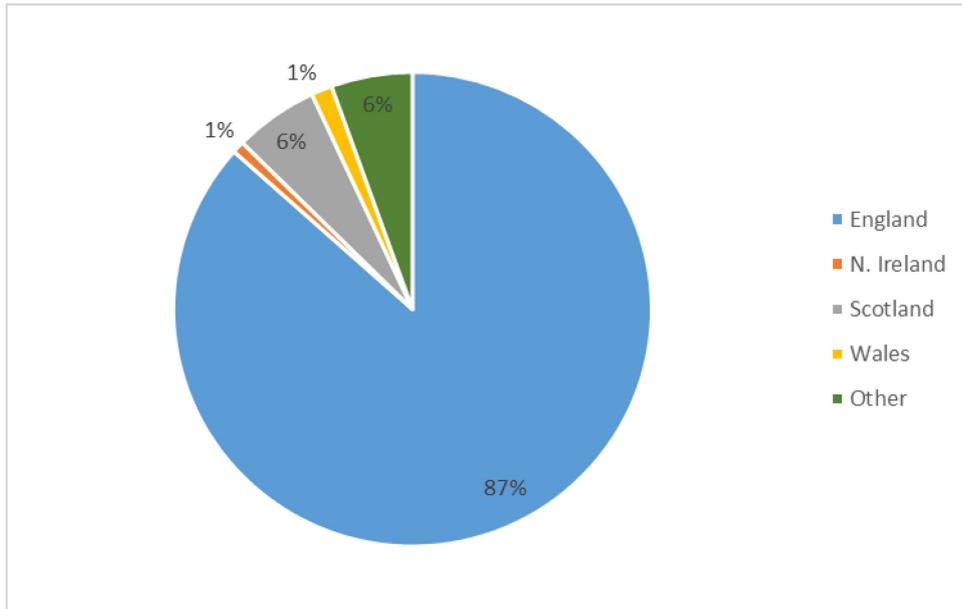
Defra received 6,705 direct responses to the online consultation, of which 5,441 (81%) were from individuals. The remaining 1,264 (19%) were from those with an 'interest' in e-collars, the breakdown of which is summarised in Figure 1. A number of people responded as being affiliated with an organisation, but not responding on behalf of the organisation itself.



**Fig. 1 Sectors that respondents identified as being affiliated with**

**Question 4: Where in the UK are you answering from?**

Questions 1 – 5 dealt with the demographics of those responding to the consultation. The majority of Citizen Space respondents indicated England (86.58%) as the area from which they were responding from, as seen in Figure 2.



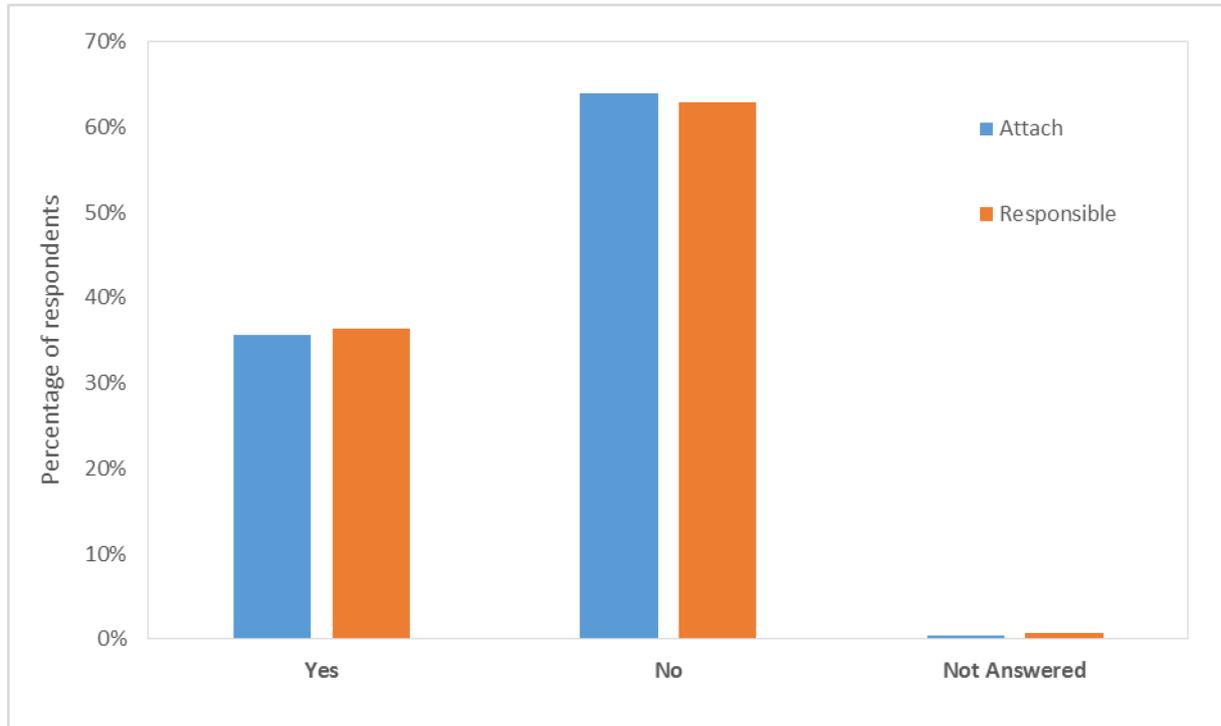
**Fig. 2 Area of residence of Citizen Space survey respondents**

**Question 5: Would you like your response to be confidential?**

75.5% of responses indicated that they did not want their responses to remain confidential. 23.0% did want their responses to remain confidential. 1.0% did not answer.

