

# Shock collar ban a pain in the neck for farmers

Wales barred the device in 2010 and sheep attacks are rising, yet Westminster is insisting on following suit

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WITH his sheep spread across 27,000 acres of the Snowdonia mountains, Gareth Wyn Jones knows that he would have to be “superman” to protect his flock and his livelihood.

Instead, the BBC star, who has earned a reputation as the nation’s favourite farmer, must rely on the thousands of walkers who share the land to take responsibility for their own actions – and those of their dogs.

But in the face of a rising number of attacks, Mr Wyn Jones and more than 100 other Welsh farmers have joined forces to warn of the impact of a ban on shock collars used to train dogs.

“This is a major problem, we are seeing so many dog attacks now,” Mr Wyn Jones told *The Sunday Telegraph*. “If you can save a sheep or a dog – because every time a dog attacks sheep, the sheep gets put down – then you have to try everything you can, and they need strict training.”

The farmers have sent a letter to Lesley Griffiths, the Welsh rural affairs minister, urging a review of the ban “for the sake of all the sheep and dogs which are dying on our hills”.

Only Wales bans e-collars, which give dogs a small electric shock, but the Government in Westminster has promised to follow suit by introducing new legislation this year.

The pledge in the Government’s “Action Plan for Animal Welfare” comes despite data from across the border, where the ban has been in place since 2010, which show an increase in attacks.

Police data show that the number of dogs shot by landowners has been at least three times higher in North Wales compared with other rural forces, while NFU insurance data show that Welsh farmers suffer from four times more dog attacks than their Scottish counterparts.

“The English farmers need to look at the statistics in Wales,” said Mr Wyn Jones whose farm in Carneddau mountains in North Wales has featured in a number of BBC series.

“The Government is banning things because they believe that it is cruel, but what is more cruel? For a sheep to be ripped to pieces or for a dog to have a little electric shock which is less than they get from a fence?”

“These collars are a deterrent. You don’t have to be clever to understand that proper training can save lives – sheep’s lives, dogs’ lives, or even people’s lives as owners get into serious problems and we have seen people trampled when they have a dog that is chasing livestock.”

More than 100 Welsh farmers have signed the letter to Ms Griffiths, which was sent on Friday. Mr Wyn Jones points out that 100 is just a small fraction of those who are seeing what is happening on the ground.

It urges the minister “to review the science on what is the most effective training for stopping predatory attacks by dogs. This should include the role of e-collars as a training aid”. They point



Gareth Wyn Jones and his sheep dog Max on a mountain above the BBC presenter’s farm in the Carneddau mountain range of north Wales

out that up until now, Wales is “the only part to be suffering from such appalling levels of attacks”.

A number are calling for the re-introduction of the collars under strict controls, for example, only to be used by trainers with a licence.

But ministers have repeatedly refused calls for a review, saying that the collars “cause pain and distress to dogs”. A similar reasoning is being used to introduce the ban in Westminster.

Meanwhile, farmers have been

known to lose hundreds of sheep – worth thousands of pounds – in just two attacks. The losses could have the potential to bankrupt them.

Many walkers believe that their pet would never attack a sheep, but they are keeping hunting or working dogs which have an instinct to kill. Some Welsh owners who have lost control of their pets have taken their dogs for e-collar training in England or Scotland, it is believed.

A husky, Mr Wyn Jones points out,

could kill about 15 sheep in one go. But there is nothing that individual farmers can do to protect their flock.

“The mountain we put our sheep on is 27,000 acres,” he said. “If I was to police that I would have to be superman, and I still wouldn’t catch everyone. We would have to live, breathe and sleep in the fields with the livestock in order to protect them.”

“We want people in the great outdoors, we want them taking their dogs for exercise, but those dogs need to be

*‘What is more cruel? For a sheep to be ripped to pieces or for a dog to have a little electric shock?’*

under control. They need to be on a leash and people need to understand that when they are loose and chasing livestock they are going to kill and cause a major problem.

“That’s where the e-collars could come in and save lives for the farmers and the dog owners.”

“The Government has to go back and look at the evidence, they have to listen to the people on the ground. Sometimes you have to be cruel to be kind, you have to make these difficult decisions.”