

Training and Behaviour Modification

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Policy

The New Zealand Companion Animal Council supports and promotes the use of humane training methods that are based on an understanding of the way animals learn. The NZCAC encourages the use of reward-based training methods that do not inflict pain, fear, or unnecessary stress on the animal.

Position Statement

In order to help protect the welfare of animals undergoing training or behaviour modification the NZCAC advocates for:

- The use of humane, reward-based training methods that do not inflict pain, fear, or unnecessary stress on the animal.
- Regulation of the animal behaviour and training industry within New Zealand
- The introduction of legislation prohibiting the use and sale of electronic training collars.

The NZCAC opposes the use of aversive training techniques and/or equipment that causes physical pain, discomfort and/or undue anxiety. This includes all electronic training devices that deliver electric shocks, such as electronic collars and pet containment systems, as well as any collar or device that delivers aversive stimuli including sound or scent; e.g. choke chains, pinch/prong collars, citronella collars and sprays, and ultrasonic devices. Such training methods have been shown to inflict pain, fear and unnecessary stress and have the potential to be misused and cause serious animal welfare issues.

This is in line with the position of the [New Zealand Veterinary Association](#) and other international organisations such as the [British Small Animal Veterinary Association \(BSAVA\)](#), [American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals \(ASPCA\)](#), and the [Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals \(RSPCA\)](#).

Background Information

Companion animals play an important role in the lives of New Zealanders with 64% of New Zealand households being home to at least one companion animal [1]. Ensuring companion animals, particularly dogs, are well socialised and trained is a vital part of Responsible Companion Animal Guardianship, yet the estimated annual expenditure on dog training per New Zealand household in 2015 was \$25 [1], a relatively low figure when considering the known impact that behaviour problems have on the dog-owner relationship [2] and the link between behaviour problems and relinquishment to animal shelters [3].

How Animals Learn

Learning is an adaptive process that results from a changing environment. Behaviour (a response to environmental changes) is a combination of genetics, environmental factors and previous learning or experiences. The consequences of a behaviour (response) will influence the likelihood of that behaviour being repeated in the future [4]. Most training methods utilised with companion animals are based on operant conditioning principles whereby reinforcements or punishments are used to teach the animal

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consequences for certain behaviours [5]. Reinforcement increases the likelihood of a behaviour reoccurring whilst punishment decreases the likelihood of the behaviour being repeated. Consequences can be positive, i.e. a reward or aversive (punishment) stimuli is given, or negative i.e. a reward or aversive (punishment) stimuli is withdrawn. Companion animal training methods tend to be grouped into one of two categories; reward-based methods (positive reinforcement) and aversive (punishment) based methods (negative reinforcement and positive or negative punishment) [6].

Reward-Based Methods

Reward-based training is a highly effective training method that is suggested to improve the animal's ability to learn [7] and strengthen the human-animal bond [8]. Reward-based methods are applicable to a wide range of companion animals including cats [8] and dogs [5, 9]. These methods involve presenting an animal with a reward (e.g. food, praise, petting) in response to a desired behaviour (positive reinforcement) to increase the likelihood that the behaviour will be repeated [10].

Dogs trained using positive reinforcement-based methods show increased attentiveness toward their handler, fostering positive interactions between dogs and people [11, 12]. Reward-based training has been demonstrated to be effective using short training sessions and to be transferable to novel people and situations [13]. Dogs trained using reward-based methods are more obedient and exhibit reduced incidences of undesirable and stress related behaviours than those trained using aversive based techniques [5, 9].

In addition, positive reinforcement has also been shown to be an effective treatment for common behaviour problems reported by dog owners, such as jumping, excessive barking, and crowding at the door when a visitor arrives [14] and should be considered as an alternative to other commonly used aversive techniques such as raising a knee to the dogs' chest, check chain/leash correction, neck jab, shock collars, or spraying water at the dog [15]. Positive reinforcement training is also an effective tool to teach novel behaviour and modify existing behaviour problems in cats [8].

The use of reward-based training strengthens the human-animal bond by fostering mutual trust, providing affection and encouraging cooperation which in turn increases the animal's enjoyment of social interactions with humans.

The NZCAC advocates for the use of reward-based training methods that hold the long-term welfare of the animal(s) at the forefront, whilst applying scientifically-based research and knowledge consistent with the principles of kindness and fairness and promote the human-animal bond.

