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Te Whare Māngai o Aotearoa

Petitions Committee

Komiti Whiriwhiri Take Petihana

54th Parliament
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Petition of Kylee Kelly: Ban the use of shock collars on dogs

Presented to the House of Representatives
by Greg O'Connor, Chairperson

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Petition of Kylee Kelly

Recommendation

The Petitions Committee has considered the petition of Kylee Kelly—Ban the use of shock collars on dogs—and recommends to the Government that MPI review the use of dog shock collars in New Zealand.

Request to ban the use of shock collars on dogs

The petition was presented to the House on 15 August 2023. It requests:

That the House of Representatives bans dog shock collars.

The Petitions Committee of the 53rd Parliament began considering the petition. We resumed consideration in the 54th Parliament and received evidence from the petitioner and the following organisations:

- the Ministry for Primary Industries | Manatū Ahu Matua
- the New Zealand Veterinary Association | Te Pae Kīrehe
- the Royal New Zealand Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
- Dogs New Zealand (formerly the New Zealand Kennel Club).

The petitioner is a registered veterinary nurse and a qualified dog behaviourist. Her petition called for a ban on the use, manufacture, and importation of dog shock collars in New Zealand.

What are dog shock collars?

A dog shock collar typically contains two electrodes that release an electric shock. There are three types of activation used in shock collars:

- A warning tone or shock is activated by a hand-held remote.
- Vibrations in a dog's voice box when it barks automatically activates the shock.
- An underground wire transmits a radio signal received by the dog's collar when it crosses the wire. A warning sound is activated, followed by a shock if it gets too close.

Shock collars are used to train working and companion animals and to discourage unwanted behaviour. They are also referred to as "e-collars".

Concerns over the use of dog shock collars

Dog welfare

The petitioner and all other submitters shared the opinion that shock collars can cause physical and psychological harm to dogs when used incorrectly.

The petitioner told us that shock collars can increase dogs' stress levels, which can lead to higher cortisol levels, pain, and increased heart rate. The Ministry of Primary Industries

(MPI) also said that shock collars can inflict pain and burn dogs' fur or skin. A dog's experience of a shock can vary greatly depending on the length of its fur, skin thickness, or the presence of water. The petitioner argued that dogs should be treated fairly and with respect. In her role as a veterinary nurse, she has seen first-hand the damage shock collars can do to dogs.

The New Zealand Veterinary Association (NZVA) raised the point that shock collars have a greater risk of abuse by users due to how easy it is for pain to be inflicted. Moreover, users may increase the frequency, intensity, or duration of the shock if they do not see a swift improvement in behaviour. This could result in a dog trying harder to escape or avoid the stimulus; the behaviour that the user was trying to prevent could become worse.

While shock collar manufacturers typically include instructions with the product, the Royal New Zealand Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) submitted that owners tend not to read them. This leads to greater risks to dogs' welfare. Dogs New Zealand said that shock collars can be dangerous if used without sufficient knowledge and skill.

Dog behaviour

Several submitters strongly expressed the opinion that shock collars were not effective at changing or improving dog behaviour.

MPI explained that there are four quadrants of learning theory:

- Positive reinforcement—providing additional stimulus to reinforce good behaviour, such as dog treats when a dog is quiet.
- Positive punishment—providing additional stimulus to deter negative behaviour, such as administering an electric shock through a collar when a dog is barking.
- Negative reinforcement—taking away a stimulus to reinforce good behaviour, such as releasing pressure on a dog's bottom when it sits.
- Negative punishment—taking away a stimulus to deter negative behaviour, such as ignoring a dog when it jumps on someone (removing human attention).

The petitioner told us that punishment methods tend not to work as well as positive reinforcement methods. Shock collars can put a dog into a stressed or fearful state, in which they struggle to learn. Furthermore, the shock does not address the underlying cause of the behaviour.

The SPCA used the example of a dog being kept in a small yard and barking. A shock collar could be used when a dog barks, but it would be more effective to address the underlying cause of the barking: the size of the space. The petitioner spoke about how shock collars can sometimes make undesirable behaviours worse. She explained that aggression is fear-based and that the pain and surprise of an electric shock could make a dog more aggressive.

