

INQUIRY INTO GREYHOUND RACING IN NSW

Organisation: Greyhound Rehoming Centre Inc

Date received: 1/11/2013



1 November 2013

Hon Robert Borsak MLC
Chair
Select Committee on Greyhound Racing in New South Wales

Dear Sir

Re: Submission On behalf of the Committee Greyhound Re-homing Centre Inc

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our comments and suggestions to the following terms of reference:

- (i) The incidence of drug administration and doping in the industry and the efficacy of Greyhound Racing NSW's control and testing processes.*
- k) The welfare of animals in the industry and the role of Greyhound Racing NSW in establishing and enforcing standards of treatment of animals.*
- (m) The adequacy and integrity of data collection in the industry, including the number of pups born, the number of dogs euthanased and injury rates.*
- (n) Any other related matter.*

Yours sincerely

Babette Angell
Public Officer
Greyhound Re-homing Centre Inc

<http://www.greyhoundrehomingcentre.org/>

The Greyhound Rehoming Centre Submission

Historical Background

I thank you for the opportunity to submit our comments and suggestions to the terms of reference – the welfare of animals in the industry and the role of Greyhound Racing NSW in establishing and enforcing standards of treatment of animals and any other matters.

In **2008** as an owner of 2 retired ex- racing greyhounds I prepared a background paper – “*They shoot Greyhounds Don’t They?*” in order to put forward a case to address the muzzle issue and bring about change to the Companion Animals Act 1998. This paper was sent to ministers of the previous NSW government, local members of parliament, and GRNSW who finally brought this work to the attention to various ministers in meetings with their advisors. As a result of constant lobbying, The Companion Animals was amended. Amendment (Greyhound Muzzling Exemption) Regulation 2001 under the Companion Animals Act 1998, providing a retired greyhound undergo retraining under a green collar program was passed.

In summary at the end of the paper I listed the following suggestions to the Minister:

What the NSW Minister for Racing can do to support Retired Greyhounds

- Set up a six-month taskforce to look at the following issues and publish a report with practical recommendations.
- Raise fees for all areas of Greyhound Registrations to reduce racing numbers.

The greyhound population, with more selective breeding and training, is likely to produce less failed greyhounds that could be abandoned or discarded.

- Continue the trials of micro chipping greyhounds instead of, or as well as traditional branding so that their history can be tracked. A database should be set up to record numbers of de-registered greyhounds to be monitored and published.
- Use a betting levy to go towards supporting Greyhound Adoption Agencies including GAP to pay for professional management of the programs and provide adoption centres near Sydney and regional areas central to the racing tracks.*
- Owners of winning dogs have to pay a percentage towards a Greyhound retirement fund.

Remove the need to muzzle retired greyhounds that have been through an *accredited adoption agency.

- An adopted centre at Dapto is now being trialled with further possibilities at Grafton.

I asked for adopted agencies to be accredited, which is still on going.

Submission made by The Greyhound Rehoming Centre

Summary

- **Acknowledgement and Historical Background**
- **Greyhound Rehoming Centre**
- **Aims and Focus of the Greyhound Rehoming Centre Inc**
- **Summary of Issues addressed under the Terms of Reference**
- *(m) The adequacy and integrity of data collection in the industry, including the number of pups born, the number of dogs euthanased and injury rates.*
- Review of the Retired/disposed Greyhound Notification Form

(i) The incidence of drug administration and doping in the industry and the efficacy of Greyhound Racing NSW's control and testing processes.

- Police should have the power to attend and randomly select dogs for swabbing from any race meeting.

k) The welfare of animals in the industry and the role of Greyhound Racing NSW in establishing and enforcing standards of treatment of animals

(n) Any other related matter.

- Terms such as "retraining" and "decommissioning" are erroneous and misleading due to the nature of the problems that arise due to a lack of appropriate and early socialization, outdated and often illegal training techniques.
- A need for responsible reporting and promotion of retired ex greyhounds as pets
- Case Histories
 - Adopting a Greyhound from a Trainer
 - Adopting a Greyhound without a qualified behavioural assessment
 - Adopting a Greyhound without a qualified medical certificate
- Inspection compliance for all greyhound rescue organisations
- Foster Carer guidelines for Greyhound Adoption Agencies
- Greyhounds in Pounds

Background – Greyhound Rehoming Centre

Incorporated on 26 April 2013 (INC1300514) The Greyhound Rehoming Centre has now been approved as a greyhound re-training program under clause 33B (1) of the Companion Animals Regulation 2008 (www.dlg.nsw.gov.au).

