SPEC.
protect e-collars – save lives

Society for the Protection of Electric Collars

Policy brief for legislators and the public

Keep electronic collars legal in England

The evidence for effective training and continued lawful access

The Society for the Protection of Electric Collars opposes a ban and new collar-specific restrictions on sale, possession or responsible use. England should preserve access for individual owners and trainers under its existing animal-welfare law.

Electronic collars can achieve rapid behavioural change, including interruption of pursuit and learned avoidance of animals, cars or other stimuli a dog might otherwise chase. Published research also records successful treatment of serious aggression within a structured programme using the collar. These are substantial benefits in situations where failure can leave animals injured or dead.

The policy question is whether removing this capability would improve welfare overall. That requires attention to the dog, potential victims, available alternatives and the consequences of unsuccessful training. A study favouring another method for a particular obedience task does not establish that every responsible collar application can be replaced.

Dangerous pursuit requires more than a preferred training label

Predatory pursuit can reward the dog directly. Food offered by a handler does not automatically outweigh that reward. Training must change behaviour in the conditions that trigger the danger, including circumstances in which the handler is distant or absent.

This is a practical problem. A National Police Chiefs' Council report covering 1,705 livestock incidents across five forces found that owners were absent in the majority. The Welsh Government also reports that most sheep-worrying incidents occur on land not accessible to the public. Walk-time lead advice cannot, by itself, address the whole problem. Durable learned avoidance deserves consideration alongside secure containment and supervision. [1,2]

Collars can also be used together with rewards. They provide a means of delivering a precisely timed aversive consequence at a distance. Whether that intervention is justified depends on its purpose, effect and proportionality.

A ban would remove demonstrated capability from responsible users. The evidence supports retaining that option and holding people accountable for how they use it.

Evidence of rapid control and lasting avoidance

Direct interruption of predation

Andelt and colleagues tested electronic collars on five captive coyotes that had each killed a lamb during preliminary testing. **During repeated tests over 22 weeks, collar stimulation averted all 13 subsequent attempted attacks. Later attempts became less likely, and the animals increasingly avoided lambs.** This is evidence involving experienced predators and live prey. It demonstrates that strong predatory motivation need not make electrical intervention ineffective. The subjects were coyotes, so the result supports the underlying capability without supplying a domestic-dog success rate. [3]

A controlled comparison of chasing protocols

Johnson and Wynne's 2024 experiment compared an electronic-collar protocol with two food-based protocols for inhibiting pursuit of a moving lure. They found a stark difference in the first post-training test: **all six analysed dogs trained with the electronic collar succeeded (100%), while none of the eleven dogs trained with either food-based protocol succeeded (0%)**. Most collar stimulation occurred in the first training session and fell sharply by the second. [4]

Eight dogs were originally assigned to the collar group, but two were excluded after exceeding the study's stimulation limit. Even if both are counted as failures, six of the eight assigned dogs succeeded, compared with zero of eleven in the food groups. The study was small and compared specific protocols; however, the difference in success was clear. [4]

Learned avoidance of live sheep

Norwegian researchers reassessed 114 hunting dogs approximately a year after their initial tests. Of the 17 dogs that had received e-collar training in the first year, only one attacked sheep at follow-up. Stimulation was given to dogs that approached sheep, rather than assigned randomly. **The result supports retention of learned livestock avoidance well beyond the original training.** [5]

Retention without continuing to wear the collar

Dale and colleagues found that all 65 dogs in a kiwi-avoidance study showed avoidance after training. **All 15 in a subset retested a month later retained avoidance without wearing an e-collar.** The targets were kiwi training materials rather than live birds. The finding directly addresses the objection that useful learning must disappear once the device is removed. [6]

These results concern different animals, tasks and protocols. Together they establish a practical capability that cannot be dismissed as an absence of evidence: e-collar training can interrupt pursuit and establish learned avoidance. An honest policy assessment must account for those benefits.

