

**Submission
No 509**

INQUIRY INTO GREYHOUND RACING IN NSW

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Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry into Greyhound Racing in NSW.

I have responded to terms of Reference:

a, b, l, j, k and m

(a) The economic viability of the greyhound racing industry in New South Wales

There is no doubt that the costs involved with owning and/or training a racing greyhound have increased dramatically over recent years.

Food, veterinarian treatment, transport and general training expenses most times outweigh the return from prize money.

Whilst it would be nice to say that people who own greyhounds are happy to see them race for "ribbons" and "certificates", the economic reality is that owners and trainers not only like to "win races" but also see a viable return from prize money.

To purchase and rear a greyhound pup to commence racing at approx 18 months of age will set the owner back well over \$5000 and that calculation is on the conservative side. Prizemoney at NSW non Tab, Tab C and Tab B race meetings does not go anywhere near compensating for these costs.

On top of that, if you are not a registered trainer, you will in most cases pay out 50% of the prize money earned, plus \$50 - \$100 per week for a specialist trainer to condition, train and race the animal.

It is also extremely hard these days to get a draw with a poor performing greyhound (that the owners may wish to see race) and it may be necessary to travel many hundreds of kilometers for little return even if successful. So both trainer and owner lose out in that scenario.

It is for these reasons that many owners send their dogs to Victoria because the prize money returns are that much better than NSW.

(b) The financial performance and conduct of the industry and of Greyhound Racing NSW including a comparison to other states of Australia

GRNSW has not been able to compete with GRV in terms of financial performance. The reasons for this are many but in my opinion, there are three that essentially hamstring GRNSW in this regard.

Firstly, the Inter Code Agreement arising from the privatization of the TAB, not only greatly disadvantages GRNSW when compared to the GRV model, but also when compared to the distribution of monies to Racing NSW (Thoroughbreds) and Harness

Racing NSW from the same agreement. It is an extremely unfair agreement to GRNSW, given the performance of Greyhound racing when compared to the other codes.

Any appreciation of a "performance model" would recommend the immediate adoption of the summary findings of the Cameron Report of 2008, a review of wagering and the future sustainability of the NSW racing industry

"p 103. Recommendation 21: That the three racing codes should agree to amend the Inter – code Agreement so that returns to each code from TAB distributions are in proportion to the percentage of wagering generated by each code; in the absence of such agreement, that the Government should over-ride the Inter – code Agreement and the RDA such that distributions from the TAB are made directly to each code and in proportion to the percentage of wagering generated by each code."

Such a change would increase the returns from TABCorp to GRNSW by approximately \$14m per annum

Secondly, the lower wagering taxation from the state Government of Victoria greatly enhances racing overall within Victoria when compared to NSW, even though wagering on greyhound racing in NSW through TABCorp is much stronger than on the Victorian product.

The combination of a more favourable Inter – code agreement and the lower wagering taxation enables Victoria to receive greater levels of money for prize money distribution, administration challenges, track maintenance and welfare support.

Finally the geographic physical size of NSW and its distribution of greyhound tracks in a variety of far flung communities also increases the difficulty of GRNSW to perform financially well when compared to Victoria.

Clearly it is a difficult juggling act for GRNSW to satisfy the needs of all participants, however, the cost of running the GRNSW Administration and the increased staffing has undoubtedly increased dramatically over the last four years to record levels. This must be looked at.

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

This is an area where I believe GRNSW has performed very well, particularly with its increase in almost compulsory testing of all race winners.

The net outcome of this would appear to be a dramatic decrease in the use of performance enhancing drugs, at least as indicated by published results. A good indication is the increase in the number of trainers winning races at Wentworth Park. It is not that long ago, when Wentworth Park results were dominated by a small group of trainers and no one else got a look in.

The area of efficacy does need further investigation and study. Variations between Swab A and Swab B readings are not a good look for the Industry.

I believe the use of levels to be a good thing, however further scientific research is needed to classify outcomes.

(j) Sale and breeding of greyhounds including the market conditions and welfare of animals

I do not believe there is an issue with the sale and breeding of greyhounds. Market forces should be the determiner of demand and sale.

Whether we like it or not, greyhound racing (as with thoroughbreds and pacers/trotters) has moved to the position of “product”. I do not like the term, but it is the reality of the wagering industry demanding “product” to feature and compete with the gaming industry. Breeding today is a professional arena, based on a country location, with the back yard breeder being phased out due to council restrictions, neighbours and the general ageing of greyhound stalwarts in suburban areas.

Breeding is expensive, time consuming and offers little in terms of genuine financial return as it is often difficult to sell the pups.

The market for greyhound pups has greatly diminished over the latter years. Let the market be the arbiter.

Having observed many greyhound breeders and rearers over the last 45 years I do not believe the hype about welfare issues with breeding and rearing. It is not financially viable for anyone to behave in such a manner. It is hard enough to make a positive return on investment through breeding and rearing by industry best practice let alone subscribing to the antics promulgated by the welfare lobby.

