

Our Response To The Minister Gerry Ritz's Comments Re: Petition (411-0003) To Ban Electric Shock

We have finally received an official response from the government of Canada to our petition presented on June 6th/11. They state they have noted our concern regarding the availability and use of shock devices on animals. Yet the response stayed away from the use of shock collars and fencing used for training and controlling animals and instead focused on the use of stun guns for the slaughter of food animals. This was not our focus. It was suggested that a complete ban, in some cases, could result in less humane conditions... as when rendering animals unconscious for slaughter. No mention is made of the electric shocks via collars imposed on companion animals, circus animals, racing, sporting, service and work animals, that are definitely not humane in nature. The shock collars used to train and control animals, the original reason for the petition, was sidestepped. The wealth of information from world-renowned experts proclaiming electric shock collars as potentially damaging to an animal's physical and psychological well being, was also not addressed.

This response was not unexpected. We take responsibility for what we see as the deflection of the main thrust of our movement, to ban the use of shock collars for controlling and training animals, since we intentionally worded the petition to include 'all' animals. Our petition emphasized, "all shock devices" on 'all animals'. Although we were warned the word "all" would be used to muddy the waters, our conscience urged us to include all animals, because all animals suffer. We felt it would be akin to asking for protection for some children with the hopes that one day the law would be extended to all children. In essence, relying that once legislation was in place for blonde children it would be easier to put protection in place for brunette and redheaded children later on. Therefore, it was important to us to initially introduce the petition the way we believed it should be presented. To effect change, it is clear we need to adjust our wording. Consequently, we have revised the petition as displayed on the banshockcollars.ca website.

Although the main issue of our petition was not addressed, let's address some of the statements the Minister made in his response.

"The judicious use of electric shock devices by law enforcement personnel is also at times an appropriate or recommended means to control animals and people in order to minimize the chance of injury."

There is no mention in our petition of the use of electric shocks on people and we assume the minister is referring to Tasers in this statement. Here again, reference is made to what was not the focus of the petition, ignoring the use of shock collars for training. Law enforcement often uses electric shock devices injudiciously and recently the safety of that use is being questioned. We're all familiar with the video of four police officers repeatedly tasing and killing a stressed out traveler at Vancouver airport. That incident led to an investigation which raised many doubts about the safety of Tasers as well as the

skill, training and judgment of those authorized to use them. The incident was only investigated because a member of the public filmed the attack. Even more recent is the

taserings of an eleven year old boy by police in Prince George. There are numerous reports of documented and suspected injudicious shock use, as it appears to be on the rise. In addition to human taserings there are no shortage of reports of undeserved dog taserings as well. In one incident police tasered, according to all accounts, a sweet gentle dog three times while raiding the wrong address.

“Shock devices should not be used indiscriminately in place of other methods known to induce less stress”.

Allowing shock collars to be readily available ensures their indiscriminate use. The hard sell of shock collars by those profiting from their use renders this statement hollow.

“In some cases, a complete ban of electric shock devices could potentially result in less humane conditions for animals. For instance, electric stunning is one of the few internationally recognized methods for humanely rendering an animal unconscious prior to slaughter”

Once again, let us reiterate that stun guns used on food animals was not the focus of our petition. However, since the Minister brought it up, it seems to us that describing an instrument that stuns a sentient being into an unconscious state as ‘humane’ speaks to the hellish lives of farm animals and the slaughter process. Food animals suffer intensely from birth to the transport and slaughter process and much of it is needless. It is the ongoing irregularities, violations, indifference or deliberate abuse by inappropriately trained farm employees that have international movements calling for more humane practices for the care of farm animals. Eurogroup For Animals state,

* Over one million farm animals are transported every day, some for several days to reach either the slaughterhouse or another farm. The present EU law is not strict enough to protect these animals and it is hardly respected. The long journeys covering many countries make it difficult for the authorities to control the quality of the transport and whether the law is being respected.... The European Commission is currently refusing to act. This is against the EU Treaty which makes it an obligation for the EU and member states to consider the welfare of animals and recognize them as sentient beings. This animal suffering is unacceptable and unnecessary.

Canadian practices have been described by some as even more dismal. Endless talk but no change tells Canadians there is no urgency on the part of (our members of) government to improve the plight of animals. How many animal cruelty charges have arisen out of the living conditions and slaughter of 650 million farm animals in Canada last year? Let’s equip farms, transport trucks and slaughterhouses with cameras and make the footage available to the public. That footage along with the findings of regular independent random inspections should also be easily accessible to the public.

“Ultimately, it is not the application of electric current to an animal that has the potential to be problematic, but rather the inhumane application of these devices.”

The problem is both. The basic premise of using pain to train is flawed, inviting abuse. The “humane use” of electric shock collars is an oxymoron. The shock collar is designed to deliver pain to animals and does just that. Electric shocks are so intolerable they are used to torture prisoners of war so it’s not a big stretch to grasp that it can be hurtful to animals. Until the ‘ban shock collar’ movement came into being the dominant perspective available to dog owners in Canada regarding shock use came from those profiting from it.

Three thousand plus Canadian signatures collected so far, requesting the ban of shock collars should help our government understand our goal is widely shared. Furthermore, we don’t want our government used as a shield by those capitalizing from animal suffering. Health concerns for animals and people should not be ignored in favour of business. It is important we note that those in government didn’t invent the lobbying system but many become casualties of it. In life, when the end comes and all’s said and done, isn’t it our actions or lack of them that will define who we really are?

“This is why the Government of Canada accepts the use of electric shock under tightly regulated conditions.”

What tightly regulated conditions? The sale and use of shock collars and fences are not regulated. They’re available to anyone through retail pet stores and the Internet. When a statement like this is made, how can Canadians feel they are taken seriously?

“In terms of using electric shock devices at the farm level, electric fences are widely employed in the agriculture community for grazing management purposes, provided they are properly installed and appropriately used and maintained.”

We would be curious to know what process and legislation is in place to ensure that electric fencing is properly installed, appropriately used and maintained? In any case, in agricultural settings, where animals graze over vast acreage, the use of electric fences in this setting is not as prime a concern. It is in urban settings, the effects of shock fences can be harsh. In a condo in West Vancouver, an English Mastiff often kept in a tiny ground floor space by means of an electric fence was regularly seen wandering the streets in the wee hours. Pets terrorized by shocks received from invisible fencing become too terrorized to go into their own backyards. Dogs tend to associate the pain they feel with whatever and whomever they are focused on at the time of the shock. Sadly, the constant stress and anxiety that results from the fear and pain the shocks induce alter their personalities from trusting and friendly to suspicious and vicious.

“Animal cruelty is addressed by the Criminal code of Canada.”

In our federal cruelty laws language exists that could apply to the needless pain and fear

of shock based training, if only there was the intent to enforce it. The law states Every one commits an offence who

(a) willfully causes or, being the owner, willfully permits to be caused unnecessary pain, suffering or injury to an animal or a bird.

The law states animals must not be allowed to suffer needlessly but so few prosecutions leave the impression neither the government nor the legal system have shown much appetite to stop violators from doing just that. Our animal cruelty laws are not protecting animals, so the question is, who are they protecting? Inaction by our government to sufficiently update and enforce the cruelty laws has been a moral failure. Millions of suffering animals continue to have little to no protection. More than ninety percent of Canadians, when asked to sign the ban shock petition, did so enthusiastically. We are convinced that banning shock collars would be a merciful action welcomed by the vast majority of Canadians.

G. & A. Williams, Ban Shock Collars Advocates

* Eurogroup for Animals - <http://eurogroupforanimals.org/get-involved/transport-of-live-animals>