Effective treatment and protective use

Tortora demonstrated successful treatment of aggression

Tortora's 1983 safety-training programme produced elimination of the specified avoidance-motivated aggression in all 36 dogs tested. The programme taught alternative responses and used electrical stimulation, warning and safety signals, and transfer of training to owners. It included a phase in which dogs met the performance criteria without wearing the collar. Follow-up covered all 36 dogs through one year, with smaller groups assessed later. [7]

A separate experiment randomly allocated 18 dogs to three groups. The complete programme outperformed play training alone and play combined with direct punishment; the comparison groups subsequently improved when given the complete programme. The distinction matters: the positive finding concerns a structured learning programme, not indiscriminate punishment. [7]

A 2022 systematic review of dog-bite prevention strategies rated Tortora's study high quality and recognised its marked reduction in aggression. Historical evidence does not validate every current protocol, but it refutes a categorical assertion that training incorporating electrical stimulation can only worsen aggression or provide no substantial benefit. [8]

In a crossover study of 42 police dogs, Salgirli and colleagues recorded the defined learning response in 39 dogs under the e-collar condition. The task was maintaining heel despite a provoking decoy, demonstrating control under strong distraction. [9]

A conservation agency recognises protective value

New Zealand's Department of Conservation currently describes electronic-collar training as a means of reducing the chance that dogs injure or kill kiwi. Its guidance explains that most dogs quickly learn to avoid the training targets. It also makes clear that training is not a guarantee and retains lead and access precautions. This is a public conservation agency recognising a protective use for the tool. [10]

The published record includes a programme evaluation covering 1,647 training sessions involving 1,156 dogs. It gives the conservation application a substantial operational history, beyond a single small experiment. Its outcomes concern responses to training stimuli, rather than a measured reduction in wild-bird deaths. [11]

The RSPCA's assertion that only people profiting from collars benefit ignores the practical value these findings describe. Behavioural improvement and conservation use deserve evaluation regardless of who sells the equipment. [12]

Owners commonly combine collars with rewards

ARDO reports more than 2,500 owner-user survey responses collected over five years. Its published summary says 84 per cent also used reward-based training and only 3 per cent used electronic aids as their first approach. This voluntary, self-reported survey cannot establish population success rates. It does show why portraying every user as someone unwilling to reward a dog or try another approach is unjustified. [13]

Efficiency matters when the unresolved behaviour creates danger. Rapid useful learning can reduce the period in which further incidents remain possible. Continued access allows an owner to choose a programme suited to the dog, rather than having that option removed by law.

The case for prohibition overreaches the evidence

Close range obedience does not establish universal replacement

China and colleagues' 2020 study measured responses to commands during training. A successful response to "come" meant starting to move towards the handler within ten seconds. It did not require a completed recall away from an unrestricted livestock chase. Dogs spent approximately 70 per cent of training time within one metre of the trainer. [14]

The study reanalysed recordings from the same 63-dog programme reported by Cooper in 2014. These publications are not independent trials. Trainer practices, rewards, location and season were not fully separated from treatment. The comparison cannot isolate electricity from every other difference between the programmes. Its findings do not demonstrate an equally reliable substitute for every dangerous pursuit case. [14,15]

There was also no common pretreatment recall test establishing how much each dog subsequently learned. Exact electrical activations were not reliably logged. Those gaps limit claims about learning gains and the effects of particular stimulation patterns. [14,15]

The methodological criticisms are documented

Professor Douglas Elliffe's November 2020 review concluded: "A policy decision that relies heavily on China et al. would not be a decision based on evidence." He challenged the comparability of the groups and the relevance of the measured task. This was an unpublished expert review, supplied pro bono, rather than a new experiment. [16]

Sargisson and McLean also published a peer-reviewed commentary challenging the training comparison and its relevance to serious predation. The authors responded. The strongest policy criticism does not depend on declaring every statistical calculation invalid: a result about short-range command responses cannot establish universal replacement in dangerous, uncontrolled pursuit. [17,18]