The NZVA told us that collars might cause global suppression or "shut-down" in dogs. This could happen when repeated shocks are administered and the dog does not associate them with one particular behaviour. Therefore, the dog suppresses multiple behaviours. In extreme cases dogs may refuse to perform any behaviour at all, known as learned helplessness.

The SPCA told us that shock collars are used to train dogs' behaviour around livestock. In these circumstances dog owners report lower satisfaction rates with the training compared to reward-based training methods.

The petitioner told us that shock collars can risk people's safety. Dogs may associate the electric shock they are given with their handler, other people, or other dogs, and redirect their fear and aggression at them. Both the petitioner and the NZVA spoke about how shock collars might mean that a dog suppresses the early warning signs before it bites someone. If these behaviours have been punished in the past, a dog might not growl or bark before biting someone. Almost 15,000 dog incidents were reported to the ACC in 2023, and the NZVA explained that unpredictable behaviour was a contributing factor to this.

Virtual boundaries

We were interested to hear more about how virtual boundaries worked through shock collars. The petitioner, the NZVA, and the SPCA all said that virtual boundaries are not an effective means of containing a dog. As the boundary is invisible it is difficult for a dog to associate it with the electric pulse it receives. The petitioner described how a dog in a high state of arousal, such as having seen prey, would not respond to a shock as it crossed the electric boundary. However, often once the adrenaline of the chase wears off a dog will feel the pain of the shock collar again so cannot cross the boundary to get back home.

Use in New Zealand

In New Zealand there are no restrictions on the import, sale, production, or distribution of dog shock collars. The petitioner called for these to be banned so it is not possible to use dog shock collars. MPI explained to us the measures in place to protect dog welfare and encourage the safe use of shock collars.

Regulations to protect animal welfare

The Animal Welfare Act 1999 requires all owners or persons in charge of animals to meet the animals' physical, health, and behavioural needs.¹ In addition to this, regulation 47 of the Animal Welfare (Care and Procedures) Regulations 2018 states that the person responsible for a dog must ensure that any collar or tether around an animal's neck does not cause cuts, skin abrasions, or swelling. Any collar or tether must also not prevent the animal from breathing normally, panting, or drinking.²

MPI informed us that, while there are standards for dog welfare, there are no regulations or standards for shock collar importation, sale, or usage in New Zealand. Shock collars can therefore vary in the strength, duration, and frequency of the shocks delivered.

The NZVA advocate greater regulation of the animal training industry. For example, it supports the current accreditation scheme run by Companion Animals New Zealand. The

¹ This reference to Section 10 of the Act can be read in full on the [New Zealand Legislation website](#).

² Regulation 47 can be read in full on [New Zealand Legislation website](#).

scheme's aim is to ensure training and behaviour management practices are humane and put animal welfare first.³

The Code of Welfare for Dogs

The Code of Welfare for Dogs provides minimum standards and recommendations for the use of training aids, including shock collars. The code recommends using electronic devices only as a last resort when other training methods have failed. Furthermore, it states that operators should be trained and knowledgeable, and that electronic devices should not be used on nervous dogs.⁴

MPI noted that an SPCA-drafted update to the code is being considered by the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC). The SPCA highlighted its concerns over the time that NAWAC was taking to consider the update. The code was last updated in 2010, and the SPCA said science had moved on in the intervening 14 years.⁵ Since 2010, 34 papers have been published that argue for a reduction in dog shock collar use.

We asked how the code is enforced and were informed that the SPCA were responsible for the enforcement of the code to do with companion animals. The SPCA explained that enforcement is challenging because the use of shock collars is legal but even when used as intended can negatively affect dogs' welfare. To prosecute someone evidence of the improper use of a dog shock collar would be required.

Working dogs

MPI explained that shock collars are used to manage behaviour in companion dogs and for training and managing working dogs. It estimated that there are around 200,000 working dogs in New Zealand. Dogs are used in:

- farming (herding or driving livestock)
- conservation (like protecting native birds)
- biosecurity at borders
- search and rescue services
- policing.

However, MPI told us that it does not know the extent to which shock collars are used in the training and management of working dogs.

Kiwi avoidance training

The petitioner informed us of the Department of Conservation | Te Papa Atawhai (DOC) programme to train dogs to not attack kiwis.⁶ Kiwi Avoidance Training was established in

³ Read more about how the scheme works here; [What is CANZ Accreditation?—Companion Animals New Zealand](#).

