

SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS



28 August 2014

To: The Editor

I refer to HDB's letter to the Ang Mo Kio residents, dated 22 August 2014. Among the suggestions to curtail dog barking nuisances, the HDB originally suggested dog obedience training, the use of training collars, and de-barking.

The SPCA acknowledges that inconveniences do occur for people living in highly populated communities such as housing board flats, and these include noise nuisances from barking dogs. When called to mediate noise issues, the SPCA would first determine if the following steps had been taken:

1. Did the owner make any attempts to undergo obedience training, with his/her dog?
2. Does the owner understand his/her responsibilities to ensure proper etiquette in maintaining a properly handled dog, whilst living in the community of his neighbours?
3. Does the dog have behavioural issues requiring more than superficial training sessions?

Obedience training is key to teaching properly acceptable social behaviour by the dog, but we cannot agree that training collars (or electric collars) should be a valid choice, let alone the first choice, in any dog training. Shock or electric collars are devices placed around a dog's neck connected to handheld transmitters which remotely deliver varying levels of electric shock to the dog's neck. They are designed to provide an aversive stimulus to a dog as a punishment or correction from its trainer or owner, and cause the animal pain and fear. The shock collar is already considered illegal as an abusive tool in countries such as Finland and Wales and in the Canadian province of Quebec.

The recommendation to debark pet animals was disappointing. The debarking procedure is outdated and inhumane, one that destroys an animal's central means of communication merely for human convenience. The surgery usually leaves the animal with something between a wheeze and a squeak, and we find that highly objectionable and surely at least mentally cruel to the animal. Many veterinarians refuse to do the surgery on ethical grounds. Those who do rarely advertise it. There are countries that have expressly prohibited debarking, like the United Kingdom which regards it as a form of surgical mutilation. Debarking is also illegal in certain American states like Massachusetts, New Jersey and Warwick, Rhode Island.

The SPCA urges the HDB, as well as the general members of the public, to always put animal welfare first in resolving existing communal problems. There are humane approaches at hand, ones that do not compromise the animal's welfare and wellbeing.

Corinne Fong (Ms.)

Executive Director

Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), Singapore