Cooper's own study recorded improvement reported by 19 of 21 collar-group owners one week after training, matching 19 of 21 in the reward-focused group. Its results do not support describing collar-inclusive training as ineffective. [15]

Association is not proof of failure or collar causation

Owner surveys cannot determine what the same dogs would have achieved under another method. Dogs receiving aversive interventions may have started with more severe problems or previous training failures. Continuing difficulty after treatment does not establish that the treatment accomplished nothing. [19]

The American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior (AVSAB) acknowledges uncertainty about whether problem behaviour precedes or follows aversive training, but then treats the association as demonstrating ineffectiveness. That inference does not follow: a seriously affected dog can improve substantially and still have more residual problems than a mildly affected dog. [20]

Studies grouping several aversive methods together also cannot, by that grouping alone, identify the effect of a particular electronic-collar protocol. Policy needs evidence about the actual intervention and use being prohibited.

Physical safety and ethics require accurate comparisons

Voltage headlines omit the information needed to assess injury

Dogs Trust cites a maximum of 6,000 volts and activation lasting up to eleven seconds. Those numbers omit current, pulse duration, repetition, transferred energy and contact conditions. A train of brief pulses is not equivalent to uninterrupted electrical exposure over the same total time. [21,22]

Lines and colleagues measured substantial differences between devices and electrical loads. Peak voltage alone cannot establish thermal damage or the experience of an individual dog. Comparisons with household mains electricity based only on voltage are technically inadequate. [22]

Remote delivery can avoid mechanical force

Electrical delivery does not require a lead jerk, tightening slip collar or force turning the head through a head halter. Where it replaces those actions, it avoids their mechanical loads.

This is a concrete advantage over a forceful mechanical application of aversive stimuli. It does not establish a universal injury-rate ranking between devices, and receiver fit and wear still matter. The appropriate comparison is the actual alternative programme, including its physical effects and success in controlling the problem.

> SPEC supports proportionate use that achieves useful control while preventing greater harm. The dog's welfare, the welfare of potential victims and the consequences of unresolved behaviour all count. Responsible practice includes appropriate equipment, clear timing, teaching and rewarding alternatives, and suitable physical safeguards.
>
> **The presence of an unpleasant consequence does not, by itself, settle the ethical question. Preventing a severe injury or a fatal attack can justify a proportionate intervention.**

Preserve lawful civilian access

Existing law already addresses mistreatment

England retains lawful civilian access subject to existing welfare law. In May 2026, the government again described its policy as consultation on whether to ban use. SPEC asks it to preserve existing access. [25]

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 already prohibits unnecessary suffering and imposes welfare duties. Relevant considerations include avoidability, legitimate protective purposes, proportionality and competent, humane conduct. Protecting a person, property or another animal is expressly recognised; it is one factor in the assessment, not permission for abuse. [26]

A Scottish review provides a defined enforcement record: nine responding bodies reported no prosecutions or convictions concerning training aids between January 2016 and October 2019. These are limited records, not a UK-wide guarantee of safety. They are the kind of identifiable evidence that should replace unsupported claims about the prevalence of criminal misuse. [27]

Government has recognised the difference between alternatives and a ban

Defra previously distinguished finding no added efficacy in a comparison from establishing grounds to restrict access. Its historical correspondence is reproduced in a High Court judgment. The distinction remains relevant to evaluating a ban. [28]

England's unmade 2023 proposal included an armed-forces exception for necessary defence purposes. The Netherlands' civilian prohibition retains conditional exceptions for specified police and military functions. These exceptions recognise that practical capability and purpose matter. Civilian needs to prevent serious harm also deserve an assessment of what removing access would cost. [29,30]

