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Your ref: ML.C0102.CM.27.10.14
Our ref: MC361734/SC

5 November 2014

From Lord de Mauley

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Natural Environment and Science

Dear Ms Lucas,

Thank you for your letter of 27 October to George Eustice on behalf of a number of your constituents about the use of pinch collars and electronic training devices to train dogs. I am replying as the Minister responsible for the welfare of companion animals.

I understand your constituents' concern about the sale of pinch collars for dogs, as people are concerned about the use of devices which may impact on a dog's natural behaviour and which may adversely affect the welfare of the animal. As you and your constituents may already know, there are requirements laid down in the Animal Welfare Act 2006 to protect the welfare of dogs and other animals. The Act makes it an offence to cause an animal unnecessary suffering. If anyone believes (or has evidence) that the use of prong collars or other devices is causing a dog unnecessary suffering, then a prosecution could be taken under the Act. If found guilty of such an offence, those responsible for the dog can be imprisoned, fined or both.

I also understand the strength of feeling amongst some people about the use of electronic training devices, but before introducing a blanket ban on their use the Government would need to be satisfied that such a ban was in the public interest and could be supported from an animal welfare point of view. The findings of the research commissioned by Defra into the use of electronic training aids for dogs provides evidence that electronic training aids can have a negative impact on the welfare of *some* but not all dogs. In conclusion, the evidence from the studies was not strong enough to support a ban of the devices under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. Furthermore, whether electronic training aids may be no more effective than other training methods is not a reason to introduce a ban or impose restrictions. What we do say is that people should only consider using these devices when other methods of training have failed, and on the basis of professional advice, for example from their vet.

I acknowledge that some owners do not read the instructions and that some electronic training aids can be obtained over the internet from overseas. That is why it is important to get the message out to unwary dog owners who are considering purchasing one of these devices to make sure that they obtain one from a reputable manufacturer, rather than a cheaper alternative which may not be safe or operate properly.

In recognition of people's concerns about the devices, we have asked the industry to work up standards for their design and manufacture in order to reduce the likelihood that they could cause unnecessary suffering due to manufacture or misuse. We are also working with the Electronic Collar Manufacturers Association which is drawing up guidance for dog owners and trainers to advise how to use e-collars properly.

We encourage owners of dogs with problem behaviour to seek the advice of properly qualified professionals who are trained (and insured) to carry out these activities and direct them in the most suitable method for their particular case.

Yours sincerely
Rupert de Manley