

**Supplementary
Submission
No 14d**

INQUIRY INTO GREYHOUND RACING IN NSW

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SUBMISSION TO SELECT COMMITTEE INQUIRING INTO GREYHOUND RACING
IN NEW SOUTH WALES

This submission is made by Susan Absalom

Terms of Reference:

- (j) sale and breeding of Greyhounds including the market conditions and welfare of animals
- (k) the welfare of animals in the industry and the role of Greyhound Racing NSW in establishing and enforcing standards of treatment of animals
- (l) financial incentives for reducing euthanasia and prosecutions for animal mistreatment,
- (m) the adequacy and integrity of data collection in the industry, including the number of pups born, the number of dogs euthanised and injury rates,

Breeding of Greyhounds

I only have brief comments to make on this issue. I have been happy with the conditions of the property and pups where we bought our greyhounds after coming back into the sport. We have since bred from one of the bitches and have had no problems with the rearing farms that we used. In my view the pups were well looked after by having lots of galloping, good food, lots of human interaction and were wormed, vaccinated etc.

Welfare of animals

I will talk about how we treat our greyhounds. These animals are professional athletes so it is ludicrous to say they are starved. It is obvious that if they are to perform well they need to be properly fed and exercised. They are fed beef from the same butcher that we buy our meat.

The rest of their diet consists of kibble, biscuits, vegemite, vegetables, marrow bone, milk and supplements. Once a week they have chicken stew.

The greyhounds spend time in the kennels, in the yard and in the house. The kennels are the standard as required by the peak body. Each kennel has a trampoline bed with another fabric covered foam bed on top. Each kennel has a water dish with fresh water. While in the kennels the greyhounds listen to 2CH. The greyhounds have a lot of human interaction.

The exercise regime includes walking, swimming, free galloping, slipping and trialling behind a lure. The greyhounds are machined, iced and massaged to maintain their healthy bodies. They are regularly checked by a registered vet.

Once the greyhound is retired it is either kept as a family pet or put through the greyhound adoption program. They may be euthanised at the end of a long life when they have difficulty eating and moving. Generally they live until they are around 10 to 14 years of age.

I may criticise some aspects of what GRNSW does but in the area of animal welfare I think they have made some inroads. They do make kennel inspections, they have vets on tracks, the weight of the racing greyhound is monitored so that the greyhound's weight cannot vary beyond a certain amount. There is also an adoption program that is far beyond what either of the horse codes has. There are policies such as "hot weather policy".

Improvements that Could be Made

We use the Greyhound Adoption Program which has successfully placed our retired greyhounds that we put into the program. I think the GRNSW Greyhound as Pets Group could look at the methods adopted by the earlier group to try to improve its numbers.

Recommendation

That the GRNSW adoption team look at other programs to learn what they do best so that they can then bring in best practice and increase the number of greyhounds successfully adopted.

The GRNSW grading department and the greyhound racing clubs should look at how they program races. Although additional prize money is on offer for the middle and staying distances those that have the power to put on the races often do not. It seems to me that they prefer to put on short course races instead. Some of the blame appears to have been put on the TAB. The reason given is that we have to try to have 8 dog fields to improve the turnover. So if there are 6 greyhounds nominated for a 600m maiden the race is not put on. These greyhounds then have to either sit in the kennel without an opportunity of earning prize money or compete in a race of an unsuitable distance. There is little chance for them progressing to a staying distance even though they are probably much more suited to the longer distance. Let's face it, if it is good enough for the thoroughbreds to run races with 5 or 6 horses at metropolitan meetings there is no reason why the greyhounds cannot do the same at any of its meetings. Perhaps when it comes to tote turnover it is as simple as the TAB coming up with other exotic betting options.

The problem is not confined to middle distance races. We have also had the situation where GRNSW would not put on staying races because the grader did not understand the grading policy. In fact two clubs, GBOTA Wentworth Park and the Richmond Club, worked very hard to get staying races going again. They were having success and on some weekends there were actually 5 staying races over the two tracks. However, after the grader resigned to move overseas and a new grader was appointed things changed. The new grader did not understand the grading policy and, even though there were enough greyhounds nominated for

staying races, he did not put the races on. As a result the staying greyhounds moved away and we were left without staying races. The grader was moved on. We now have 3 tracks, Wentworth Park, Richmond and the Gardens, working to put on the staying races again and they are having some success.

Another problem with the middle and staying distance races are the way they are programmed. It seems that the race clubs do not speak to each other regarding the programming. I say this because it is not unusual for a 600m maiden being programmed at two clubs in the same week only a day or couple of days apart then not programmed for another month. A better way would be for the clubs to get together a program the races on different weeks of the month. The programming of maiden, 0-2, 0-3, 1-3 and 1-4 win races are important to increasing the staying ranks. This is where the clubs could work together.