Aims and Focus of the Greyhound Rehoming Centre

The aim of the Greyhound Rehoming Centre Inc is to educate and support both new owners and re-homers of greyhounds in understanding the often unique requirements of the breed. Training workshops will be held in various locations in the region from Northern NSW, Brisbane and the Gold Coast. Within the organisation is a qualified vet and dog behaviouralist who will assess the temperament and suitability of each retired greyhound as well as provide an overall health report. More information can be found on the website (www.greyhoundrehomingcentre.org).

Predatory behaviour in greyhounds is generally poorly understood which has led to many unnecessary and regrettably preventable incidents often with at times tragic results. It is an inherited, hard wired, innate survival mechanism that has been selectively bred for in the racing greyhound and cannot be reliably trained out of the dog. There is also a huge variation between individual dogs with regard to its intensity and triggers, but is usually stimulated by fast moving objects. Prey drive is often confused with aggression, but the two behaviours are actually very different. The Greyhound Rehoming Centre Inc encourages everyone involved in the re-homing or adoption of greyhounds to take the time to understand this common behavioural trait.

The Greyhound Rehoming Centre Inc also recommends the use of a modified restraining safety harness especially for greyhounds because they can be notorious for slipping out of their collars. This harness has a double clip system in which a dual clipped lead is attached to both the collar

and the harness around the chest and barrel of the greyhound. Therefore, if the greyhound did slip its collar, the attachment to the harness acts as a safeguard so that there is still control.

A greyhound correctly restrained on a leash and is a completely different prospect to one allowed to run around in an off leash environment with other small animals. This is where some incidents occur. No matter how placid a greyhound is in the home environment or whilst on a leash, the Greyhound Rehoming Centre does not endorse or encourage greyhounds be allowed off leash without a muzzle.

All greyhounds from the Greyhound Rehoming Centre Inc come with a qualified behavioural and health assessment, are de-sexed, fully vaccinated, wormed and heartworm protected via a yearly injection and have had a full dental check scale and polish. Greyhounds in the program are also assessed as suitable for the NSW Greenhounds green collar program and this is included in the adoption price.

Terms of Reference:

k) The welfare of animals in the industry and the role of Greyhound Racing NSW in establishing and enforcing standards of treatment of animals.

Key Factors in the Welfare of Retired Greyhounds

The Greyhound Rehoming Centre strongly believes

The process of retirement is starting *too late* in the life cycle of the dog.

- Terms such as "retraining" and "decommissioning" are erroneous and misleading due to the nature of the problems that arise due to a lack of appropriate and early socialization, outdated and often illegal training techniques.
- Providing further funding for adoption programs without introducing and enforcing welfare changes earlier in the life cycle, in line with for example, AVA (Australian Veterinary Guidelines) is pointless, like using a band - aid to stem an arterial bleed.

A significant percentage of the dogs being presented for adoption just are not suitable for re-homing. This leads to bottlenecks both into and out of the adoption programs and an ever-diminishing pool of willing foster carers and adopters.

A need for responsible reporting and promotion of retired ex greyhounds as pets

Prominent television vets such as Dr Harry and Dr Chris Brown regularly promote greyhounds as pets and suggest people adopt them. They give the impression that all greyhounds are laid back and spend a lot of time lounging around.

In a recent article (Better Homes and Gardens p. 240 November 2013) Dr Harry says that he spent many years looking after racing greyhounds. He must know that for racing greyhounds to succeed they must have a strong prey drive and that many of these dogs may not be suitable for re-homing and that they retain a training memory that may respond to triggers, could be carrying injuries that cause pain and stress within a domestic situation.

International dog whisperer Cesar Millan offers some advice (Australian Women's Weekly p. 215 July 2012) where he suggests that if someone is looking for a greyhound, to look into local dog racing tracks if there are some nearby. When selecting a greyhound focus on finding your perfect match from an energy-level perspective! This advice is very misleading and loaded with danger for someone inexperienced with the breed. To obtain a greyhound from a trainer based on the premise that all greyhounds are laid back, make perfect pets is very misleading and does not take into account their past training, health, and temperament.

