

INQUIRY INTO GREYHOUND RACING IN NSW

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

Dear Sirs and Mesdames,

INQUIRY INTO GREYHOUND RACING IN NEW SOUTH WALES

I live in Queensland and worked in a Greyhound breeding and spelling complex on a seasonal basis from 2002-2006, most of the time when the owners of the facility went away on holidays. I believe the Greyhound situation is much the same in each State and hasn't changed since that time, so would like to offer the following comments on the points you are reviewing:

- (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.*

It was my experience that the care given to the dogs on the 120 dog licenced property I worked on was just adequate under the "food, water, shelter" umbrella.

Bitches were spelled there following racing, waiting to come into heat for mating and be bred from. Over the time I worked there, several bitches were known to be hypothyroid and needed the veterinary equivalent of Thyroxine (Oroxine, Eutroxsig, a thyroid-hormone replacement medication). I take this medication myself. It needs to be kept refrigerated or at the very least a week's supply at a time stored below 25°C and discarded after four weeks as quickly loses efficacy. It needs to be given daily, at about the same time each day and is a lifelong medication. At this facility, the medication was stored in a holding cup on the door of each dog's pen, outdoors. In Summer, temperatures could reach the mid-40s. The medication was given haphazardly and discontinued after the first prescription was completed.

This facility had several dogs boarded at their owners' cost permanently after retirement from racing. Presumably these dogs were boarded until they died, serving out their term of life imprisonment in a bare pen with nothing to do. Usually they had a large yard (20m x 20m minimum) to themselves, occasionally they would share with another retired dog. These dogs were somewhat forgotten apart from the old "food, water, shelter" tick list – they were not being "watched" for season, they were not valuable racing dogs so not frequently observed for injury risk etc., they were not walked, brushed, washed, or given any other attention that domestic pet species usually have.

I know of at least one bitch – we (the other seasonal kennel hand and myself) called her "Nana" - whose teeth had all rotted away and infection had set into her upper palate to the point where she had a hole through it. Nana drooled bloody saliva constantly. She was still given bones to eat and she would walk around with them in her mouth growling at anyone who tried to take them away, but completely unable to eat them. She was unable to chew her food. Nana was quite obviously sick, dull, disinterested in anything but still well enough to feel hungry. Nobody had noticed and certainly nobody had brought it to our attention when we began that work cycle. When we realised what was wrong with Nana, we soaked her kibble in water and treated her with antibiotics. We discussed her situation with the vet over the telephone as we felt it would have been kinder for her to be put to sleep but as permission was required from the dog's actual owner (not us, nor the facility owners), there was nothing we could do, except bring the condition to the facility owners' attention when

they returned from holidays. We knew Nana's actual owner would not spend a fortune on corrective surgery and take her into his lounge room and look after her for her remaining days. We realised by raising the situation with the facility owner that we were condemning this dog's life, but Nana was suffering. Once the facility owners returned from holidays and we advised them, they were quite blasé about it, didn't see it as a problem, along the lines of *"she'll be right, she's just old"*.

This condition was NOT a condition of age, it was a condition of complete disregard for a dog's health. This was a chronic, long-term, slow-developing condition and Nana had been in **many** Greyhound facilities throughout the country in her life, it was not the responsibility nor the fault of one single person and to me, evidences a complete lack of knowledge of canine husbandry on the part of the industry as a whole. It was around this time that I stopped working at the facility. The other kennel hand told me Nana's general health picked up a bit after the antibiotic treatment but then she disappeared, presumably was shot and buried which was standard practice there although it never occurred when we were on the premises.

Once weaned, litters of puppies were separated from their dam and placed into yards by themselves. There they would stay until they were sold, some of them were there together until adulthood as often whole litters were bought by syndicates and just stayed together until they went off for "education". The yards were very large, bigger than the standard backyard, so the pups had lots of space, although in my opinion, the shelter sheds were never big enough for the bigger litters because there were always a couple of pups who would guard space and hunt the other pups away from the shade. The shelters may have been physically big enough for eight Greyhounds to lie down in if they'd all lie quietly alongside each other but they weren't that co-operative (dogs generally aren't)! As the shelters were in the centre of large open yards with very few trees, there were often pups or dogs that didn't have shade, or who went from one small shady patch to the next as the sun moved, all the while avoiding the bullies.

Unfortunately none of the dogs on the property were given any form of environmental enrichment. This meant that puppies made their own fun, usually digging holes, massive craters to lie in, little holes to find crickets. Making a moonscape of their pens due to "nothing else to do", created a danger for the dogs when they played chasing games and leg injuries were common. The other kennel hand and myself frequently provided the pups with things like empty soft drink bottles or cardboard rolls to chew and play with but this was discouraged as it encouraged the dogs to chase each other and injuries may have occurred. This would cost the dogs' owners money or the facility owner to lose the dogs as boarders and ultimately a leg injury in a young, unraced Greyhound is a death sentence. There were huge mounds of dirt outside many of the pens for the purpose of resurfacing the yards and filling in holes, but I cannot recall this ever being done while I was there, grass just grew over the mounds.