Aversive Based Methods

Aversive based training methods typically involve the use of positive punishment and negative reinforcement both of which are associated with negative impacts on animal health and behaviour [16, 17]. Scientific research evidences that aversive based training is linked to increased anxiety, fear [18, 19] and stress related behaviours [5], increased incidences of aggression and higher instances of behaviour problems [9, 15, 19] including separation anxiety [10].

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It has been determined that guardians of dogs with a history of aggressive behaviour are more likely to sustain injuries when using aversive methods or equipment [15]. In addition, dogs previously trained with punishment (aversive) based techniques are significantly less interactive with a novel person and show less interaction with their guardian during play, suggesting a negative impact on the guardian-dog relationship [7]. Forceful handling such as physical punishment, leash yanking, or making a dog submit by rolling it on its back is psychologically damaging for the dog and has potentially dangerous consequences for handlers [15].

The use and impact of aversive training techniques and equipment applies equally to cats and other companion animal species with aversive training aids such as electric shock collars, citronella collars, electric door mats, electric containment systems (readily promoted for use on cats) and water spray bottles. The frequent recommendation and use of water spray bottles to deter cats from engaging in any number of unwanted behaviours is of concern. Water spray bottles are a form of punishment that can result in frustration (from restriction of the ability to perform a necessary behaviour (e.g. scratching), fear and anxiety (of the person holding the bottle), the delayed performance of necessary behaviours (e.g. the cat scratches the couch when the guardians are not home), deterioration in the human-animal bond and an increase in behaviour problems [20].

The NZCAC opposes the use of all aversive training techniques and equipment that inflict pain, fear, or unnecessary stress on the animal.

Electronic Training Devices

Electronic training devices are commonly categorised according to the use as a.) training devices (Handler-operated devices activated remotely by a trainer); b.) containment systems (delineate the boundaries of an area - activated when the animal reaches the prescribed boundary) and anti-barking devices (activated automatically by vibrations produced from vocalisations by the wearer). [21]. Electronic training devices can be utilised on any companion animal species, but they are primarily utilised on dogs with some containment systems specifically marketed for cats.

a. Electronic Shock Collars

Electronic shock collars consist of a collar including a battery and electrodes. The duration and intensity of the shock is often modifiable to a greater or lesser extent depending on the manufacturer/model of the collar [22]. A large body of scientific evidence supports the detrimental impact electronic shock collars have on the health, behaviour and welfare of companion animals. Their use results in pain, distress, stress, fear, anxiety, aggression and deterioration of the owner-dog relationship [6, 21, 23]. Additionally, electric shock devices pose a significant risk to the welfare of animals when used incorrectly and by inexperienced people and when used in the treatment of behaviour problems is there a risk of exacerbation of the problem or the emergence of additional problems [23]. Several recent detailed reviews of the scientific literature on the efficacy, risk and welfare implications of the use of electronic collars conclude that the scientific evidence does not justify the use of these collars [6, 21, 23].

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b. Electronic Pet Containment Systems

Electronic pet containment systems are an alternative to traditional fencing primarily used to contain companion animals such as cats and dogs. These systems use a wire to determine the boundary and a receiver attached to the animal (collar) which emits a “correction” (shock) when the animal approaches or passes the boundary line [24].

The NZCAC opposes the use of electronic pet containment systems that deliver an electric shock or other aversive stimuli due to the infliction of pain and undue stress [22], particularly where there are clear alternatives such as a physical boundary fence [6]. The use of electronic pet containment systems may also be associated with eliciting aggression in dogs, a direct result of an animal’s tendency to react defensively in response to pain [25]. One study has described five cases of severe attacks on humans by dogs who were being trained or maintained with electronic pet containment systems. In all five cases the containment systems were active, and the attacks occurred next to the boundary of the containment system. Furthermore, in nearly all cases the dogs received a shock from the electric collar [25].

In addition to their use on dogs, electronic pet containment systems are available and marketed for use on cats. It has been suggested that long term exposure to electronic containment systems does not adversely affect the behaviour and welfare of cats [26]. However, this research is severely limited as it only examined the effects of the containment system after a period of 12 months when the cat is likely to have become conditioned to the correction and therefore does not provide any evidence that the cats did not experience significant pain and distress during the first 12 months.