Prohibition needs a demonstrated welfare benefit

Scotland's 2025 statutory review reported insufficient conclusive evidence that proper use of a modern static-pulse collar is inherently harmful or more harmful than unresolved problem behaviour after reward-based training has failed. It also identified uncertainty about harmful unintended consequences of prohibition. That is an official acknowledgement that the welfare comparison remains unresolved. [31]

Welsh livestock-loss estimates fluctuated long after the 2010 ban: £439,000 in 2022, £883,000 in 2023, £314,000 in 2024 and £385,000 in 2025. These are financial losses, not attack counts. They document a continuing problem; they do not establish that the ban caused either the rises or falls. [32]

A ban's consequences depend on the alternatives owners can actually obtain and sustain. Permanent physical management is a different outcome from learned avoidance. A promise that another method will always succeed is not evidence that it will do so in the affected dogs.

Our request to government

Keep electronic collars legal for individual owners and trainers. Do not introduce a ban, sale restrictions, compulsory licensing or professional-only access. Retain existing animal-welfare protections and judge misuse by the conduct and harm involved.

The published record documents interrupted predation, rapid learning, retained avoidance and treatment of serious aggression. Those benefits matter to responsible owners and to the animals/property they protect. England should preserve the option to achieve them.

Sources and evidence notes

Numbered references link the claims in this brief to their sources. Research findings concern the conditions tested; the request to retain lawful access is SPEC's policy position.

1. National Police Chiefs' Council (2018). New police report highlights the barriers to tackling attacks on livestock, 21 February. Police report release

Original police release: 1,705 incidents across five forces, September 2013-August 2017. Owners absent in the majority; absence is not itself a measured escape rate.

2. Welsh Government (2023). Keeping dogs under control will protect lambs and other livestock, 18 February. Government statement

Reports that most sheep-worrying/attack incidents occur on land inaccessible to the public. Establishes a practical limitation of walk-time advice, not a causal effect of the ban.

3. Andelt WF, Phillips RL, Gruver KS, Guthrie JW (1999). Coyote predation on domestic sheep deterred with electronic dog-training collar. Wildlife Society Bulletin 27:12-18. USDA paper archive

Five previously lamb-killing captive coyotes; 13 attack episodes interrupted. No untreated control. Attack episodes are not numbers of stimulations.

4. Johnson, A.C., & Wynne, C.D.L. (2024). Comparison of the efficacy and welfare of different training methods in stopping chasing behavior in dogs. Animals, 14(18), 2632. Research paper

Methods and Results, especially Figure 3. Six analysed collar dogs; two further allocated dogs excluded. Tests used an artificial lure and particular training protocols.

5. Christiansen, F.O., Bakken, M., & Braastad, B.O. (2001). Behavioural changes and aversive conditioning in hunting dogs by the second-year confrontation with domestic sheep. Applied Animal Behaviour Science, 72, 131-143. Research paper

Results and Table 2. Selected hunting dogs; one previously shocked dog attacked at follow-up. The 114-dog follow-up cohort included untreated dogs.

6. Dale, A.R., Statham, S., Podlesnik, C.A., & Elliffe, D. (2013). The acquisition and maintenance of dogs' aversion responses to kiwi (Apteryx spp.) training stimuli across time and locations. Applied Animal Behaviour Science, 146, 107-111. Research paper

Results and Table 1. All sixty-five dogs showed avoidance after training; a subset of fifteen retained it at one month without a collar. Targets were kiwi training stimuli, not live birds.

7. Tortora DF (1983). Safety training: The elimination of avoidance-motivated aggression in dogs. Journal of Experimental Psychology General 112:176-214. Research paper

Experiments 2-3; pp.188-190 and 198-200. Multicomponent programme; selected diagnosis. Follow-up primarily owner-reported: 36 dogs through one year, 18 at two, eight at three.