**Question 6: Do you think it should be an offence to attach an e-collar to a cat or dog, or cause an e-collar to be attached to a cat or dog?**

**Question 7: Do you think it should be an offence to be responsible for a cat or dog which has an e-collar attached?**



**Fig. 3 Total responses to questions 6 and 7 on whether it should be an offence to attach and e-collar to a cat/dog vs. whether it should be an offence to be responsible for a cat/dog wearing an e-collar**

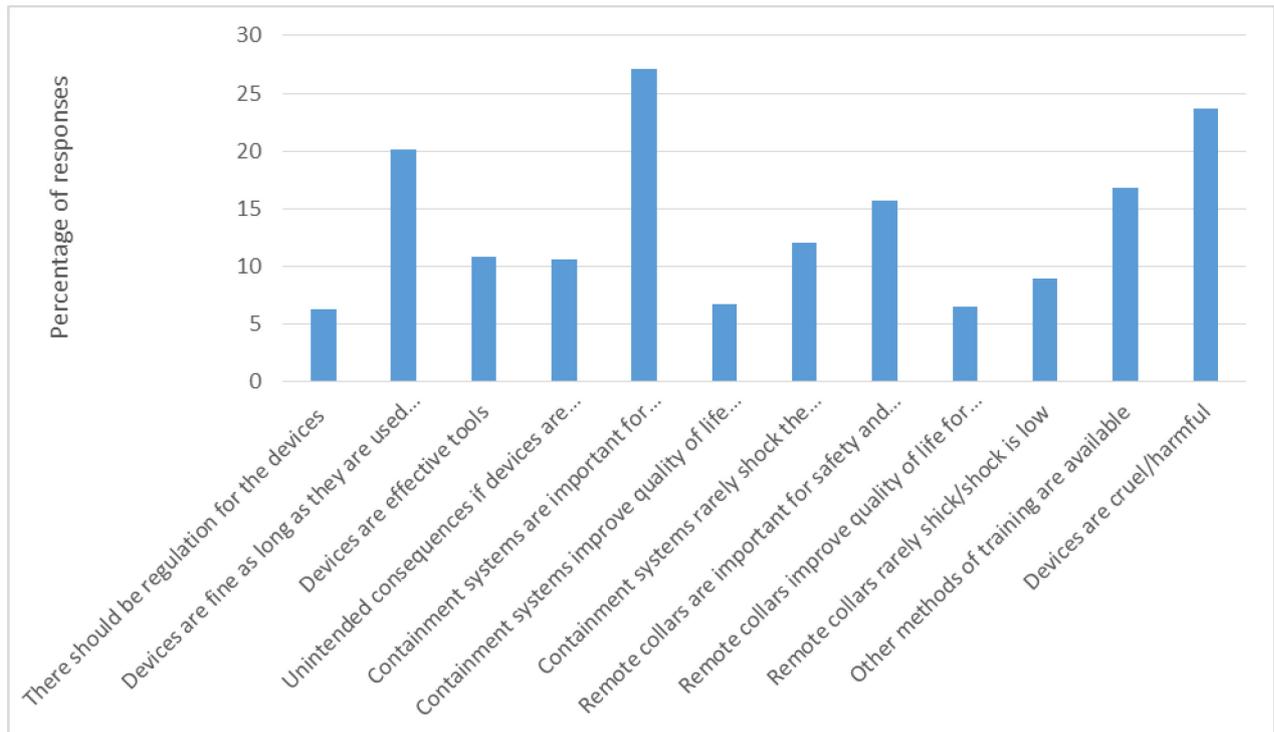
The similarity of responses between the two questions potentially indicates that respondents saw little difference in the wording between the two questions, or the implications of these differences.

Respondent answers also varied between regions of the UK, as illustrated in table 1.

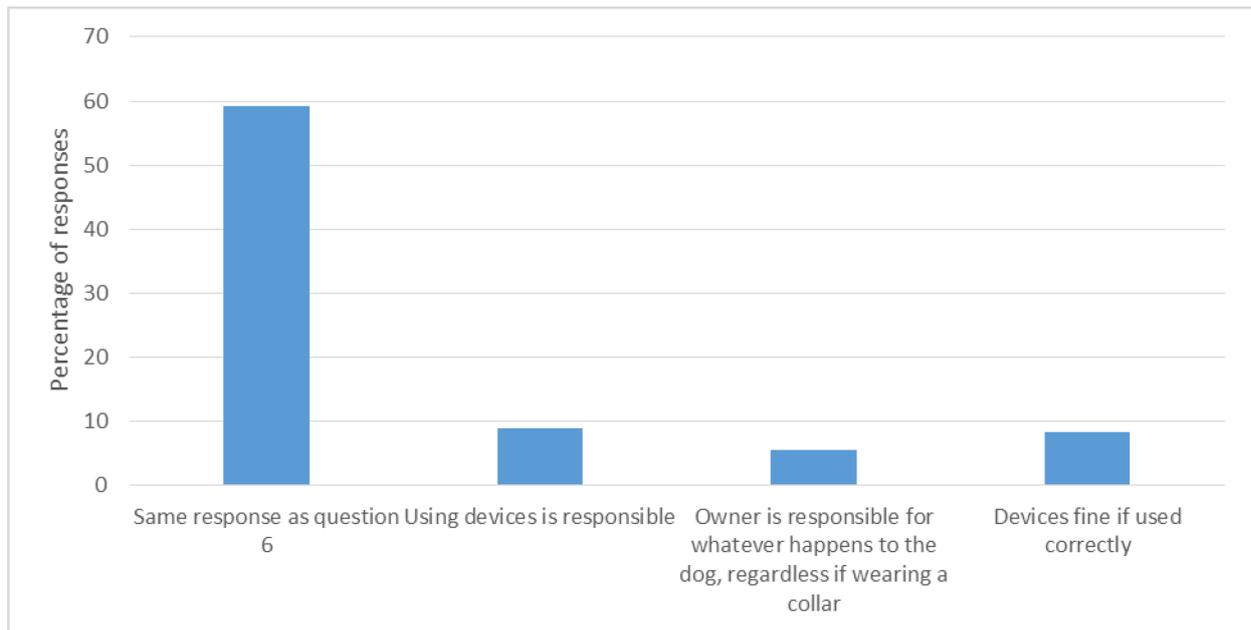
**Table 1. Respondent answers by UK region**

Area of UK	Total Number of Participants	Attach			Responsible		
		Yes	No	Not Answered	Yes	No	Not Answered
England	5805	35.5%	64.5%	0.5%	36.0%	63.5%	0.5%
N. Ireland	55	40.0%	58.0%	2.0%	42.0%	58.0%	0.0%
Scotland	381	40.5%	59.5%	0.0%	42.0%	58.0%	0.5%
Wales	95	73.5%	26.5%	0.0%	71.5%	28.5%	0.0%
Other	369	24.0%	75.0%	1.5%	25.5%	72.5%	2.0%
Total	6705	35.5%	64.0%	0.5%	36.5%	63.0%	0.5%

The greater support for a ban from those in Wales may be indicative of that fact that Wales already has a total ban on e-collars, for both training and containment purposes.