[The NZCAC opposes the use of electronic training collars and all other devices delivering an electronic shock as a means of training, modifying behaviour and/or containing an animal due to the significant risk to the animal’s welfare.](#)

Socialisation and Training

Providing companion animals with appropriate training and socialisation improves the human-animal relationship [27] and minimises the risk that an animal’s behaviour will negatively impact on people and other animals. Appropriate early socialisation (within the first 4 months of life) provides companion animals with the opportunity to learn to accept close proximity of members of its own species as well as that of other species, consequently increasing the likelihood that companion animals are able to live harmoniously with their guardians, other humans and other companion animals [28]. Providing socialisation and training is an important step in preventing the development of behaviour problems. Research has demonstrated that dogs isolated during the socialisation period are more likely to be hyperactive, aggressive, difficult to train, antisocial and fearful, whilst on the other hand, dogs who attend training classes are significantly less likely to demonstrate behaviour problems and are more likely to obey guardian commands [8, 24, 27]. Early handling in a gentle, non-threatening manner is just as important for normal development in cats.

Early Socialisation

Puppy and Kitten socialisation classes (often called Preschool or Kindy) are frequently available and combine socialisation with guardian education. In addition to providing age-appropriate environmental

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and social interactions these classes often combine general information on normal puppy or kitten behaviour and development and how behaviours commonly viewed as problematic can be prevented or managed; such as chewing, mouthing, biting and eliminating in appropriate places [29]. Facilitators of socialisation classes should utilise the opportunity to introduce guardians to humane, reward-based training and socialisation methods that promote good welfare and aid the reduction in the number of animals surrendered to shelters for behaviour deemed inappropriate or resulting from a lack of socialisation.

The NZCAC advocates for early socialisation of all companion animals.

On-going Training and Behaviour Modification

The NZCAC encourages companion animal guardians to engage in on-going training with their animals. On-going training utilising reward-based methods provides mental stimulation (enrichment), exercise and promotes the human-animal bond. On-going training also supports animals to adapt to changes in their environment and address problem behaviours that may arise.

When seeking the professional support of a trainer or animal behaviour expert the NZCAC suggests companion animal guardians ask their veterinarian for recommendations or seek out a professional who has been certified by an expert organisation such as the following:

- A. The Association of Pet Dog Trainers New Zealand has a [Trainer Endorsement Programme](#) that recognises and endorses members of the organisation who have a high calibre level of knowledge, experience and academic qualifications in line with the association's code of ethics which promotes dog friendly training techniques.
- B. Dogs New Zealand has over 55 affiliated Obedience Clubs across New Zealand and operates the [Black Hawk Canine Good Citizen Certification Programme](#), the purpose of which is to ensure that dogs are trained to act with good manners in the home, in public and in the presence of other dogs.
- C. The [Australian and New Zealand College of Veterinary Scientists \(ANZCVS\) Veterinary Behaviour](#) chapter aims to foster the interest of veterinarians in the understanding of animal behaviour and provides recognition to those who have pursued further study in the field of animal behaviour. Membership to the ANZCVS Veterinary Chapter signifies that a veterinarian has expertise and competence in the field of animal behaviour.
- D. The [Association of Animal Behavior Professionals \(AABP\)](#) and the [International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants \(IAABC\)](#) are both international organisations that offer membership to individuals working in New Zealand.

Companion animal guardians should carefully consider the experience, qualifications, and chosen training methods (including any tools or equipment) prior to engaging the services of any trainer or behaviourist and satisfy themselves that any training technique utilised holds the long-term welfare of their animal at the forefront and is consistent with the principles of kindness and fairness and promotion of the guardian-animal bond. The NZCAC also advises guardians to have their companion animal checked by a veterinarian to rule out the possibility of any underlying medical problems that may be contributing to the undesirable behaviour.

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The animal behaviour and training industry within New Zealand is currently unregulated with no overarching accreditation scheme in place to certify professionals working in this field. Consequently, companion animals can be at risk of physical and/or psychological harm if incorrect or aversive tools or techniques are used.

The NZCAC believes there is a need for the development of national accreditation and a regulatory body for the accreditation of animal trainers, animal behaviourists, veterinary behaviourists and educators to minimise the risk of physical and psychological harm to animals undergoing training and behaviour modification and to protect the physical safety of both animals and the humans they interact with.

The NZCAC advocates for regulation of the animal behaviour and training industry within New Zealand.

