

Save our Welsh Cats & Dogs From Death on the Roads

I am very pleased to be able to submit evidence to the members of the Environment & Sustainability Committee. Having watched the Senedd TV recording of the Committee's meeting last Wednesday 5th November 2014 on the subject of Electronic Collars used with invisible boundary fencing.

Brief History

Before the 2010 ban, the animal-activated electronic boundary fencing system was in use for decades in Wales without any adverse reports from the Police, Animal Welfare organisations or the veterinary community. In the Draft Legislation of 2009, this animal-activated boundary fencing system was actually permitted to be used under certain criteria, but it was included in the final legislation at the last minute without recourse back to the Assembly to be debated as a separate item as the then Minister Elin Jones was persuaded by her officials that it would be easier to implement the law with both types of collars included. The whole Assembly voted in favour of a ban on the human-activated dog training collars, many unaware that it also encompassed the animal-activated invisible boundary fencing collars..

I met with Nick Ramsay AM with one of his constituents last year and he expressed surprise that the boundary fencing system had been included in the law and he stated " This is not what we voted for".

There are 'clear blue water' distinctions between the two types of electronic collar which will be addressed later in this paper.

It is worth noting, that the RSPCA will not rehome rescue cats & dogs in homes that are situated near a main road. Below is an article in a national newspaper and can be read here:

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2254729/RSPCA-destroys-HALF-animals-rescues--thousands-completely-healthy.html>

Scientific Research

There has never been any scientific studies undertaken for invisible boundary fencing electronic collars nor for electric livestock fencing. The 3 year DEFRA AW1042 study that the RSPCA and the Dog's Trust referred to during the meeting last week, was exclusively to do with human-activated training collars for dogs. These 'clear blue water' distinctions between these two types of collars have been highlighted many times in my submissions through the Petitions Committee under the Chair of William Powell AM. To add weight to my evidence, I am enclosing a letter from Companion Animal Welfare Council which was contacted by the Petitions Committee last year for their opinion of this campaign to lift the ban on animal-activated boundary fencing electronic collars. An excerpt reads "*It is therefore our conclusion that presently, on the balance of probabilities, the element of the Welsh ban which extends to these boundary fencing systems is not conducive to the promotion of good welfare, and may increase animal suffering*".

There is a currently a scientific study sponsored by the cat charity Feline Friends currently underway assessing this boundary fencing with cats, but this is not due to be completed until late 2015 at the very earliest.

Fencing Collar Films

I would respectfully urge those members of the Environment and Sustainability Committee who have not been involved with the Petitions Committee to view two very short films. They clearly demonstrate how the boundary fencing collars works in practice with cats and dogs using the gentle training protocol devised by the American Kennel Club. One film is in Welsh with English subtitles and the second is from the Feline Friends Charity in English.

The bilingual film can be viewed here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7vkMnHnE0g>

and the English film here:

<http://www.jacobwhittaker.co.uk/pics/FelineFriends.mp4>

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Misuse

As there is no human input into the operation of the animal-activated fencing collars, 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 from around £600. 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 using variable commands during the day.
- c) they are used to train dogs in more complex tasks than simply remaining within the animal's home territory.
- d) only the human activated collar is capable of giving a variable duration of the electronic correction.

Clearly demonstrated on the 2 films mentioned, once the pet is trained for the accredited UK boundary fencing collars, it doesn't receive a correction again as it avoids the warning zone by some margin. The pet has been trained to understand that the warning sound says " don't go any further". This is in stark contrast to the claim made by the RSPCA CVO James Yeates that in case of malfunction, the collar will repeatedly shock the pet. This is absolute nonsense.

Livestock fences

No one seems to voice concern about long-term psychological damage to horses or cattle if they bump into a livestock fence (which incidentally carry no warning alerts). People accept that the animal simply learns never to do it again. The same is true of cats & dogs using the invisible boundary system.