Sources and evidence notes

CONTINUED / REFERENCES 8-15

8. Duncan-Sutherland N, Lissaman ACL, Shepherd M, Kool B (2022). Systematic review of dog bite prevention strategies. Injury Prevention 28:288-297. Systematic review

Dog training section rates Tortora high quality using CASP appraisal. This is an assessment of that study, not a general endorsement of collars.

9. Salgirli Y, Schalke E, Boehm I, Hackbarth H (2012). Comparison of learning effects and stress between 3 different training methods (electronic training collar, pinch collar and quitting signal) in Belgian Malinois Police Dogs. Revue de Médecine Vétérinaire 163:530-535. Research paper

Crossover with 42 dogs; 39 met the learning outcome with the electronic condition. Same-day tests; mostly experienced dogs. Not a comprehensive reward-training comparison.

10. New Zealand Department of Conservation. Kiwi avoidance training for dogs. Accessed 16 October 2026. Conservation guidance

Official guidance describes e-collar training and quick avoidance learning. It also retains lead/access precautions and says training is not a guarantee.

11. Dale AR, Podlesnik CA, Elliffe D (2017). Evaluation of an aversion-based program designed to reduce predation of native birds by dogs: An analysis of training records for 1156 dogs. Applied Animal Behaviour Science 191:59-66. Research paper

Retrospective programme records: 1,647 sessions. Avoidance or loss of interest in training stimuli; later assessments used returning subsets. No measured population effect on kiwi deaths.

12. RSPCA. Dog training devices: prong, pinch or shock collars. Accessed 16 October 2026. Organisation webpage

Shock-collar discussion and claim about beneficiaries. Cited as the source of the public assertion being challenged.

13. Association of Responsible Dog Owners. E-Collar Survey Results. Accessed 16 October 2026. Survey and methodology

Published owner-user summary: over 2,500 responses, 84% also using rewards, 3% first approach. Voluntary self-report; no independent outcome verification.

14. China L, Mills DS, Cooper JJ (2020). Efficacy of Dog Training With and Without Remote Electronic Collars vs. a Focus on Positive Reinforcement. Frontiers in Veterinary Science 7:508. Research paper

Methods and Results. Initiating a come response within ten seconds was the criterion; approximately 70% of training time was within one metre. Same programme as Cooper 2014.

15. Cooper JJ, Cracknell N, Hardiman J, Wright H, Mills DS (2014). The Welfare Consequences and Efficacy of Training Pet Dogs with Remote Electronic Training Collars in Comparison to Reward Based Training. PLoS ONE 9:e102722. Research paper

Methods and owner outcomes. Same 63-dog programme as China 2020. At one week, 19/21 collar owners and 19/21 reward-group owners reported improvement.

Sources and evidence notes

CONTINUED / REFERENCES 16-23

16. Elliffe D (2020). Commentary on the Lincoln electronic-collar research, 26 November. Unpublished expert review. Original review

Nine-page original; quotation p.9. Supplied pro bono to Abzed. His policy-evidence criticism is not an institutional position or a rejection of every ethical argument.

17. Sargisson RJ, McLean IG (2021). Commentary: Efficacy of Dog Training With and Without Remote Electronic Collars vs. a Focus on Positive Reinforcement. Frontiers in Veterinary Science 8:629746. Peer-reviewed commentary

Published critique of task relevance, treatment differences and interpretation. Read alongside the authors' response; not a retraction.

18. Cooper JJ, Mills DS, China L (2021). Response: Commentary: Remote Electronic Training Aids; Efficacy at Deterring Predatory Behavior in Dogs and Implications for Training and Policy. Frontiers in Veterinary Science 8:675005. Published response

The response addresses repeated measurements and other statistical allegations. The brief relies on design and outcome limitations that remain.

19. Blackwell EJ, Bolster C, Richards G, Loftus BA, Casey RA (2012). The use of electronic collars for training domestic dogs: estimated prevalence, reasons and risk factors for use, and owner perceived success as compared to other training methods. BMC Veterinary Research 8:93. Research paper

Owner questionnaire and perceived success. Observational associations do not identify the counterfactual outcome for the same dogs under other methods.

