



# **Standards and Guidelines for the Health and Welfare of Dogs in Western Australia – public consultation supporting paper**

## **Issue: Community consultation on restricting or banning the use of electronic collars on dogs.**

### **Purpose**

The use of electronic collars on dogs is a controversial issue. Some jurisdictions in Australia and overseas have banned the use of electric shock collars (a type of electronic collar) on dogs. Many animal behaviour scientists, animal welfare organisations and dog trainers do not support the use of electronic collars in general. However, some government organisations in Australia and overseas use electronic collars as an important part of their dog training programs.

As part of the consultation on the Dog Standards and Guidelines, the Department seeks comment on the use of electric shock collars, and other types of electronic collars for the training and management of dogs in WA.

You can have your say by completing the Dog Standards and Guidelines online survey, or by providing a written submission. Please see <https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/animalwelfare/standards-and-guidelines-health-and-welfare-dogs-wa> if you wish to comment on this issue.

### **Background**

In the draft Dog Health and Welfare Standards and Guidelines, an electronic collar is described as ‘a collar that is used to modify behaviour through the delivery of a stimulus, including but not limited to an electric shock, citronella spray, vibration, water vapour, air pressure or tone, and includes electric training collars and electrical devices known as the “invisible fence” ’.

Training that uses an unpleasant stimulus to prevent a dog from exhibiting undesirable behaviour is known as aversive training.

Electronic collars for dogs are generally used in three ways:

- to train dogs (remote-training collars) – the collar is activated remotely by a handler
- to inhibit barking (anti-barking collars) – the collar is activated in response to vibration in the voice box when a dog barks
- to confine dogs (‘invisible fence’ or boundary containment collars) – the collar is activated when the dog approaches a set boundary. A wired or wireless system can be used.

### **Animal health and welfare considerations**

Studies have shown that electronic collars can cause behavioural change in dogs relatively quickly<sup>1,2</sup>. The Electronic Collar Manufacturer’s Association™ (ECMA) argues that electronic training can be effective when used as part of a balanced training regime, “by being sufficiently unpleasant but causing no harm or lasting effects”<sup>3</sup>.

People and organisations who support the use of electronic collars say training can be of value:

- to allow control of a dog at a distance for safety of other animals or the public. Relevant uses include training dogs that chase livestock, training dogs to avoid reptiles or birds, and training dogs for use in military or law enforcement service;
- for confinement in an area where physical fencing is not practical. This can avoid welfare risks associated with wandering, or alternative methods of confinement such as tethering; and
- where other training techniques have not been successful, and rehoming or euthanasia of the dog is being considered.

## Risks associated with electronic collars

Animal behaviour research has identified a number of risks with the use of electronic collars in aversive training. Training with an electronic collar will not address the underlying cause of a problem behaviour (e.g. barking due to boredom or anxiety) and will not teach a dog an acceptable alternative behaviour<sup>1</sup>. Learning and interaction with people may also be inhibited in dogs trained using aversive training techniques<sup>1</sup>. Dogs with a nervous or aggressive temperament are particularly at risk, and aversive training may generate unwanted or dangerous behaviour. For example, aversive training to reduce aggression can cause dogs to suppress their warning signs leading to greater unpredictability<sup>5</sup>, or if a collared dog barks or approaches a boundary as a person walks past, the dog may associate the aversive stimulus with the person, leading to more aggressive behaviour towards strangers.

Review of the science indicated that reward-based training has been shown to be as effective as electronic collars for dogs<sup>8</sup>, while avoiding associated welfare risks<sup>4</sup>.

## Electric shock collars

Scientific research on electronic collars has largely focussed on electric shock collars. There is wide variation in the functionality, strength, quality and use of electric shock collars. For example, some collars can send a warning tone or vibration, to allow an animal to stop its behaviour before a shock is delivered. Modern collars will allow different strengths of electrical stimulation, from a low intensity (described by people as a prickle or tickle), through to high intensity, which has been described as a painful, burning sensation<sup>5</sup>. The ECMA aims to control the quality and use of devices, however, in WA, it is not currently a requirement for manufacturers or suppliers of collars to be members of the ECMA.

Research in electric shock collars for dogs has found that, in addition to showing pain and fear at the time of receiving an electric shock from a collar, dogs have shown longer-term signs of stress associated with their use<sup>6</sup>. Factors such as the moisture, dirt, coat length, degree of contact, and the dog's temperament will affect a dog's experience of an electric shock collar<sup>5,7</sup>.

There is a significant risk of poor welfare outcomes with electric shock collars, especially if a collar is not fitted and used appropriately. Excessive stimulation leading to compromised welfare can arise from inexperience, malicious handling or device malfunction<sup>1,6</sup>, and skin wounds and infection can result from the electrodes of poorly fitted collars, or as a result of prolonged periods of wear<sup>5</sup>.

## Policy on use of electronic collars

Many animal health and welfare organisations including the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Australia (RSPCA), the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) and pet industry groups<sup>11</sup> oppose the use of electric shock collars on dogs. A number of Australian and international jurisdictions have also banned the use of electric shock collars for various purposes (see Appendix 1).