[Copy of an email earlier this year from a petitioner in North Wales to his Assembly Member](#)

"I am writing to ask for you support in lifting the ban on invisible fencing which is the only way we can protect are 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 Llandegla, 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 side. 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 there livelihood. Our invisible fence is the only possible way to protect our dogs, and be responsible citizens living in this area" (sic)

I have other letters of support from Welsh owners of invisible boundary fencing systems which I can provide to the Committee if they so wish (minus names & addresses).

After the DEFRA AW1402 report was published, the charity Feline Friends contacted DEFRA to enquire if they had any plans for restrictions on invisible boundary fencing. Below is a cut & pasted copy of DEFRA's reply:

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----- Original Message -----

From: ccu.correspondence@defra.gsi.gov.uk

To: Cats@feline-friends.org.uk

Sent: Tuesday, June 18, 2013 2:16 PM

Subject: Response to your Query : - Ref:DWOE000313575 - AW1402 and AW1402A

Dear Mrs Fawcett,
PET TRAINING AIDS

Thank you for your email of 11 June about pet training aids. I have been asked to reply. A copy of the final report is available on the Defra website

at: <http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Default.aspx?Menu=Menu&Module=More&Location=None&ProjectID=17568&FromSearch=Y&Publisher=1&SearchText=1402a&SortString=ProjectCode&SortOrder=Asc&Paging=10#Description>

While research showed no evidence that e-collars cause long-term harm to dog welfare when used appropriately, Defra wants to ensure electric dog collars are used properly and manufactured to a high standard.

We will work with the Electronic Collar Manufacturers Association to draw up guidance for dog owners and trainers advising how to use e-collars properly and to develop a manufacturers' charter to make sure any e-collars on sale are made to high standards. A ban on e-collars could not be justified because the research provided no evidence that e-collars pose a significant risk to dog welfare. For a ban to be introduced there would have to be evidence showing they were harmful to the long-term welfare of dogs. **There are no proposals to place restrictions on the use of electronic containment fences.**

Yours sincerely,

Adam Broderick Defra - Customer Contact Unit
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)

I have also met with Elin Jones AM and have requested a further meeting with her now that this subject has arisen. I have to date, received a sympathetic ear. Whilst she was a member of the Petitions Committee, she called for a review of the legislation for "unintended consequences".

Watching the Senedd TV reply, I was taken aback at the wildly inaccurate comments given by the RSPCA Cymru's PR officer Chris O'Brien and CVO James Yeates. I had an open, pleasant conversation at length with O'Brien this time last November having beforehand sent information and the two short films to Claire Lawson, Head of Policy. I also asked them for a meeting which was declined.

Despite my best efforts, the RSPCA Cymru is still confusing the human-activated electronic training collars for dogs with the animal-activated electronic collars linked with the animal activated invisible boundary fencing systems, which are freely used all over Scotland, Irelands North & South and also in England as these countries did not follow Wales's example.

In addition, in April this year, another national newspaper reported that the Society was "full to capacity" with abandoned cats and CVO James Yeates was quoted as saying that "there is a shortage of available good homes for them". This can be read here :

www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/rspca-full-cat-crisis-charity-3341187

As if that is not enough, 18 months after the Welsh ban came into force in 2010, the RSPCA's former CVO Chris Laurence (who was also a former Director of the Dog's Trust) was discovered by the media to be using a boundary fencing system linked to electronic collars at his own home near Chippenham, Wiltshire, to prevent his own cat and dog getting run over by traffic. This can be read here :

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2020343/Dogs-Trust-veterinary-director-Chris-Laurence-Hypocrisy-bunny-hugger.html>

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I sincerely hope that the points I have raised will raise awareness within the Committee of the harmless invisible boundary fencing system as it is undoubtedly a force for good.

Lastly, I would be very pleased to introduce a professional trainer to the Committee at a day and time of its choosing to demonstrate this system.

I look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Monima O'Connor
13th November 2014.

PS I am sending this note by hard copy with a DVD of the films and including a photocopy of a 2010 RSPCA Wiltshire Annual Report cover showing an advertisement for an invisible boundary fencing system on the inside front cover.