**Fig 4. Percentage of responses to question 6 based on themes. Themes that received less than 5% of responses were not included**



**Fig 5. Percentage of responses to question 7 based on themes. Themes that received less than 5% of responses were not included**

## Citizen space free text responses

### Question 8: Do you have any other views on these proposals or relating to them?

Free text responses were available for questions 6 and 7, as well as question 8. A total of 3,736 free text comments were provided in response to Question 6 of the Citizen Space survey. Responses were grouped based on the themes that were raised. Below is the percentage of free text responses that made reference to the following issues:

- 6.0% mentioned some level of regulation for devices e.g. licensing, education, limit use/sale etc.
- 20.0% mentioned that the devices are fine AS LONG as they are used correctly or people are trained to use them
- 11.0% mentioned that the devices are effective tools (primarily for remote collars)
- 10.5% mentioned justifications or unintended consequences if devices are banned including more dogs being put down, an increase in dog attacks, using them only as a last resort or for problem dogs, using them only when other methods failed
- 27.0% mentioned the importance of containment systems for safety

- 7.0% mentioned that the containment systems improved animals quality of life i.e. not locked indoors all day
- 12.0% mentioned that containment systems rarely shock the animal or the shock is of a low level
- 15.0% mentioned the importance of remote collars for safety and control issues
- 6.5% mentioned that the remote collars improved animals quality of life i.e. they have greater freedom/reduced behavioural problems
- 9.0% mentioned that remote collars rarely shock the animal or the shock is of a low level
- 17.0% mentioned that there are other methods of training available
- 23.5% mentioned that the devices are cruel or harmful (the majority of these were in reference to remote collars)

Issues that received less than 5% of responses have not been included in the analysis for this consultation.

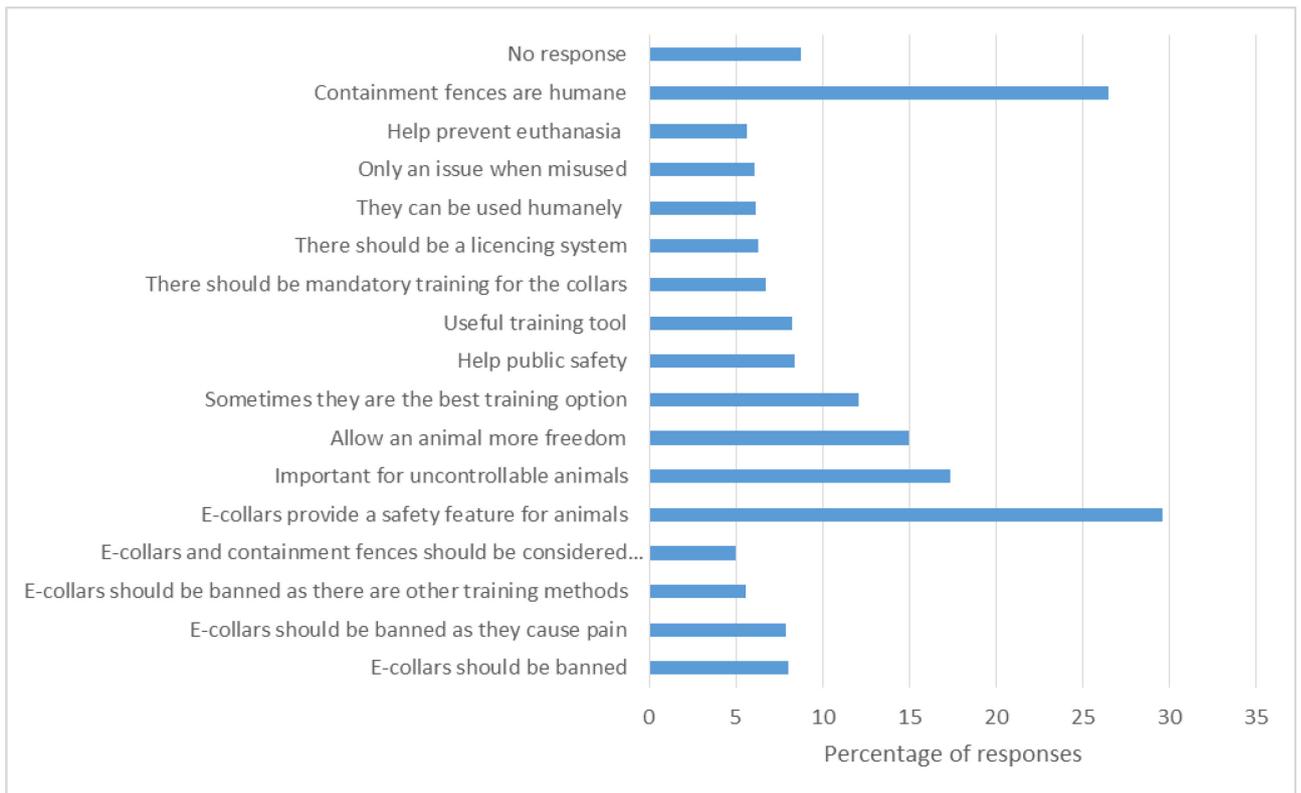
A total of 2299 people provided free text answers for Q7. For the comments, people mentioned the following issues:

- 59.5% provided the same answer as in Q6.

