

## **INQUIRY INTO GREYHOUND RACING IN NSW**

**Organisation:** Australian Veterinary Association

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# Inquiry into greyhound racing in New South Wales

## From the Australian Veterinary Association Ltd

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The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the national organisation representing veterinarians in Australia. Our 8000 members come from all fields within the veterinary profession. Clinical practitioners work with greyhounds, companion animals, horses, farm animals, and wildlife. Government veterinarians work with our animal health, public health and quarantine systems while other members work in industry for pharmaceutical and other commercial enterprises. We have members who work in research and teaching in a range of scientific disciplines. Veterinary students are also members of the Association.

### Recommendations

- A more **accurate and reliable database** is essential to support efforts to monitor and improve breeding practices, enhance animal welfare standards, and provide a longer healthier life for racing greyhounds. As not all greyhounds stay in one state throughout their lives, there needs to be a nationally accessible database to ensure tracking from birth to end of life. However, adoption and implementation of the Ozchase database system used by other states would be a valuable interim step towards a national database.
- More **veterinarians should be employed** by Greyhound Racing NSW as stewards and running animal welfare programs as is becoming more commonplace in other states. This would be a significant positive step towards improved animal welfare, better breeding and husbandry, and improved perceptions of integrity.
- The **phasing out of some race tracks** would make regulation and enforcement more manageable with limited resources.
- **Shortfalls in revenue** to Greyhound Racing NSW must be addressed for money to be available to improve the welfare of racing greyhounds immediately and in the future.
- Any additional financial support to Greyhound Racing NSW should be dependent on greater involvement of veterinarians in the industry and achieving other **key performance indicators**.

### (i) Drug administration and doping

Members have not raised concerns with the AVA about widespread illegal doping problems in greyhound racing in NSW. The level of positive samples in NSW is similar to those returned in other states.

However, the AVA believes that perceptions are reality in today's world of high-speed access to information and it's essential that the industry is perceived as having impeccable integrity as well as having it in reality. If doubts are expressed publicly by industry participants about doping, the public has cause for concern about the integrity of the industry and the transparency of the governing body.

## **(j) Sale and breeding of greyhounds**

The biggest problem with greyhound racing in Australia is that significantly more animals are born than will have a long, healthy career in racing leading to unacceptable wastage levels.

Some of the causes of dogs not going on to have a long career include pups injuring themselves on rearing farms or at breaking-in stage, and dogs not being able to show sufficient speed. Often these dogs are slow maturing dogs and if kept until 24 -30 months they may become competitive.

While greyhound adoption programs are very worthwhile, they currently only rehome a small percentage of available animals. Many greyhounds are not suitable for adoption due to a lack of early socialisation and the conditions in which they're kept in their early lives. Dogs with chronic physical, medical or behavioural problems (such as arthritis, Pannus and anxiety) are not suitable for rehoming programs, and euthanasia is the preferred option.

In New South Wales, rehoming rates are lower than other states. The program needs more resources, funding and greater veterinary input to increase the rates of greyhounds adopted as pets.

The long-term solution is to address every aspect of the animal's lifecycle to give each individual the best chance at a long and healthy life. An important component is to promote and encourage veterinary involvement at all life stages – advice on breeding choices, early socialisation, routine husbandry, healthy training practices, injury prevention and treatment, and humane euthanasia.

One strategy that has had an impact on breeding in Victoria was to establish a “responsible breeding program”. This has focussed attention on less responsible breeders, and is helping to raise breeding standards. Increasing stud fees for registered litters may also help to increase the quality and reduce the number of litters. The success of these strategies is reliant on much more effective data collection and tracking than currently exist in NSW (see comments below on data collection).

## **(k) Welfare of animals**

GRNSW does not allow racing unless an official track veterinarian is present, and this is an important step towards improving animal welfare. On race day, official track veterinarians should focus their attention on animal welfare matters, and integrity issues such as drug sample taking should be done by stewards or other “integrity officers”

Additional veterinarians employed by Greyhound Racing NSW on race days could provide veterinary services such as vaccinations and health checks for racing animals. This would be an opportunity to discussing breeding, rearing and training matters with owners and trainers.

New South Wales has a significantly larger number of racetracks than Victoria and other states, and this can mean that standards are harder to monitor and enforce, particularly at rural and regional tracks. Gradually reducing or consolidating the number of racetracks to a more manageable level would be helpful in spreading resources less thinly across the state.

## **(l) Euthanasia and mistreatment**

NSW is lagging behind some other states in regulation and enforcement, largely due to inadequate funding. Current funding arrangements limited to 13% of TAB wagering revenue hampers what can be spent on improving all aspects of racing. The AVA sees this as one of the largest barriers to improved animal welfare in the industry as the funds available for monitoring and enforcement are currently insufficient.

The national rule mandating humane euthanasia by a veterinarian was important progress towards higher animal welfare standards in greyhound racing. However, reports of owners and trainers flouting this rule are concerning. Unfortunately with inadequate reporting, monitoring and enforcement, the extent of possible contraventions to this rule is impossible to ascertain. Inadequate data collection and tracking is another major contributor to these welfare concerns.

### **(m) Data collection**

Victoria has an excellent data collection system called Fast track. South Australia, Western Australia, Queensland, Tasmania and the Northern Territory are developing another system called Ozchase. NSW is adopting Ozchase also, and this initiative must be properly funded to ensure that appropriate data is collected, analysed and used to enhance the welfare of greyhounds.

As not all greyhounds stay in one state throughout their lives, there needs to be a nationally accessible database. This is the only way the industry can begin to collate accurate data and truly track animals from birth to the end of life.

### **(n) Other related matters**

The high incidence of race day injuries like broken hocks is a concern for veterinarians. Tracking injury rates is another compelling reason why accurate and reliable data collection is essential to the improvement of animal welfare in the industry.