

**Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change  
and Land Reform**

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Convener

Environment, Climate Change and  
Land Reform Committee

Room T.340

Scottish Parliament

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Dear Convener,

As you are aware from my announcement in Parliament on 24 January 2018, I have reconsidered the most appropriate method of addressing the issue of electronic collars for dogs. I committed to issue guidance under section 38 of the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 to make it clear that training that includes unpleasant stimuli or physical punishment may constitute an offence of causing unnecessary suffering to a protected animal.

This guidance has now been developed and is attached for your consideration. It is the product of feedback from a wide range of stakeholders on the original draft published on our website in January this year. The precise wording had been agreed with a number of key stakeholders, including the Kennel Club, Dogs Trust, the British Veterinary Association, the Animal Behaviour and Training Council, the Scottish SPCA and the Edinburgh Dogs and Cat Home.

I would welcome your views on this guidance before it is published on the Scottish Government website. My intention is for the Scottish government to review how this guidance has worked as a practical aid to animal welfare enforcement bodies in 12 months' time.

Yours,

**Roseanna Cunningham**

## **Scottish Government Guidance on Dog Training Aids**

Successful dog training is expected to deliver dogs that consistently demonstrate appropriate social behaviours with both other dogs and people. It should also meet legal requirements and public expectations in terms of the control that an owner has over their dog's behaviour. Ideally training will be conducted with the assistance of a qualified trainer and the most effective method of training dogs is reward-based (positive) training.

Training that includes unpleasant (aversive) stimuli or physical punishment may cause unacceptable pain, suffering and distress. It is important to note that causing unnecessary suffering to a protected animal is an offence under Section 19 of the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006, if the person knew, or ought to have known, that the action would cause unnecessary suffering. This may include unnecessary suffering caused by inappropriate training methods.

Particular training devices that the Scottish Government does not condone are: electronic shock (static pulse) collars, electronic anti-bark collars, electronic containment systems, prong collars, or any other method to inflict physical punishment or negative reinforcement. This includes the use of any device that squirts oils such as citronella or other noxious chemicals that interfere with a dog's acute sense of smell, or emits any other aversive stimulus. These techniques compromise dog welfare, as they may lead to aggressive responses and worsen the problems that they aim to address by masking or aggravating underlying behavioural issues.

This guidance is advisory and may provide an aid to both dog owners and those involved in the enforcement of the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006. Those responsible for enforcement of the 2006 Act may refer to the guidance when issuing advice, warning letters or care notices under the 2006 Act. A Court may, at its discretion, consider the guidance in a prosecution under Section 19 or Section 24 of the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006."