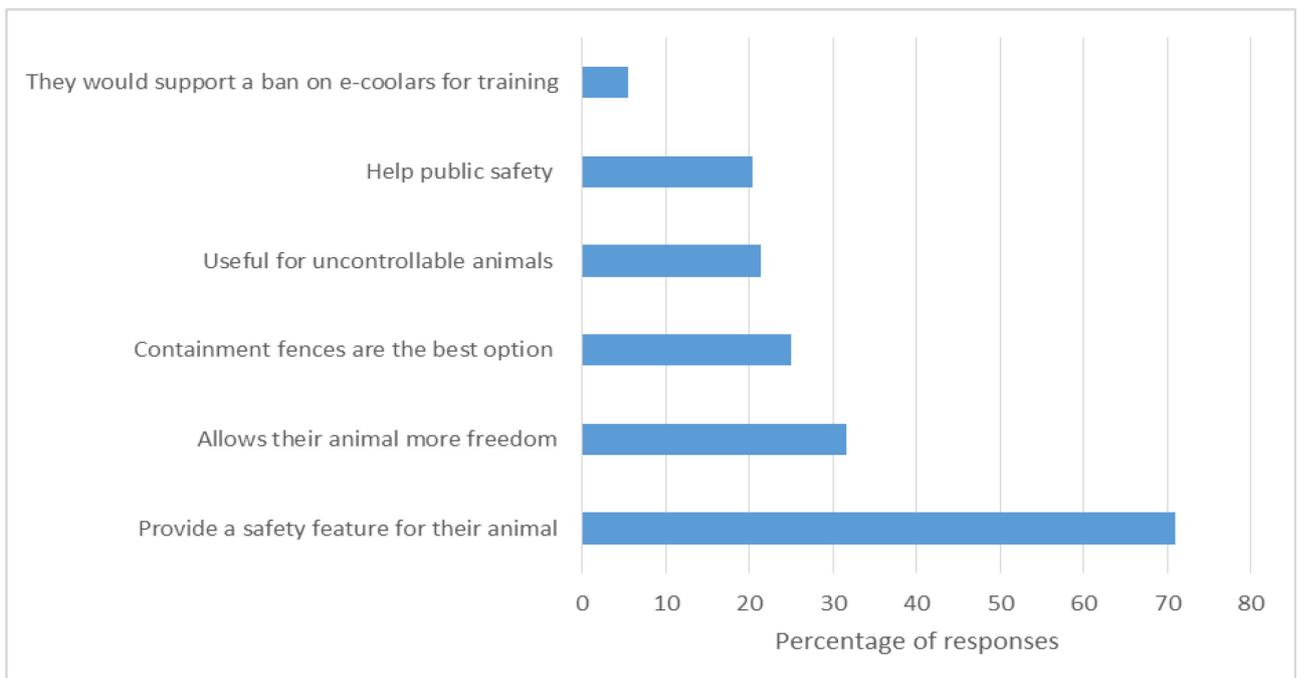
A further:

- 9.0% mentioned that using the collars 'was' an act of responsibility/it was their responsibility to control their dog
- 5.5% mentioned that the owner was ultimately responsible for anything that happens to the dog regardless of whether they put an e-collar on
- 8.5% mentioned that the devices are fine AS LONG as they are used correctly or people trained to use them
- 7.0% were uncodeable/errors/commented on question wording/added nothing beyond the yes/no answer already provided.

Issues that received less than 5% of responses have not been included in the analysis for this consultation.



**Fig 6. Percentage of responses to question 8 based on themes. Themes that received less than 5% of responses were not included**



**Fig 7. Percentage of responses to question 8, specifically mentioning containment fences, based on themes. Themes that received less than 5% of responses were not included**

## Further comments responses

We received a total of 4281 responses adding further comments in response to question 8. Below is the percentage of free text responses that made reference to the following issues:

Given all responses, those that were against E collars gave the following reasons:

- 8.0% of responses said that e collars should be banned without giving a specific reason
- 8.0% of responses said that they should be banned due to the fact they cause pain and stress for an animal
- 5.5% of responses said that e collars should be banned as there are other training methods that are more effective (mainly positive behavioural methods)
- 5.0% of responses said that e collars and containment fences should be considered separately

Given all responses, those that were for E collars gave the following reasons:

- 29.5% said that they provide a safety feature for the animal. This was mainly in relation to running into the road, or getting shot by a farmer
- 17.5% said they were important for uncontrollable animals. Those most mentioned were animals who worry livestock and animals with a high prey drive
- 15.0% said that they allow an animal more freedom (mainly off the lead for walks)
- 12.0% suggested that sometimes collars are the best training option. This was mostly mentioned in the context of a 'last resort'
- 8.5% said that they help public safety
- 8.5% said they were a useful tool for training
- 6.5% wanted mandatory training for anyone who wanted to use a collar
- 6.5% suggested that, rather than a ban, there should be a licensing system
- 6.0% said that they can be used in a humane way
- 6.0% said that they were only an issue when misused, but made no mention of prosecution against the misusers
- 5.5% said that the collars help prevent the euthanasia of animals

26.5% of responses specifically mentioned their support for containment fences and how they felt they were a humane way of containing their pet

- Of this 26.5%:
  - 71.0% said that they provide a safety feature for their animal. The main reasons cited were that they prevent cats and dogs being hit by traffic, and prevent dogs being shot for going into farmer's fields
  - 31.5% said that it allows their animals more freedom

- 25.0% said that containment fences were their best option. The main reasons cited were the impossibility of putting up physical fences and the ability for animals to escape through physical fences
- 21.5% said it was useful for uncontrollable animals, such as those with a high prey drive and those that have a propensity to attack livestock
- 20.5% said they help public safety, mainly by stopping road traffic accidents
- 5.5% said that they would support a ban on e collars for training

9.0% of responses did not provide an answer to the question.

Issues that received less than 5% of responses have not been included in the analysis for this consultation.