20. American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior (2021). Humane Dog Training position statement. Position statement

Page 2, Long-Term Effects. The brief challenges the inference from association to ineffectiveness; this is an organisational statement, not a new experiment.

21. Dogs Trust. Shock collars. Accessed 16 October 2026. Organisation webpage

What is the issue. Source of the voltage and duration figures. Their omission of waveform and delivered energy is the technical point addressed.

22. Lines JA, van Driel K, Cooper JJ (2013). The characteristics of electronic training collars for dogs. Veterinary Record 172:288. Research paper

Electrical characteristics and Discussion. Device outputs and loads varied; the work was not a thermal-injury trial or a ranking of overall device safety.

23. Schalke, E., Stichnoth, J., Ott, S., & Jones-Baade, R. (2007). Clinical signs caused by the use of electric training collars on dogs in everyday life situations. Applied Animal Behaviour Science, 105, 369-380. Research paper

Methods and Results. Stimulation predictability and its relationship to behaviour differed between groups. The study does not test every collar protocol.

Sources and evidence notes

CONTINUED / REFERENCES 24-32

24. Cooper J, Cracknell N, Hardiman J, Mills D (2013). DEFRA AW1402a final report: field study of dogs in training. Government research report

Three-month follow-up, pp.12-14. Same cohort as Cooper 2014. Behavioural differences did not survive multiplicity adjustment; cognitive-bias measures did not differ. Not proof of harmlessness.

25. Defra (2026). Responsible Dog Ownership Taskforce report, 24 September; written answer 1201, 27 May. Government report | Ministerial answer | 2023 draft procedure

Official policy remains consultation on whether to ban use. The Commons approval motion for the 2023 draft lapsed. Status checked 16 October 2026.

26. Animal Welfare Act 2006, sections 4 and 9. Section 4 | Section 9

Section 4(3)(a)-(e) identifies relevant considerations for unnecessary suffering. Protective purpose is one factor, not an automatic defence. Section 9 sets welfare duties.

27. Scottish Government (2021). Dog training aids: review of guidance, section 3.2.1. Official enforcement review

Nine of 33 enforcement bodies responded; January 2016-October 2019. No prosecutions or convictions reported, but investigations/verbal warnings occurred. Not UK-wide twenty-year data.

28. Electronic Collar Manufacturers Association and Petsafe Ltd v Secretary of State [2019] EWHC 2813 (Admin), paragraphs 10 and 34-36. Approved judgment

Judgment reproduces earlier Defra correspondence distinguishing comparative efficacy from grounds to restrict. The court upheld the later policy change; it did not certify safety.

29. Draft Animal Welfare (Electronic Collars) (England) Regulations 2023, regulations 2(3) and 2(6). Official draft

Unmade proposal, printed page 2. Defined armed-forces exception for necessary defence purposes; no general civilian-police exception.

30. Netherlands (2021). Staatsblad 2021, 361, Article I, inserting Besluit houders van dieren article 1.3(h)(2°). Official legislation

Effective 1 January 2022. Specified state uses remain conditional on a justified objective that cannot be achieved another way; not a general exemption for civilian trainers.

31. Scottish Government (2025). Animals and Wildlife (Penalties, Protections and Powers) (Scotland) Act 2020: review of provisions and requirements, section 3.2.6. Official review

Published 4 April 2025. Policy assessment of evidence and consequences, not a safety experiment. The review also announced a further consultation on prohibition.

32. NFU Cymru (2024, 2026) and House of Commons (21 May 2025). Welsh livestock-worrying loss estimates. 2022-2023 costs | 2024 costs | 2025 costs | Welsh 2010 regulations

NFU Mutual estimates reported by these sources. The 2022-2023 doubling concerns cost, not attack numbers; subsequent estimates fell then rose. No causal ban comparison.