⁴ The full Code can be read on the MPI website: [Code of Welfare: Dogs](#).

⁵ The SPCA noted that the Code has 2018 on the cover as the Regulations were added that year but the Code's content has not changed since 2010.

⁶ The DOC website has more details about the methods used to train dogs to avoid kiwi: [Avian awareness and avoidance training: Dog training](#).

1996 and uses decoys to simulate ground-dwelling native birds. If a dog sniffs a decoy it is given a small shock through the collar.

The petitioner called for this training to be updated to involve reinforcement rather than punishment training methods. She mentioned an example of snake aversion training that uses positive reinforcement. The NZVA also recommended that Kiwi Avoidance Training consider using only positive reinforcement.

The SPCA described studies testing the effectiveness of using shock collars to train dogs to avoid native birds. It said that these studies have found that training dogs using decoys was not effective at changing dogs' behaviour around live animals. Therefore, it supported the petitioner and the NZVA in their calls for higher welfare standards for the national training programme.

Support for a ban

Several submitters told us about countries which have banned shock collars, arguing that New Zealand should follow suit and demonstrate to the world its high standards of animal welfare. Dog shock collars are illegal in ten European countries, including France, Germany, Spain, and the Netherlands. England's ban came into effect in February 2024. Several states in the United States and provinces in Canada have also banned the collars. In Australia, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory only allow shock collars on dogs with specific permits.

The petitioner, the NZVA, and the SPCA advocate a complete ban on shock collars in New Zealand.⁷ MPI noted that in deciding whether a ban should be put in place, stakeholders should be consulted.

Dogs New Zealand acknowledged that shock collars can be dangerous if used incorrectly and do inflict pain on dogs. However, it was concerned that a complete ban would remove a training option for skilled individuals dealing with difficult dogs. It suggested that a ban could also mean more dogs would be euthanised.

Alternatives to shock collars

The petitioner and the SPCA spoke about the benefits of positive reinforcement over any kind of punishment training method. Dogs learn best when calm, relaxed, and engaged. The petitioner told us that it is important to teach a dog good associations with their behavioural triggers.

The NZVA consider that the most important aspect of reducing unwanted behaviour was to understand the root cause and address that first. Forcing compliance through aversive means fails to nurture the human-dog relationship or foster productive environments. The NZVA therefore discourages the use of shock or citronella collars, electronic boundary fences, and sprays.

⁷ The petitioner also cited a further two organisations who supported her petition: the Association of Professional Dog Trainers New Zealand and the animal rights group Save Animals from Exploitation (SAFE).

Our response to the petition

We thank the petitioner for bringing this topic to our attention and thank all submitters for their carefully considered evidence. We heard a great deal of information on the best practices for training dogs.

We understand the concerns about the effectiveness and welfare risks of dog shock collars. We note that the Code of Welfare for Dogs has not been updated for some time and that there are no restrictions or regulations on the design of shock collars. However, we also recognise that the extent to which dog shock collars are used, particularly for working dogs, is not known. We determined from the evidence presented that there is relatively little regulation in this area and recommend that MPI review the use of dog shock collars in New Zealand.

Appendix

Committee procedure

The petition was referred to the Petitions Committee of the 53rd Parliament on 15 August 2023.

On 6 December 2023, the petition was reinstated with the Petitions Committee of the 54th Parliament. We met between 14 December 2023 and 20 February 2025 to consider it. We received written submissions from the petitioner, Dogs NZ, the Ministry for Primary Industries, the New Zealand Veterinary Association, and the SPCA, and heard oral evidence from the petitioner, the Ministry for Primary Industries, the New Zealand Veterinary Association, and the SPCA.

Committee members

Greg O'Connor (Chairperson)

Carl Bates (to 29 January 2025)

Kahurangi Carter (to 8 May 2024, then from 29 January 2025)

Greg Fleming

Paulo Garcia (from 29 January 2025)

Francisco Hernandez (from 8 May 2024 to 29 January 2025)

Related resources

The documents we received as evidence in relation to this petition are available on [the Parliament website](#).

A recording of our hearing can be accessed online on [the Parliament website](#).