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

In terms of kenneling and housing I believe that most practitioners provide excellent facilities for their greyhounds. Although greyhounds may be kenneled in facilities without a large yard, every trainer I know would let the dog out to “empty”, sun itself and generally stretch its legs at least 3 to 5 times per day.

For example in my own kennels, our dogs are exercised every morning and evening by free galloping, walking on lead or walking machine, and let out to roam on a grass lawn for up to 30mins between 1100 and 1200, and again around 1500. Further to this they are let out for a “pee” sometime between 2200 and 2400.

It appears that our greyhounds are so well fed and looked after, that many a friend has commented that next time around (if you believe in a next life), they'll come back as a greyhound.

I would suggest that GRNSW has good control of the greyhound housing policy from a welfare issue with a well establish Code of Practice that is available to all.

However in terms of racing welfare, I believe many issues need to be looked at.

These include:

- (1) track design and shape – as far as I know, no scientific nor engineering studies have been undertaken in Australia to determine the optimum track shape and design that would eliminate race day injuries. In an industry of this size there is no excuse for this not to happen.

- (2) the loss of straight track racing - with the cessation of racing at Appin, the opportunity to race those dogs who for whatever reason can not get around a corner, was lost seemingly forever. This decision also greatly impacts upon those older dogs whose racing life is extended by straight track racing; that to me is a serious welfare concern
- (3) Speed of track – especially during well promoted carnivals and big race events. Track operators seem to like extremely fast tracks that produce record breaking performances. Unfortunately this attitude is all too prevalent and results in a number of serious bone fractures often meaning that the animal will have to be “put down”.
- (4) Location of starting boxes – far too often these are located on a turn or the immediate approach to a turn. The result is that the dogs cram towards the rail fence, causing major interference and subsequent fall and injury.
- (5) Efficacy of lure driving – whilst this is under the control of the race day stewards, most misdemeanors are from the gambling and competitive angle not the welfare. A lure brought back to the field will cause the dogs to bunch up. This is a big problem when it occurs approaching a turn and often carnage results. We can do better.

(m) The adequacy and integrity of data collection in the industry, including the number of pups born, the number of dogs euthanized and injury rates, and

GRNSW and GRA probably have more extensive records of greyhound breeding and numbers bred than any other animal organization.

The greyhound is an ancient animal, used for hunting in the Egyptian period of long ago. Lt James Cook in his exploratory voyage to discover Australia and Captain Arthur Phillip in the arrival of the first fleet are recorded as having brought greyhounds with them.

As part of the hound group of dogs, greyhounds can have large litters, and whelpings of 7 – 10 pups are quite common. GRNSW ensures that all whelpings are recorded and the surviving pups marked (microchipped), ear branded and identified by about 12 weeks of age. This is a far more robust data collection than all other animal agencies.

It is a fact of life that in the first few weeks post whelping and during rearing a small number of pups die. The cause of death is often perplexing to the breeder, but is often the result of the bitch “knowing” that all is not well with a specific pup so she rejects it and it succumbs to lack of warmth and or food/sustenance.

I do not believe that anything would be gained by the data gathering of all such animal occurrences. I say this for two reasons; firstly, the deaths are probably unavoidable; perhaps hounds have large litters for this reason and secondly, data should only be collected when it is going to contribute to the general wealth of knowledge, not to take up room in a filing cabinet.

During and after a racing career, some animals are euthanized. If this occurs during a registered meeting this data is always recorded. If post race, perhaps due to location or financial circumstances that greyhounds are euthanized, then this is recorded by the Vet acting within GRNSW guidelines.

Whilst the figures produced by GRNSW may show a discrepancy between numbers racing and numbers whelped, it does not mean that they have all been euthanized. Many greyhound people, and I include myself and family in that category, retain our retirees as pets. They stay with us until they die of natural causes. (We currently have 4 at the

moment, one a 12 year old, one a 6 year old and two 4 years old who can't make up their minds if they want to be race dogs or couch lizards.)

I recognize that dogs like these are not recorded by any data base. They are not racing, nor currently registered on any trainers GRNSW listing. But they are alive and happy. A vast number of trainers with whom I am acquainted do similar things. It is vast over reaction to claim that the discrepancy in whelping to racing numbers means the "missing" animals are all dead.

Summation

I have had an ongoing involvement with the greyhound industry most of my life. During that time I have met many wonderful people who have a great love and appreciation of the greyhound dog. Most of them owned, raced and bred dogs. Some were interested in the money side, many weren't. However essentially all were very caring for their dogs and committed a vast amount of time and money to ensure their welfare.

All of them understood that greyhounds love to run, are keen to pursue anything that moves and delight in going racing. Ask any trainer what happens when you attach the trailer to the car. The dogs know, and they let you know.

Greyhounds are better cared for and attended to than most other species of animals I find it odd that constant reference is made by certain groups for the recording and tracking of greyhounds throughout their lives; and that the failure to provide same is unacceptable accounting.

I'd suggest that when all other forms of animal husbandry adopt such practices, then greyhound racing will.

Garry Comans