There is currently another problem with the programming of races. I have noticed that the TAB tracks and running more short course races. The result of this is less greyhounds to compete at 520m at Wentworth Park. Generally the shorter course races have a bend start which I believe can lead to interference at the start of a race. Therefore from an animal welfare point of view it is better to have greyhounds starting over the longer 500+ distance. As already mentioned they can then progress to the metropolitan track.

Recommendation

That middle and staying distance races be put on with a minimum of 5 greyhounds for a period of time until there is a critical mass of greyhounds for these distances. The minimum number can then be increased to 6 greyhounds.

That the clubs meet and program the races to complement each other by having say maiden 600m on different weeks at each track.

That GRNSW accede to participants' request to set up a committee made up of participants, club administrators and GRNSW staff to look at encouraging staying races.

That TAB B race meetings reduce the number of races run that are of a distance of 400m or less.

I believe that work can be done on track design and maintenance. It is an area that generates much discussion at participant meetings and results in many motions to GRNSW. I say this even though if you look at the number of greyhounds that race in New South Wales each week the number of greyhounds injured is really only a fraction of those that race. However, the aim should be to keep improving the tracks so that injuries are rare. I am on a sub-committee at a track and the stewards reports and track safety are discussed at each meeting. We even passed a resolution that the CEO write to GRNSW saying he would be putting on a seminar on track maintenance. However, he received what could only be described as a discouraging reply advising that GRNSW would be handling this matter. We are still waiting to hear when the seminars were held and what has come out of them.

Recommendation

That quarterly seminars be held for all track managers and GRNSW staff and members of the animal welfare committee to review statistics on falls, injuries etc. and determine if changes are needed to improve track safety and if so what is needed.

That GRNSW review tracks worldwide to determine best practice designs and maintenance of tracks.

That GRNSW ensures that it maintains both one turn and two turn tracks.

That GRNSW looks at returning straight track racing to New South Wales.

Financial Assistance for Reducing Euthanasia

I believe financial assistance should be given and this assistance can be in the form of prize money. Contrary to comments reported in a greyhound print publication prize money does assist animal welfare. The example I will give is in our family. We don't look at the prize money for each greyhound separately but rather we look at the prize money earned by all the greyhounds. The effect of this is that greyhounds that earn prize money pay for those that earn considerably less or none at all. The prize money received by current racing greyhounds also covers the retired greyhounds. The reality is that funds given out as prize money are spent in the industry. This is just another compelling reason for prize money being first charge on the funds.

Recommendation

Every effort is made to ensure that the greyhound industry receives its fair share of the TAB funds.

Prize money is increased to at least the same levels as Victoria.

GRNSW look at the viability of paying small amounts of prize money for 4th to 8th place for greyhounds in top grade races such as no grades and free for all. This is because there are greyhounds that are used up in these races to ensure that there are enough greyhounds to make up the field.

Prosecutions for Animal Mistreatment

It is obvious that there needs to be prosecutions for animal mistreatment. I thought that this was happening and I remember seeing press releases from GRNSW advising when people were prosecuted.

Data Collection

As a former public servant I am a great believer in data collection. I am not aware of the records held by GRNSW but I do know that we have many forms to fill in from the time the bitch is mated through to when the greyhound finally dies. It is time consuming for participants but we do our part in ensuring that the data exists. GRNSW has spent a good deal of industry money on a computer system so the information should be available i.e. the greyhounds should be able to be tracked from birth to death. I would be surprised if greyhounds were not the most tracked dogs in New South Wales. I don't know of any other breed that is followed so closely.

Other Submissions

I cannot finish this submission without saying something about a number of so called animal welfare submissions that have been put to the parliamentary select committee. My concerns are that a number of these submissions have their names suppressed, the submissions appear to be nothing more than roneod sheets and the claims are fictitious and outlandish. I stand to be corrected but I would not be surprised if they had come from a small number of people using false names. What is disconcerting is that this is a very important inquiry with the main issues being funding, integrity and animal welfare. It is nothing more than disruptive to have a small group of people cluttering up the inbox with, as I said, fictitious and outlandish claims.

I will address several of the outlandish claims. The first is that the greyhound is made to run. How silly. When the dogs are let out into a yard they run. When a greyhound is put into the starting boxes it is on its own. It does not have a jockey on its back to make it run. If the greyhound does not want to run it won't.

The second is that greyhounds are starved. Racing greyhounds are professional athletes. It is ridiculous to suggest that owners would starve a greyhound when it has to compete against other greyhounds that are properly fed and trained. The greyhound owners I know would prefer to see their greyhounds properly fed and go without themselves. Greyhounds are naturally slender animals.

A third allegation is that the animal is kept in small pens. Actually GRNSW has a policy on the size of the kennels. There is enough room for a trampoline and for the greyhound to walk around. These animals are couch potatoes and generally do nothing more than sleep in the middle of the day. There are good reasons for the greyhounds being in kennels after they are exercised.

Recommendation

That an investigation be conducted into the animal welfare submissions to determine if they are just time wasters for the committee. If this is the case then the perpetrators are brought to account.

Susan Absalom

3 November 2013