Other types of electronic collar, such as spray, noise, vibration or air collars, vary in their aversiveness to dogs. In general, these devices have not been as widely tested, and their full effect is not as well understood<sup>6</sup>. The RSPCA is opposed to the use of all collars that deliver aversive stimuli, including citronella collars and high-pitched sound-emitting devices<sup>9</sup>. The AVA's current policy is that 'behaviour-modifying collars that use citronella (or other nontoxic substances) are *not recommended*'<sup>6</sup>. However, this is under review, and a draft AVA policy states that behaviour modifying collars, including citronella collars, must not be used<sup>10</sup>.

## Appendix 1

**TABLE 1: Summary of regulation of electric shock collars for dogs - Australia**

Note: General prohibition of animal cruelty under state and territory legislation will still apply, even where use of an electronic collar is allowed.

Australian Jurisdiction	Containment collars	Anti-barking collars	Remote-training collars	Comment:
<b>Australian Capital Territory</b> <a href="#">Animal Welfare Act 1992 s13</a> <a href="#">Animal Welfare (Welfare of Dogs in the ACT) Code of Practice 2010</a> (Dog CoP)	Banned  (Offence to administer a shock under the Act)	Banned  (Offence to administer a shock under the Act)	Banned  (Offence to administer a shock under the Act)	It is an offence to administer electric shock to an animal using a device not prescribed by regulation for use on that kind of animal. Dog CoP 2.5 Devices using electric shocks for confinement or training/discipline purposes are not permitted under section 13 of the <i>Animal Welfare Act 1992</i> . 6. Under the <i>Animal Welfare Act 1992</i> , the use of any devices which administer an electrical shock is prohibited.
<b>New South Wales</b> <a href="#">POCTA 1979 s16. Schedule 3</a> <a href="#">POCTA Regulation 2012</a>	Conditionally allowed	Banned  (non-electric citronella collars are permitted)	Banned	Electrical device: Canine Invisible Boundary for confining dogs only permitted if used inside a fence through which dogs cannot pass and that is at least 1.5 metres high.
<b>Northern Territory</b> <a href="#">Animal Welfare Act 1999</a> <a href="#">Animal Welfare Regulations 2000</a>	Conditionally allowed  (for the purpose of training)	Conditionally allowed  (for the purpose of training)	Banned  (Electric training collar excluding a collar operated by a remote control device)	Electrical device: Electric training collar S 19 Part 2 R4 Schedule 1 - Condition of use: Only to be used strictly in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions in respect of the use of the collar.
<b>Queensland</b> <a href="#">Animal Care and Protection Act 2001</a>	No restriction	No restriction	No restriction	S18 cruelty includes if a person (e) uses on the animal an electrical device prescribed under a regulation; No regulations prohibit use of e-collars on dogs.
<b>South Australia</b> <a href="#">Animal Welfare Regulations 2012</a>	Banned	Banned	Banned	Electrical device: R8 Offence to place a collar on an animal designed to impart an electric shock (other than approved research)
<b>Tasmania</b> <a href="#">Animal Welfare Act 1993</a>	No restriction	No restriction	No restriction	S8) a person is guilty of an offence under that subsection if the person (i) in the course of any sport or public performance or in the training for any sport or public performance, applies or exposes an electronic device to an animal. Animal Welfare (Dogs) Regulations 2016 are silent on collars
<b>Victoria</b> <a href="#">Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Regulations 2008</a>	Conditionally allowed	Conditionally allowed	Conditionally allowed	Electronic collars (electric current or shock) Regs 17-21 set out conditions of use of remote training, anti-bark and containment collars on dogs. NB: The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Regulations 2008 will sunset on 15 December 2019.
<b>Western Australia</b> <a href="#">Animal Welfare Act 2002</a> (AWA)  <a href="#">Animal Welfare (General) Regulations 2003</a> (Regs)	Conditionally allowed  (for containment and training through defence, in compliance with Reg.7)	Conditionally allowed  (for training through defence, in compliance with Reg.7)	Conditionally allowed  (for training through defence, in compliance with Reg.7)	<u>AWA</u> : Section 19(2)(b) prohibits the use of a prescribed inhumane device on an animal. S 19(2)(d) and (3)(b)(i) prohibit a prescribed act to, or in relation to, an animal; S 29 provides a defence to use a prescribed inhumane device in a prescribed manner. <u>Regs</u> : Reg.3: Inhumane devices. Includes a device, other than an electric fence, that is designed or modified to deliver an electric shock to an animal. Reg.4: The administration of an electric shock to an animal in a manner that is not set out in Reg.7 is a prescribed act for the purposes of section 19(2)(d) and (3)(b)(i) of the Act. Reg.7: Dogs: Use must be in accordance with the generally accepted method of usage for the type of collar, or type of "invisible fence"

## Appendix 1

### International Regulation

- Countries banning electronic collars on dogs for some or all uses include Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Norway, Slovenia, Switzerland, Sweden and Wales.
- England is proceeding towards a ban on remote controlled hand-held electronic training collar devices following public consultation in 2018.
- New Zealand does not prohibit the use of electronic collars (which includes citronella sprays) under animal welfare legislation. However, the use of collars in general is regulated. A new regulation came into force on 1 October 2018 that requires that any collar or tether does not cause a cut or skin abrasion that bleeds or discharges; causes swelling; or prevents the animal from breathing normally, panting or drinking. The code of welfare for dogs also contains a minimum standard that electronic training devices must not be used in a way that causes unreasonable or unnecessary pain or distress to the dog. Evidence of a failure to meet a minimum standard may be used as evidence to support a prosecution for an offence under the Act. The code also recommends that electronic training devices are used only as a last resort.

### References and further reading

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