New Zealand Legislation

The [Animal Welfare Act 1999](#) and the [Dog Control Act 1996](#) are national legislation acts that relate to companion animals in New Zealand. The Animal Welfare Act 1999 is supported by [Codes of Welfare](#) which provide the minimum standards for animal care and management. Companion animal guardians should respect and adhere to legislation that pertains to their companion animal.

While the Animal Welfare Act 1999 (the Act) does not explicitly identify aversive training methods and aids as an offence, the blatant and/or deliberate use or misuse of such methods or aids in a manner which causes an animal to suffer unreasonable or unnecessary pain or distress would constitute a breach of the Act. The [Animal Welfare \(Dogs\) Code of Welfare 2010](#) and [Animal Welfare \(Companion Cats\) Code of Welfare 2007](#) provide specific minimum standards and recommendations for best practice which may be used to support a breach of the Act. Relevant minimum standards are identified below.

Animal Welfare (Dogs) Code of Welfare 2010

Minimum Standard No. 4 – Containment and Tethering

- (a) Dogs must not be contained or tethered in a way that causes them injury or distress.
- (b) Collars must fit comfortably without damaging the skin or restricting breathing.

Minimum Standard No. 18 – Training

Training techniques must be appropriate for the individual dog.

Minimum Standard No. 19 – Aids for Behavioural Modification

- (a) Training aids, including electronic training devices, must not be used in a way that causes unreasonable or unnecessary pain or distress to the dog.
- (b) Pinch or prong collars must not be used.
- (c) Muzzles must fit comfortably without chafing the skin or impeding breathing and must allow the dog to open its mouth sufficiently to enable panting or drinking.

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Animal Welfare (Care and Procedures) Regulations 2018

In addition to the minimum standards highlighted above, the Ministry for Primary Industries has issued an animal welfare regulation in relation to the muzzling of dogs which will come into force on 1st October 2018:

12 Muzzles on dogs

(1) The owner of, and every person in charge of, a dog that is muzzled must ensure that the muzzle does not—

- (a) cause a cut that bleeds or discharges; or
- (b) cause a skin abrasion that bleeds or discharges; or
- (c) cause a swelling; or
- (d) prevent the dog from breathing normally, panting, drinking, or vomiting.

(2) However, a muzzle that restricts panting, drinking, or vomiting may be used if—

- (a) the muzzle is used under constant supervision to prevent injury to any human or animal during veterinary treatment or handling; or
- (b) the muzzle is used by—
 - (i) an inspector or auxiliary officer while performing or exercising his or her functions, duties, or powers under the [Animal Welfare Act 1999](#); or
 - (ii) a dog control officer, dog ranger, or warranted officer performing or exercising his or her functions, duties, or powers under the [Dog Control Act 1996](#); or
- (c) the muzzle is used under constant supervision to facilitate handling of the dog for therapeutic purposes, including preventative treatment.

Animal Welfare (Companion Cats) Code of Welfare 2007

Minimum Standard No. 9 – Use of Collars

Collars, where used, must be fitted to the cat in such a way that the risk of injury to the cat is avoided.

8. Behaviour Problems - Recommended Best Practice

- (a) Advice should be sought at the early stages of a behaviour problem.
- (b) Cats should not be punished by physical means for toileting in inappropriate places.

International Legislation

A number of countries, states and provinces internationally have placed restrictions on the use of certain aversive training aids including (this is not an exhaustive list):

Australia

The use of shock collars is illegal in South Australia and ACT.

Canada

The Council of the City of Toronto added subsections to the city's animal bylaws include a ban on using choke collars, choke chains, pronged collars, or any similar device which came into force on 1 March 2017.

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Europe

Electronic collars are banned or restricted in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Austria, Switzerland, Slovenia, Germany, and Finland.

United Kingdom

- Wales: The Animal Welfare (Electronic Collars) (Wales) Regulations 2010 came into force in Wales on 24 March 2010. The Regulations ban the use of any collar that is capable of administering an electric shock to a cat or dog, including electronic pet containment systems.
- Scotland: In January 2018 the Scottish Government announced an intention to ban the use of electronic training collars.
- England: The British Government announced, in March 2018, an intention to amend the Animal Welfare Act 2006 to ban the use of hand-held remote-controlled e-collar devices throughout the United Kingdom

The NZCAC advocates for the introduction of legislation prohibiting the use and sale of electronic training collars, to help safeguard animal welfare.

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