

Hello,

I wish to comment on one specific element of the proposed changes to the Act, that being the use of pronged collars.

I love my dogs and have had them all my life and would never consider hurting them in any way. In more recent times I have fostered about a dozen greyhounds for adoption and have owned a couple of them myself. In becoming involved with this breed I believe that I have become even more aware of the need to take a gentle and caring approach in training, walking and general handling because they are quite a sensitive breed, even to the point of them being a bit sooky at times and overreacting to perceived injury or pain and even faking it at times for attention.

A few of the big, male dogs that I have fostered have initially been a bit of a handful at times on the lead and they have pulled like crazy on walks and leapt in full flight to the end of the lead when they have spotted a rabbit to the point that I injured both a shoulder and elbow at different times, let alone what strain it must have placed on their necks.

The normal "martingale" type collar simply does not do the job in terms of control and more importantly, training them for their future owners. a "choker" type of correction lead is likewise an unworkable choice, and I would argue, is both dangerous and possibly more damaging to the long and sensitive necks of greyhounds. Chest harnesses remove the potential for damage but do not deal with the strong pulling or leaping. A head-check type of harness can be effective on some dogs but again, not all of them.

I may be one of the few people in the State who has actually used a pronged collar and therefore, one of the few who can realistically comment on their use. I fully understand the emotional reaction to this type of collar because they do look quite horrific and damaging, I had a similar reaction when I first looked at them and I wrestled with myself for quite some time before I purchased one online because harming any animal is just so far from what I ever want to do, especially my beloved dogs. I first used the pronged collar with great trepidation not knowing for sure that it would not harm the dog and not knowing how the dog would react but I felt that we both needed to try it to avoid injury. I'm sure that you can imagine the potential injury that might be caused by constant, hard pulling against a correction lead (let's call it what it truly is, a choker chain), and even worse possible injury by a dog leaping full-force to the end of a chain when spotting a rabbit.

The dog's initial reaction to the pronged lead was certainly not one that showed any sort of pain but rather a discomfort level however it soon settled down and we began walking "together" for the first time. The thing you must understand about these collars is that the dog quickly self-regulates based on the discomfort (the prongs aren't sharp and if they had been that way I would have blunted them anyway). Instead of the unpleasant towing walk we had previously been experiencing, the dog trotted along beside me once it had tried to pull ahead a few times and I was still able to give it some slack when it wanted to sniff and scent mark. We suddenly had a new relationship. I can't remember how long I actually used it but it wasn't a long period before we went back to a normal Martingale lead.

Part of the issue with fostering greyhounds for rehoming is that, because they haven't been raised as domestic pets, it can take some time (I have found it to be around 3-6 months with some of them) before they really relax into their new lifestyle and bond with you and importantly, listen to and obey commands. Because the dog is going to be handed over to a new owner, as a "reconditioned dog", there is a responsibility for the sake of both dog and owner, to get the dog up to speed in a fairly short period and I would hate to think that a dog may not end up in a permanent and loving home simply because it was a bit of a berserker on the lead.

In my opinion, and more importantly, my experience, the pronged lead, used only when necessary, is a much better and humane method of training and controlling a strong dog than is the choker-chain, which you probably all accept as being OK. I suspect that it is unlikely that many people would in fact use a pronged collar or even know of their existence. This collar allows the dog to self correct, to learn to walk normally and is not something that I have found to be required for any great length of time. As far as I am concerned, it is far less damaging to a dog than the choker.

I haven't fostered any greyhounds now for a couple of years and sadly it is unlikely to happen due to the rising costs of food for them however, I urge you to not make a judgement on the pronged collar based on your initial, emotional reaction to what certainly looks like an instrument of torture (this was my own reaction when I first saw them). They definitely have their place, I know they are not cruel because they create a discomfort level for the dog, not a pain level. I have only had to use one two or three times for quite short periods but the results were brilliant to say the least. I am all for protecting animals but in truth we are being impacted more and more by over-regulation in so many areas of our lives and I simply don't agree that banning these collars is necessary.

I trust my feedback and real experience is useful in your deliberations.

Yours Sincerely

Leigh Murrell