Case History – Adopting a Greyhound direct from a trainer

Jackson was given to me by his trainer as a 2-year-old male. His promising career was cut short by a broken leg that had been pinned. I had already taken a dog from this trainer so agreed to help out in this difficult situation. The leg did not heal and was decided to retire him. Traditionally this dog would have been euthanized, but because he was a handsome looking fawn and white greyhound and knew I could learn from a dog that had no potential as a romantically idealized laid back greyhound. I took one look at him and knew he'd be trouble in spite of the trainer saying he was a quiet sort of dog. The dog trembled and shook, rolled the white of his eyes, scared of his own shadow, but he did lick my hand.

He growled if you went near him, and was unable to put his pinned leg down on the ground for any length of time. He was very irritable, hated being touched, appeared friendly, but very nervous and had continually shaking legs. We went on limited walks with my other 2 dogs, and he wanted to chase (while on the lead), after other dogs on the beach, yowling and complaining. The leg was X-rayed, and my local vet found the leg had healed, subsequently removing the pin. After discussions with Dr Karen Cunningham at Greycare about his anxiety, nervousness, a physical examination and background history together with my local vet, she advised a blood test before treating him with anti-inflammatory medication to relieve the swelling and possible pain from arthritic development in his leg. Looking at the causes of anxiety and pain together with his past history was a good strategy to help him improve and relax in order to learn new social behaviours. The change in Jackson's attitude was amazing after the medication. Using a modified safety collar and chest harness the as recommended by Greyhound Rehoming Centre gave me more control and safety knowing he would never slip his collar. He had a pre Green Collar assessment and failed because of his strong prey drive and would always wear a muzzle. I implemented management strategies whilst walking every day for 3 years. Because of the pain and anxiety management in consultation with Dr Karen Cunningham's qualified and my feedback reports, Jackson is now pain free. Dr Cunningham's experience and diagnostic skills have enabled me to continue to successfully retrain Jackson into a greyhound as a special family pet.

Thus there are dangers for inexperienced individuals taking on a problem greyhound unless you are prepared for the long haul and that you must be prepared to accept that the dog you take from a trainer might never make the grade as a safe companion animal, where it would be better if the dog was euthanized.

Case History – Adopting a Greyhound without a qualified behavioural assessment

I first saw Cora on a rescue website where she was offered up for adoption. Three months later I saw her outside a local pet store where a few greyhounds were on show and ready for adoption. She was rather subdued, bored and didn't seem interested in anyone, however she was a handsome looking female and made the effort to appear to enjoy being patted. Past experience of dogs made me realise that here was a greyhound with potential, but needed somewhere stable to live. I adopted her straight away without a trial because it was explained that she had run away from 4 foster homes. I discovered she had a very strong prey drive and as a sight hound, could sense a wallaby, out walking. An old hind leg injury from her past occurred, and caused some lameness. A vet examination found that she had a heart murmur so that care has to be taken with exercise. Thus began 4 years of daily walking and training ignoring triggers that remind her of her past. With endless patience she passed her Green Collar test mainly because my experience and hard work to retrain her behaviour over a long period of ownership. She has become a successful sympathetic visiting dog to residents in a dementia unit in a local residential aged care facility. Had this dog been accurately assessed given her foster and adoption history, it would have been better to fail her as a potential safe pet. Given that there is no training, workshops or advice other than websites or dog training information, it was only a matter of luck that I adopted her.

Case History - Adopting a Greyhound without a qualified health check

A young female was put up for adoption.

The new owner discovered a lump under a front leg. This proved to be cancer. The owner decided to keep the dog, pay expensive vet bills, and maintained palliative care until the dog died. Had this dog been properly assessed by a vet, then it would have been kinder to withdraw the dog from adoption and assess the next step to manage the condition. The dog died a painful death.

Inspection compliance for all greyhound rescue organisations

Anecdotally, some trainers have refused to give up their greyhounds for adoption to some agencies because of the poor conditions of their premises, poor documentation, and risk to injury because of unsafe yards.

- **The following compliances should be undertaken:**
- In order to protect the welfare and health of rescued greyhounds that are taken into care until adoption by not for profit organisations, all premises where greyhounds are temporary rehoused must be open for inspection and comply with the existing Establishments NSW Animal Welfare Code of Practice No 5 – Dogs and Cats in Animal Boarding Establishments.
- They must pass the inspection before they are permitted to continue to operate as a rescue and re-homing service. Under this code establishments are required to manage pest control, each animal check at least once daily to monitor its health and comfort, the animal is eating, drinking, defecating, urinating and behaving normally, is able to move about freely and safely in a yard free of dangerous objects, and have a normal coat.
- Organisations that have gained approval as a greyhound re-training program under clause 33b (1)(a) of the Companion Animals Regulation 2008 have ensured that their nominated boarding kennels comply with the requirements of the Code.