## Responses regarding satisfaction with the consultation

### Question 9: Overall, how satisfied are you with our online consultation tool?

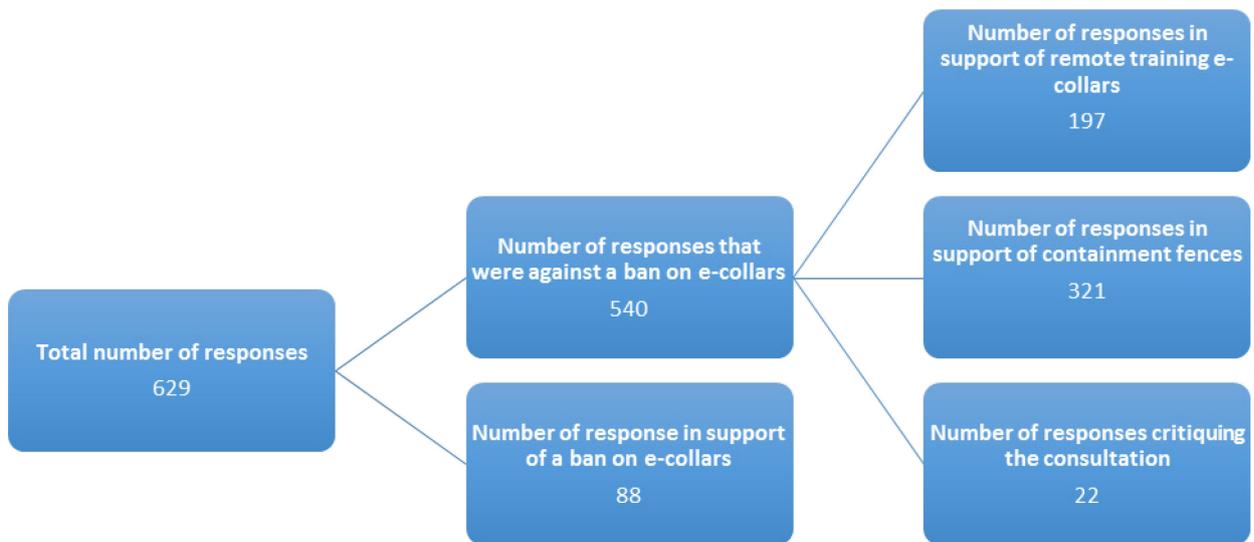
Question 9 asked whether the responder how satisfied they were with the consultation tool. The majority of responses were satisfied with the consultation tool. Table 2 illustrates the total responses to this question.

**Table 2. The number and percentage of responses to question 9, regarding whether they were satisfied with the consultation tool**

Option	Total	Percentage
Very satisfied	1758	26.0%
Satisfied	2809	42.0%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	1626	24.0%
Dissatisfied	166	2.5%
Very dissatisfied	105	1.5%

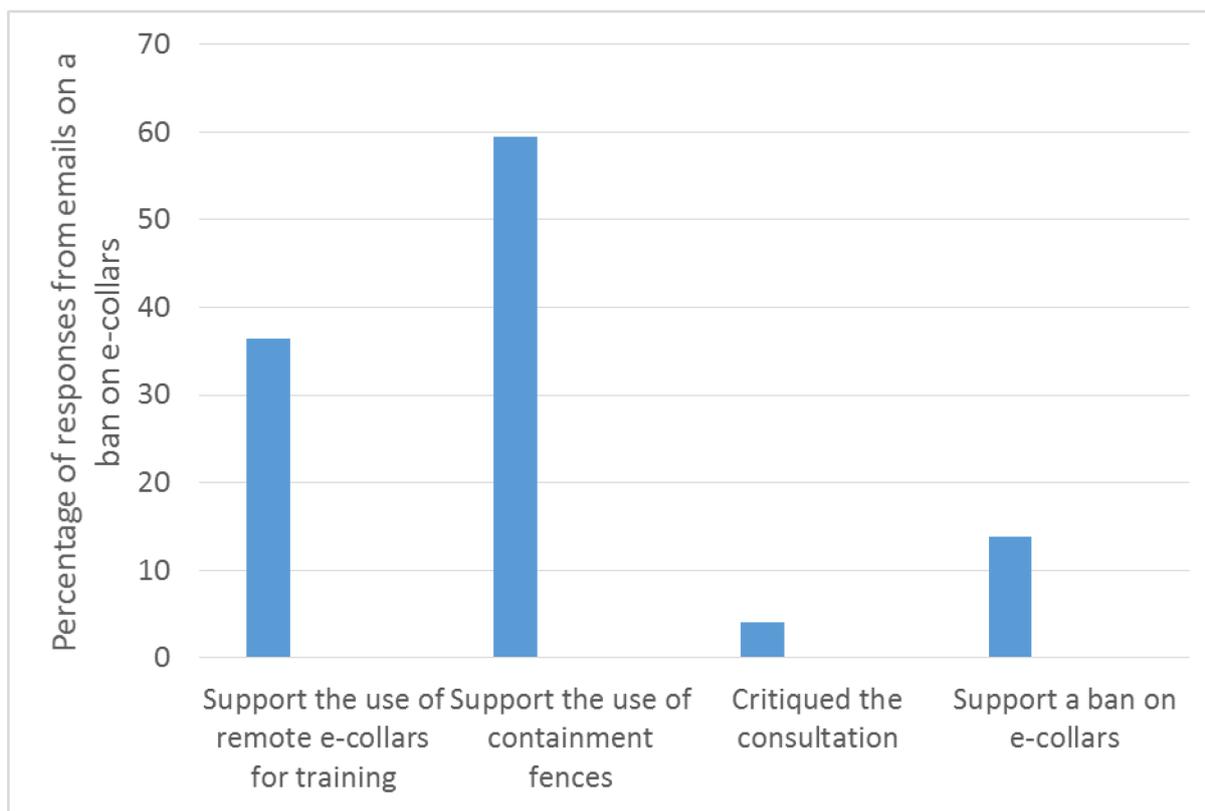
Don't know	153	2.0%
Not answered	88	1.5%

## Email responses



**Fig 8. The total number of responses to the consultation received via email, and the breakdown of those responses by support for or against a ban on e-collars**

Defra received 629 email responses to the consultation, of which 580 (92.0%) were from individuals. The remaining 45 responses were from organisations or individuals associated with a sector of relevance to e-collars e.g. dog trainers (31.0%), veterinarians (24.5%) or animal welfare organisations (9.0%)



**Fig 9. Percentage of email responses based on their support for or against e-collars**

## Stakeholder comments

### Kennel Club:

Any negative method employed to prevent a particular behaviour in dogs has to be extremely aversive and painful enough in order to stop the undesired behaviour from reoccurring. There is conclusive evidence which proves that they cause physical and psychological harm to dogs. As a result they are already banned in many other countries.

