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From Prof D.S. Mills

On behalf of the Companion Animal Welfare Council

3/6/13

William AC/ AM

Chair- Petitions committee

National Assembly of Wales



UNIVERSITY OF
LINCOLN

Dear Mr Williams,

Further to your letter of April 8th, please find the response of CAWC below regarding the use of electronic collars linked to invisible boundary fencing, which I have been asked to deliver of their behalf:

The letter of John Griffiths (February 5th 2013) states that *"an electric shock is an electric shock whether caused by a remote or by a an underground circuit"*, and this seems to be used to justify the conclusion that these devices ... *"can give rise to both behaviour and welfare problems"*, implying this was a quote of the conclusion of the CAWC report on 'The Use of Electric Pulse Training Aids (EPTAs) in Companion Animals'.

Firstly, it is our opinion that the term *"shock"* is misleading, implying a degree of intensity which does not necessarily accurately reflect the nature of the stimulus being delivered by these devices. They deliver an aversive stimulus, but do not necessarily induce a state of shock, and for reasons outlined below, there is reason to believe that the electronic collars linked to invisible boundary fencing may be effective without causing significant compromise to the animal's welfare.

It is our opinion, as pointed out by Mrs O'Connor, that the comments above do not represent accurately the conclusions of the report. The full sentence from which this text comes is: *"Finally, it is clear that poor contingency between the application of an electrical stimulus and the behaviour to be modified can give rise to both behaviour and welfare problems"*. The report explicitly addresses the point that this poor contingency does not apply to boundary fence systems, which typically include the additional safeguard of an audible warning beep. Indeed the executive summary goes on to say: *"There is inconsistency in the prevailing moral attitude towards boundary fencing involving the use of electric currents: electric fencing is widely accepted for use with horses and livestock including smaller species, but fencing systems that involve the wearing of a collar, even if they have the additional welfare safeguard of an audible warning of impending stimulation, are often rejected"*.

In case of doubt, important distinctions between hand- held devices and invisible boundary fencing are as follows:

1. The risk of operator inconsistency is removed;
2. The behaviour of the animal (proximity to the boundary) provides a reliable contingency for activation of the warning prior to the delivery of an aversive stimulus, i.e. there is a consistent and highly predictable relationship between proximity to the boundary and the activation of the warning signal;

3. The animal is in control of the response necessary to avoid the delivery of the electrical stimulus (as already noted, shock is too emotive a term). Predictability and control over aversives are both important considerations in animal welfare, since if an animal knows what it must do to avoid an aversive and has the freedom to do this act, it can be expected that the warning should not generate any anxiety. By way of analogy, if you go into your kitchen you do not worry about being burnt when you see the oven is on, because you know what to do to avoid being burnt.

Further, the report notes there is no scientific evidence that these boundary fence systems necessarily cause any welfare problems, nor is there a compelling argument to believe that this should be the case. However, it has been estimated that around 300,000 cats are killed on UK roads each year, which is clearly a welfare problem and these boundary systems appear to have the potential to prevent cats straying off a property, and so manage this threat. Practical alternatives are limited and have their own potential welfare risks, e.g. confining cats indoors.

It is therefore our conclusion that presently, on the balance of probabilities, the element of the Welsh ban which extends to these boundary fence systems is not conducive to the promotion of good welfare, and may in fact be increasing animal suffering. We trust this clarifies the issue for you.

You may find it helpful to know that there is currently research in progress at the University of Lincoln into the welfare impact of electronic boundary fence systems. The project is being undertaken under the direction of myself (Professor Mills), who led the preparation of the original CAWC report.

Yours sincerely,



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