- All documentation of greyhounds in their care should be documented with a case history and should undergo a qualified vet health check and behavioural assessment before offered up for adoption with records given to the new owner.
- **According to proposal for new regulations for animal shelters in Boston, USA (www.bostonglobe.com 18 Sept 2013) the following were considered:**
 - Ban the adoption of animals with contagious diseases or serious aggressive tendencies and require all animals to come with a disclosure statement detailing any medical or behavioral issues.
 - Those with non-contagious medical conditions can be adopted, but must come with an estimate for the cost of treatment.
 - All animals must have a veterinarian-certified health certificate that has been signed no more than 30 days prior to the date of adoption.
 - New guidelines for foster homes, which are a crucial part of smaller organizations that lack a shelter facility. Those providing foster care would have to be willing to open their home to inspectors, and comply with new regulations governing the care of the animals, such as a ban on carpeted flooring in areas where the animals will be kept, on the grounds that they cannot be easily disinfected.

- **Foster Carer guidelines for Greyhound Adoption Agencies**

All foster carers must undergo training to manage the transition of retired greyhound into a pet ready greyhound for safe adoption, and the progress of the foster dog regularly monitored. Foster carers must complete assessment and progress forms of their greyhound and report any adverse or stressful behaviour. In NSW foster homes must be and comply with a safe well-fenced yard, and pest free premises.

Foster caring is more than just sticking a dog in a back yard.

Feed back from at the Big Adopt Out RSPCA Qld 21/8/2013

When people met greyhounds ready for adoption at the Greyhound Rehoming stand at the recent big Adopt-Out :

people wanted to adopt a dog that was tested.

Greyhounds in Pounds

There should be closer co-operation between the NSW department of Local Government and GRNSW when Greyhounds are accepted into a NSW pound.

In order to trace previous owners, and racing history, no greyhound should be accepted into a pound or animal welfare organization unless the Notification of Disposal of a Greyhound form issued by Greyhound Racing NSW (GRNSW) accompanies the Greyhound (<http://www.thedogs.com.au>). GRNSW should be able to contact the pound if a greyhound has been reported entering the pound or welfare organization and similarly, the pound or animal welfare organization should notify GRNSW. If the owner cannot be traced, and the dog is to be rescued or available for re-homing, the greyhound should not be released from the pound until the Disposal of Greyhound form is handed over with the dog for the new organization or owner to update and notify GRNSW. *If the greyhound is to be released it must have a qualified behavioural assessment before being offered up for adoption as a suitable companion animal.*

Terms of Reference:

m. The adequacy and integrity of data collection in the industry, including the number of pups born, the number of dogs euthanased and injury rates.

**Review of the Retired/disposed Greyhound Notification form
Background**

This form is marginally successful with trainers completing this form, according to conversations with GRNSW.

Suggestions to encourage more compliance with this form.

- **Design a Free App**

Get rid of the cumbersome need to print out a hard copy and replace with a purpose designed free app which can be completed from a tablet or smart phone on the spot with the dog either in the kennels immediately, or at vet surgery.

- This app should be linked to a database so that information can be tracked and managed to obtain accurate immediate information that should be published.
- Encourage downloading this app by emailing to trainers, members of NSW breeders and owners, and trainers association (www.gbota.com.au) and in a prominent place on their website.
- ***Publish results from this new data collection process.***

The Greyhound Rehoming Centre believes that it is the responsibility of all trainers to comply with this tracking process and that if GRNSW are serious they should pick up the tracking forms at the kennel returns if they have not already done so. It should not be the responsibility of not -for-profit rescue organisations.

(i) Terms of Reference:

The incidence of drug administration and doping in the industry and the efficacy of Greyhound Racing NSW's control and testing processes

Amend the rules of racing so that at any time, without involvement or fore-warning of the racing control body, the police should have the power to attend and randomly select dogs for swabbing from any race meeting or dog, for a pre allocated number of swabs per year.

It's not like we alcohol test each other prior to driving is it???