Prior to studies paid for by Defra and carried out by the University of Lincoln, there was already a lot of evidence to show the harmful effects of using shock collars on dogs. Studies have focused on the physiological effects, psychological effects and the impacts on learning through the use of electronic shock collars.

This reinforces our view that shock collars should not only be banned, but that even working with the industry to draw up guidance for dog owners and trainers to advise

how to use e-collars 'properly' would be unwise. This is particularly significant given the inconsistencies in how even professional dog trainers use them.

The ECMA have however published materials outlining when it is appropriate to use electronic training aids and how to use them in a way that is safe, supervised and effective, which includes for managing 'soiling public spaces'. Quite clearly this is not a suitable use for a shock collar.

Ideally a ban on shock collars would include a ban on sale as, whilst we acknowledge that the demand for such devices will fall as a result of the Regulations being introduced, possibly to the point that retailers will naturally stop stocking them, this very much relies on dog owners keeping up to date with Regulations which may not have been in force when they initially took responsibility for their dog. As local authorities are already stretched in terms of their resources to effectively enforce animal welfare legislation, we further believe that a ban on the sale of shock collars would factor in another layer of protection for dogs as it is likely that retailers will keep up with legal changes far more than most dog owners.

Electronic shock collars were banned in Wales under the Animal Welfare (Electronic Collars) (Wales) Regulations 2010. The Electronic Collar Manufacturers Association challenged the regulations under Judicial Review on the basis that the regulations breached the European Convention of Human Rights, but the Royal Courts of Justice found in favour of the Welsh Assembly and the regulations remain unchanged following a routine five year review. This proves that the ban was fully justifiable. In addition we are not aware of any dogs being put to sleep in Wales owing to their owners not being able to use an electronic shock collar on them (this is the most common justification for their use – explained above).

In January 2018 the Scottish government announced plans to ban the use of electronic shock collars. The use of shock collars is banned in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Austria, Switzerland, Slovenia and Germany and in some territories of Australia, including New South Wales and Southern Australia.

## **RSPCA:**

The RSPCA strongly opposes the use of electronic training collars (including containment fencing systems) to train and control dogs and cats.

RSPCA policy states that 'it is opposed to the use of any aversive training methods, to train and control companion animals and believes that reward based methods should be used instead' and as such the Society welcomes Defra's proposal to make it an offence to use an e-collar.

Practical experience gained by members of the Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors (APBC) shows that electronic training collars can compromise welfare and in some cases can result in other behaviour problems not previously present, e.g. aggression.

When delivering the shock, there is the risk of associating or pairing the pain with other persons, animals, objects or events that were present at the time of the shock but of no relevance to the dog's behaviour. In the case of aggressive behaviour, because electric shocks can increase this behaviour, it is possible for the owner, another dog or young child to become the target of unexpected aggression.

A study comparing the characteristics of different electronic training collars found large differences between e-collar models in the pulses delivered meaning that one model cannot simply be swapped with another. Faults were also found with individual collars with one delivering stimuli longer than expected and another, a stimulus much greater than expected.

Part of Defra's justification to propose a ban on e-collars is the public concern that all pet animals should be treated with appropriate reward and respect. Banning the use of e-collars will go some way to addressing these concerns. However, the RSPCA would also like to see tighter controls on those who work within the behaviour industry and offer training and behaviour services as they have significant influence over the training methods adopted by owners. As highlighted in our recent report on the welfare needs of dogs, unlike vets, who are regulated by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, no such regulatory body exists for those practising in the behaviour industry. This means there is an overwhelming number of 'behaviour therapists' and 'trainers' available as well as a myriad of terms describing their ethos, approach, methods, techniques and equipment. This is hugely confusing for owners and concerning when outdated methods and techniques still embraced by some can place dogs and owners at risk. There is therefore an urgent need for regulation of those who practise within the industry to ensure that dog owners can access professionals who are not only up to date and evidence based in their approach, but also work in ways that protect the welfare of dogs in their care.

## **The Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW):**

UFAW agrees with the general principle driving this piece of legislation that animals should not be subjected to unnecessary suffering. We believe, however, that the planned scope of the legislation is too broad and would result in the banning of some devices that, when used appropriately, can bring long-term benefits

UFAW agrees with the view that electronic training collars that deliver shocks should be banned. We note that the use of electric shock collars, is prohibited in Scotland and Wales and proscribed by the British Veterinary Association (BVA 2006), the European Society of Veterinary Clinical Ethology (Masson et al 2018) and the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA 2018).

UFAW agrees that anti barking collars that use shocks or which emit strong smells such as citronella should be banned. However, we believe that there is insufficient evidence to ban anti-barking collars that emit distracting puffs of air or non-aversive behaviour changing or welfare improving pheromones/chemicals.

UFAW believes that the case for banning 'invisible' electronic containment systems, especially for cats, has not been made.

We are persuaded that banning electric collars that deliver shocks on command to dogs or cats, whether used by owners or professionals, is justified as they are stressors, cause pain, and effective alternatives such as positive reward based training techniques exist.

Indeed, virtual fencing is something that is being investigated for use in containing farmed livestock as it offers a more flexible way of containing animals and is part of a move towards more precision farming that exploits developments in remote technology. It offers the opportunity to constrain livestock without constraining the movement of wild animals (Umstatter 2011). A ban in the use of such technology in dogs and cats might have the inadvertent impact of restricting the use of such technology in livestock.

## General comments

### Anti-ban:

'When used the proper way E-collars are wonderful. I use one for my aggressive dog and I no longer have to worry about her trying to go after other dogs. I have used E-collars for a while now and they are sometimes the only communication method that gets through to dogs. I understand the ban of shock collars but E-collars that are used by professionals do not shock or cause harm to the dogs. They are used as an effective communication tool and not as a disciplinary tool.'

