Companion Animal Welfare Council Report on The Use of Electric Pulse Training Aids (EPTAs) in Companion Animals

The Companion Animal Welfare Council has today published a report reviewing the use of electric pulse training aids, or “shock collars” as they are often called. The 92 page report follows an extensive review of the current scientific literature relevant to the subject and open call for evidence from the public. Recognising the moral complexity of the problem, it undertakes a dispassionate but critical review of the arguments commonly used by both proponents and opponents to the use of these devices. This highlights the need to avoid simple moral generalisations about the use of these devices in animals. The report notes that there are potentially important welfare distinctions to be made between the different ways the devices may be used, i.e. as a disrupter, negative reinforcer or punisher.

The report notes that it is clear that these devices can be used to inflict suffering, but there is currently insufficient evidence to indicate whether significant suffering is routinely the product of their use.

The report also highlights the potentially meaningful distinctions, from a welfare perspective, to be made between devices which are activated by the animal’s behaviour and those which depend on some other party for the discharge of the stimulus (e.g. hand held devices). It notes there is no current research published on the welfare implications of the former in companion animals but important additional research soon to be published concerning the latter which may help to resolve the issue of their typical effect on dogs.

Finally the report notes that if Government are to support the legality of EPTAs there is a need for key product characteristics to be made freely available, including the reliability of the product, its electrical discharge features and its current and voltage output over a range of resistances. It is further recommended that if Government support the legality of these devices that additional safeguards against their misuse should be included, such as a voltage limitation feature within the device and a registration or licensing of practitioners together with a procedure for documenting each use of an EPTA.

The Report will be of interest to all involved in the care and training of companion animals including veterinarians, trainers, behaviour counsellors and others interested in companion animal welfare.

The Report is available at the CAWC website www.cawc.org.uk.