Due to lack of environmental enrichment, these litters of pups grew up guarding their food bowls, fighting with each other and killing any birdlife that happened to land in the pens – many times while cleaning up pens I would also scoop up Kookaburra and Magpie carcasses. The pens were not overcrowded and there was ample space but boredom does create delinquency and many dogs lost chunks of flesh from fighting with others and I witnessed

one dog with its gullet torn out. The wound was wide and flapping, extremely bloody and in my opinion required qualified veterinary attention, surgical repair and a drain inserted. A kennel hand who was new to the property applied first aid and the facility owner was happy with that. I don't know what happened to the dog.

- (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 euthanased and injury rates, and*
- (n) *Any other related matter.*

I do not believe any financial incentive is possible for reducing euthanasia rates. Once a dog has finished winning money or producing puppies, it has no further monetary value to the owner and is disposed of in the cheapest way possible.

At the facility I worked at, the owner told me himself that "good" dogs, i.e., dogs that had won their owners a lot of money and were retired, were shot and buried along the front fenceline. Dogs that weren't "good", i.e., dogs that couldn't run well, had an injury, etc., were shot and buried elsewhere, quite likely with the excrement.

Surely someone with an ounce of gratitude or genuine affection for these dogs – as all Greyhound owners, breeders and boarding facility operators claim they have – would do their utmost to find homes for dogs that helped them earn their livelihood rather than expecting **someone else** to financially reward them for not killing the dog? Why should a financial incentive be offered for something that should be a basic human action? They need to breed less dogs – that will create less dogs to euthanase or rehome and be cheaper for all involved!

At any one time I worked at this facility there was an average of 70 adult Greyhounds in residence. It was only the last time I worked there that there were a couple of dogs waiting to be adopted, being boarded at their owner's cost. Times are not changing quickly enough.

Laws for prosecution for animal mistreatment exist in every State and Territory in Australia but the problem is that nobody is watching this industry. There is no independent body visiting facilities and spot-checking the condition of animals, therefore no reporting or prosecution can take place. Staff (such as myself) working at these facilities, are not in a position to report these types of problems as time and again the old "food, water shelter" rule is presented to us, it becomes a deterrent to reporting as if one does report something, notification of inspection is given to the owners, a cursory inspection is carried out, the boxes are ticked and nothing changes for the dogs. It is too easy to move a Greyhound, in a sea of 70+ Greyhounds, to hide a particular dog with a problem, or for a dog to simply disappear. There are so many ways a dog can disappear, an imaginary snake can bite it, for instance.

A system needs to be put in place where independent inspections are carried out without notification, at the cost of the Greyhound Racing Industry. Inspections of facilities, large or small, should be carried out at least twice a year. What would work well is if, for instance

one inspection a year (and follow-ups from that inspection for compliance, as necessary) was carried out by staff **and** a veterinarian from the RSPCA and then the another inspection was carried out annually by staff **and** a veterinarian from AWL, this would leave the system open to scrutiny and the Greyhound industry is open to all. Every single puppy and dog on every single facility should be examined thoroughly, not for the owner's benefit as a bulk veterinary check-up, but for the overall health of the dogs and transparency of the industry. This is an opportunity for every dog to have it's microchip scanned or one inserted at the owner's cost if it doesn't not yet have one.

One thing that is not included in your list of things to review is the necessity for people involved in this industry to have some form of formal education in animal care, to be able to carry out a health check beyond being able to tell if a bitch is on heat, and to be able to care for dogs throughout their lives, including aging dogs, to be able to identify the signs of a dog in pain or illness, and to avail themselves of the use of a qualified veterinarian when necessary, and especially before the dog has no choice but to make a one-way trip.

In conclusion I would like to say that the family who owned the facility I worked out were a lovely, Church-going family who would readily give you the shirts off their backs if you needed them. However, they had no empathy towards the Greyhounds on the property and saw them only as, at best, income-producing livestock of monetary value, and at worst, bloody mongrels who barked all night. This is the attitude that needs to change – dogs of all kinds, and Greyhounds are dogs - feel pain and emotion, they need all their needs met, not just "food, water, shelter". I do not believe that conditions would be vastly different at other facilities in other States, I believe it is the standard and it needs to change.

I would suggest that as a group you go and visit some facilities of all shapes and sizes. Reading abstractly about a facility with 70 dogs is not the same as being there on a mid-Summer's day and feeling it. Don't give the owners much warning so they can do a big tidy-up, just go and spend a day, smell the food (very often it's rank), watch them at feed times, see how much aggression is shown (aggression is one sign of stress), go into the yards and spend time with the dogs, breathe in the dusty, faeces-laden air they spend all their days smelling. Listen to the frustrated barking and see the joyful dogs that are forced to live in these conditions because of this self-regulating, unmonitored "industry". Is this how you'd like your pet Labrador to spend his life? Should conditions be like this for a Greyhound just because it can run fast?

Yours faithfully,