'Having been a dog owner for 40 years and having been involved in the training of hundreds of dogs, and although the training methods 99.9% of training does not involve the use of an e-collar, the e-collar are and will remain to be a very effective addition to very specific situations and when used in a controlled environment at the hands of an skilled and experienced trainer.'

'E collars, used correctly and gently on low levels, keep high drive dogs safe from chasing, livestock damage or possibly causing road traffic accidents. Pica is also a welfare issue easily stopped by correct use of a remote/e-collar. I do however think training and a paid licence would be a good idea to avoid misuse. A dog stuck on a lead for life is no life at all. I have trained dogs since I was 6 and won my first handler award at age 8. I do see e collars as a last resort but they hold a valuable place in safety. I understand that since Wales banned them, livestock death has vastly increased. I am an award based trainer but do not want my dog killed through prey drive. There are no results from Purely Positive that can stop prey drive/chasing. Let's not fill rescue shelters full of dogs by banning E collars.'

'I do not consider the use of a restricting collar to be in any way cruel. I have heard people to say things like "it can't be pleasant for the animal but it's better than being run over and maimed" as if the use of collars is a lesser evil. There is no compromise here. I said I have four cats but have used the system with eight in total now. In each case the animal is sufficiently clever to quickly (24 hours) recognise the consequence of ignoring the warning. In point of fact I would say that none of the cats now even get to the stage where the warning is activated. The worst aspect of the collar is that it can cause fur loss through friction but this is alleviated when the collars are removed at night where this is possible. In any event it is no worse than any other form of collar.... Although I admit my main motivation in acquiring the system as to prevent road accident there are other fringe benefits. I am a wild life lover. Wildlife and cats do not mix. By keeping them restricted in a given area in which wildlife is discouraged, the effect on the bird population in the wider area has been greatly enhanced. Bird death by (our) cats has changed from a daily occurrence to perhaps one a year.'

'I have a huge garden, mainly consisting of woodland, which is impossible to physically fence off. The protection and peace of mind the e-collar has given us over the past 4 years is indescribable. Before the e-fence/collar, my little dog was forever escaping onto the road and we were really lucky that she never came to harm. She is not distressed or upset by her e-collar, which just purely makes a noise and doesn't actually give her an electric shock. Having said that, I think, like anything, e-collars are open to misuse. The rules need to be tightened up but the principle not banned. My little dog wouldn't be here now if it weren't for her protective collar/fence.'

'Electronic containment systems are a very safe way to protect pets from danger, for example straying onto fast roads, or into neighbour's gardens. They are particularly useful for cats, which are otherwise impossible to contain within anything other than an urban garden. The life expectancy of an outdoor cat is 2-5 years- largely due to being killed on roads. The only alternative is keeping the cat as an indoor cat only, which increases stress and obesity. An additional advantage to containment systems

are the benefits to minimising hunting territory for cats, minimising impact on wildlife including nesting birds etc.'

'I have never known one to be used on a cat. In the correct hands, e-collars, especially ones that work like a tens machine on a human, have a very important role in preventing aggressive behaviour between other canines, sheep worrying/ maiming/ killing, deer chasing and other forms of undesirable dangerous behaviour. Having exhausted all other corrective training methods to stop unwanted behaviour, this has been an extremely useful and effective final solution. In a lot of cases it only takes one lesson for the behaviour to stop.'

'When used correctly (like any technology) containment systems and e-collars (a) protect cats and dogs from the risk of road traffic accidents; and (b) improve their quality of life significantly allowing them to roam freely within the permitted area. There is no need for yet more law when there are already general offences of cruelty to animals that would engage if the technology is misused.'

'These can be used in the correct environment and situation to give "untrainable animals" a last chance before being put to sleep.'

### **Pro-ban:**

'Collars that are designed to be an aversive are open to abuse and are simply not effective and are detrimental to the owner/dog relationship. There is also evidence showing increased aggression with shock collars.'

'Most people who use these collars do not have the knowledge of training or behaviour to use them effectively, and if they did have this knowledge then they wouldn't need to use them anyway. There are arguments that they stop animals from being euthanised, such as sheep chasers, but in reality they are rarely used as a last resort, can make problems worse, and often there is no need to even consider euthanasia if the owner is responsible and just uses a lead.'

'There are "trainers" and "behaviourists" with no qualifications who use these devices and encourage owners to use them. These people do a lot of harm. Pups and children should not be trained with violence. Violence breeds violence.'

'The use of positive punishment, in particular e-collars, has attracted considerable attention in the fields of dog training and dog welfare. In addition, it must also be a concern for public health given the links between the use of such training methods and an increased risk of dog bites to members of the public. Not only have non-aversive methods been shown to be more effective and more humane, e-collars have a propensity to be used on dogs exhibiting emotional reactions such as fear, anxiety or aggression. Recognised training bodies do not advocate the use of such

methods, therefore individuals utilising these tools are likely to be unregulated and have received insufficient theoretical training in the behaviour and welfare of dogs. As both a behaviour consultant and a dog welfare researcher, I believe no individual with a thorough grasp of these issues would utilise these tools because of the danger to the dog, owners and the general public.'

'These devices are extremely difficult to use correctly and more often than not cause unnecessary pain and distress.'

### **On sensible use:**

'When used properly they are a good training tool. They can be misused but so can many items, horse riders and spurs come to mind. I have used an e-collar in a purely positive manner, very low settings and treats paired with was used to teach a very good recall. The dog never felt any correction or punishment. The offence should be misusing the device.'

'As with many products, it is not the product that is the issue but the operator.'

### **On technical issues relating to banning:**

'I run a dog walking business and walk many other dogs. If I see any sort of aversive collar I will remove them, all owners are told this. But many dog walking companies run staff, and occasionally one of my staff has left a collar on a dog, or used a lead type that I do not accept. Examples are a choke chain and an extending lead. I do train my staff and they have an operations manual detailing this ban, but occasionally they will be almost bullied by an owner, persuaded, or simply they haven't come across the equipment for so many years that they just forget I don't allow them. I appreciate this is my issue, but I would not like to think they are prosecuted because an owner has left a collar on a dog, and it's not been noticed by my staff.'

