**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

**Northern Farmers & Landowners Group response to the Defra consultation on the proposed ban of electronic training collars and invisible electric fencing for cats and dogs.**

In the rural parts of the North East, the use of electric collars on pets is a rare occurrence. When such devices, training collars and invisible electric fences, are utilised, it is most usual to be to control a dog which is prone to attacking livestock or wildlife, usually sheep and deer. Most often, the dogs involved are of the relatively “untrainable” breeds ie terriers and long dogs and the devices are used as almost the last resort.

In January 2017, the Government was presented with research From SheepWatch UK showing that an estimated 15,000 sheep were killed by dogs in 2016. With a problem of this scale, electronic training devices should be seen as part of the solution to a major animal welfare issue, rather than being banned as a dubious animal welfare problem.

While it is easy to say that owners should keep their pets under close control by shutting them up and only exercising on leads, the practical reality in a family household is rather different. A dog that is determined to go on the hunt can be very devious about how it can slip away, often aided and abetted by inattentive children. An invisible fence will keep it in check 24 hours a day.

If Defra is to accept that these training tools are in fact cruel to pets and ban them on welfare grounds, then what does the future hold for electronic controls in the wider countryside? If an occasional low voltage electric shock is too cruel for cats and dogs, will the same apply to farm livestock, poultry and horses? It would seem likely that some in the animal welfare/rights profession may well seek such an extension of the policy. The removal of electric fencing, both permanent and temporary, would have a profound effect across the countryside where its use is widespread. It is deployed as general fencing, but it is also used for specific management systems (ie strip grazing) as well as for conservation management, stock protection and for actual welfare purposes, such as restricting pony grazing.

In short, we do not support the ban of such electric devices as they are not thought to be a welfare issue and do play a role in the larger welfare issue of sheep worrying. In addition, we fear that such a ban may lead to further restrictions on the use of electric in the countryside with serious implications for farming, conservation, the equine sector and actual animal welfare.