'All cat or dog owners are responsible for their pet, WITH or WITHOUT an e-collar. Inappropriate use of an e-collar should be an offence. However, the reporting of any alleged misuse is completely open to interpretation by uninformed onlookers, who may have a personal agenda. It would be impossible for anyone monitoring a dog with an e-collar to determine if it is being used as a 'pager' only or with electrical stimulation.'

'To police such a ban would be nearly impossible - to date there has been no RSPCA convictions for cruelty for using e-collars.'

## **On regulation:**

'A person should be able to apply to the Local Authority to use a remote collar. There should be a ban on their wide scale availability online. They can be a very effective tool to combat behaviours that Quadrant training fails to do.'

'I can see a use for these collars, but they need to be regulated. We see too many dogs attending classes who have mentally shut down because the own mistakenly thought the e-collar was training the pup. The collars, if absolutely necessary, need to be regulated. It is harder to a pain killer for a dog than a device that administers pain (discomfort resulting in an inability to enjoy life). Owners need to understand training is an on-going activity in a dog's life, it's not a one hour course. These collars are often used instead of tried and tested training methods because mistakenly the understanding is that they achieve a trained pup. My thoughts is that under recommendation of a certified dog trainer and with agreement from vets - then these devices should be accessible with training on their use.'

'I think that rather than banning e-collars, there should be requirement to have a licence to use an e-collar with proof that the owner has attended an approved training course and obtained a certificate saying that they know how to use the collar. I have attended two such courses, with different e-collar trainers, spending several hundred pounds in the process and am now confident that I know how to use the collar safely and humanely. The licence should be expensive (over £100) to deter people who want to use the collar for the wrong reasons. Revenue from the licence fee should be used to administer the system. I also think that only certain brands of e-collar from approved dealers should be allowed in the UK. (Petsafe, Dogtrack and Mini Educator for example). These products cost several hundred pounds, and have a range of settings, which are consistent and reliable. I have a Mini Educator collar with settings from one to 129 and I usually use it at 12. I have never used it above 18 even to get the dog back when chasing. The collar delivers a quick burst - enough to distract but never enough to make her howl or seem in pain. She just turns and runs back happily for a treat. The cheaper collars that can be bought on line do not deliver consistent correction and can cause unnecessary pain, particularly in the wrong hands. Cheap unregulated e-collars that can be bought on the internet should be banned in future.'

## **On the use of vibrating/haptic collars to recall deaf dogs:**

'I have one born DEAF Boxer/Staffi who is happy being off-lead and responds to 'vibrate' to look to me for hand signals. With a ban he will no longer be allowed off-lead as he will be in DANGER.'

'When used correctly they are a very effective training tool and the voltage used is very low. My dog is deaf and without an e collar she would be confined to lead only walks and would not have such a fulfilling life.'

### **On cats vs. dogs:**

'Cats definitely YES. Dogs NO but with strict conditions, licenses and training before purchase allowed. I would support licensing - and only after compulsory training courses without which no sale should be allowed - which should also be paid for. Regulating supply to proven responsible owners who have tried other solutions as I did.'

'To a cat yes, categorically an offence. To a dog, it depends very much on the circumstance, the age of the dog, the method of use, and the frequency and way it's used.'

### **On types of collar:**

'Collars that deliver ELECTRIC shocks should be banned. However, collars that vibrate and which activate a buzzer are perfectly legitimate training aids. All the publicity surrounding this issue refers to 'Electric Shock Collars' but my experience has been that these are NOT generally available and people have been misled.'

'Such collars should be tested and approved safety levels.'

'I think the level they can be used at i.e. the strength should be lowered for end users i.e. pet owners and only trained and qualified persons should be able to use a collar that has the full range of strength.'

### **On working dogs:**

'Cannot see a problem fitting an e-collar to a dog. Dogs working at distance cannot always hear a whistle or verbal command especially if it is windy, a single bleep on collar gets there attention.'

'Some E-collars have more functions than those described in the consultation paper. For example an old-fashioned pager-like beep can be emitted and heard by a working dog at long range even when wind conditions would otherwise make command impossible: its operation need not be a precursor to an electric shock but alerts the dog and in conjunction with rewards can be used in place of the word 'come'.'

## Government response

The government has decided that it will proceed towards a ban on the use of remote controlled hand-held e-collar devices for dogs and cats in England. The government accepts that, where this is necessary as a last resort to prevent other serious risks of harm, there is an argument for retaining the ability to use invisible fencing containment systems for cats and dogs subject to them being set up and used properly, and these will not be subject to the prohibition at this stage.

The government's decision is based on the concern that hand-held remote controlled devices can be all too easily open to abuse and can be harmful for animal welfare. In addition to information received as part of the consultation exercise, Defra's funded research in 2014<sup>1</sup> showed that many users of the hand-held devices were not using them properly in compliance with the manufacturers' instructions leading to welfare problems for the dogs. In many cases alternative positive reward training can be used to encourage and to correct a dog's behaviour. The government will therefore bring forward secondary legislation, to be made under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, to ban the use of hand-held remote controlled e-collar devices.

The government considers that, when installed and set up properly for the cat or dog and for the premises in question, and when proper training is provided, the adverse animal welfare impacts of invisible fencing containment fences can be minimised and at the same time these systems can avert other risks to animal welfare. For example these systems can play a role in preventing a cat or dog from wandering into a potentially dangerous environment. When appropriate training is provided, cats and dogs should quickly learn to understand the boundaries without being regularly subject to electronic pulses.

Whilst the government does not plan to ban the use of invisible fencing containment systems now, the statutory *Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs* and *Code of Practice for the Welfare of Cats* will be amended to emphasize that invisible fencing containment systems should be installed and set up by professionals, that appropriate training should be provided, and that they should only be used as a last resort. We will also keep the situation under review.

---

<sup>1</sup> \*Effect of pet training aids, specifically remote static pulse systems, on the welfare of domestic dogs – AW1402 and AW1402a [AW1402 SID5 Final Report](#) [AW1402a SID 5 Final Report](#)