

INQUIRY INTO GREYHOUND RACING IN NSW

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Introduction

Sentient, The Veterinary Institute for Animal Ethics welcomes the opportunity to provide commentary on this NSW parliamentary inquiry into the greyhound racing industry.

In summary:

- Animal welfare is the most important issue currently facing the GH racing industry. We cite figures that up to 17,000 greyhounds are killed in Australia each year, as pups, due to injuries sustained during racing, or as surplus dogs at the end of their racing 'careers' – all in the name of entertainment (McEwan & Skandakumae, 2011).
- We encourage moves away from the greyhound racing industry, and note that it is banned in 6 states of North America and South Africa.
- The export of live greyhounds brings with it further welfare risks through transport and the lack of control over welfare standards in the import countries.

(d) The effectiveness of current industry regulation, including the level of autonomy of Greyhound Racing NSW

(g) The effectiveness of the current arrangements for, and role of, the Integrity Auditor of Greyhound Racing NSW

(h) The capability and performance of Greyhound Racing NSW and governance of the industry

The Greyhound Racing industry should not be self-regulated. The industry should be regulated by an independent body according to publically agreed principles having equal weight of influence from all of the different interest groups involved.

The Integrity Auditor must have stand-alone and independent statutory powers, and a broad charter associated with integrity assurance. They must be allowed to perform their duties in a matter of integrity, honesty and fair dealing by improved legislation.

Independent third party monitoring and enforcement is vital for effective governance of any regulations. This third party framework should include contribution to the development of industry standards, oversight of the auditing process, and sufficient regulatory power to act on any issues that arise.

Any overlap between the regulatory and promotional aspects of GRNSW operations should be minimised such that relationships between staff and industry participants are appropriate, and that conflicts of interests are properly identified and managed when they arise.

Similarly, Stewards' responsibilities should be demarcated such that any role in kennel inspections, and day-to-day care of animals should not conflict with roles in investigating and adjudicating animal cruelty offences. Greater industry

transparency is paramount particularly with regard to how the industry manages breaches of welfare-related racing Rules, the referral of possible cruelty offences, and the outcomes of those referrals. Stewards should receive formal training in animal welfare legislation and husbandry to enable efficient enactment of such roles.

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

Anti-doping regimes within greyhound racing are inadequate. Race officials need to be independent, and veterinarians should not be employed by the racetrack, as this risks compromising their independence. Tighter controls on pathology laboratories should also help to increase the integrity of the results. The frequency of spot testing should increase and the results stored on a reliable database for analysis by the Integrity Commissioner, government and the public.

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

While pups are bred for the benefit of commercial enterprise, consideration for their welfare and care will never be a top priority. Breeding occurs with little regard for science-based strategies or genetic technologies available to other animal production industries. This reduces the efficiency of achieving desired phenotypes, such as speed and high fecundity, resulting in gross wastage in the industry. Desired phenotypes and breeding parameters should be documented on a standardized scale that allows breeder to choose and compare animals thereby improving the efficiency of the breeding process.

However, as with all pure-bred dogs, selecting for phenotype often results in high rates of breed-specific disorders. For example, high incidences of cancers such as bone cancer (osteosarcoma) are seen in retired racing greyhounds more than any other breed which is possibly a genetic disposition but is also related to bone stress (Lord, L. K. et al, 2007). It has also been shown that hypertension is common in retired racing greyhounds, which may also be breed-related (Surman et al, 2012).

The welfare of breeding animals and pups could be significantly improved in NSW through implementation of recommendations outlined by the Responsible Breeding Task Force, Victoria, including that:

- Educational material be provided to all people involved in the breeding and sale of greyhounds. Information should include the costs involved when breeding a greyhound, decision-making in selection of animals for breeding, and considerations for whelping and rearing pups. This should be followed up by 'assessments of competency';

- Participants be provided with information in relation to success rates for categories of both sires and brood bitches to enable better selection for mating;
- Analytical data be provided in relation to breeding with a bitch that was not successful on the racetrack or unsuccessful in her first two litters;
- Racing rules be implemented whereby participants are not permitted to have their brood bitch that has already produced two litters, to be mated for a third occasion until the first litter of pups reaches the age of 18 months.

Greyhound owners must assume responsibility for careful rehoming of all healthy and temperament-sound dogs, and the industry must be mandated to fund and help with rehoming options.

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

The main welfare concerns with racing greyhounds include:

1. The overbreeding of greyhounds compared to the number that will be successfully used in racing;
2. The short working lives and early deaths due to unsuitability or injury;
3. The levels of injury and deaths in training and racing, including:
 - a) Large stresses are placed on greyhounds' limbs as they corner on the racetrack leaning left into the bend to counter the centrifugal force on their bodies; this 'cornering' potentially damages bone, muscle, tendons and ligaments, and makes limb fractures in greyhounds very common (Turner, J).
 - b) Fractures of the tarsus, carpus, metacarpi and metatarsi are common in racing greyhounds (Bloomberg & Dugger, 1996).
 - c) Carpi and metacarpi scintigraphy of racing greyhounds reveals many areas of increased bone remodeling, sometimes in the absence of radiographic signs of injury (Zuber et al, 1996).
 - d) Speed, race distance and track design were found to be significant factors that influence the injury rate of racing greyhounds (Sicard et al, 1999).
 - e) Common injuries during racing and training include acetabular fractures which are related to the tremendous repetitive stresses produced during running. Bilateral fractures were found to be associated with retraining between the occurrence of the first and second fractures, and microfractures have been found on the opposite side to the fracture site even in grossly normal acetabulums.
 - f) Racing subjects the GH to extreme physiological stresses (Turner, 2010).

4. The continuous production by the greyhounds racing industry of surplus or rejected animals that need to be rehomed by the public or destroyed (Turner, 2010.).
5. The breeding and management for behavioural characteristics that make the animals less suitable for 'second careers' or rehoming' (Turner, 2010).
6. A historical acceptance in the industry that injuries and deaths are a normal part of the sport (Turner, 2010).

As per the Responsible Breeding Task Force's recommendations, some solutions could include:

- Providing trainers with information on reliable, up-to-date training practices, dealing with training problems, and suitable rehabilitation for injured race dogs.
- Providing information to trainers about preparing a greyhound from breaking in to racing, as well as the rigours of racing.
- Ensuring trainers maintain relationships with greyhound veterinarians to assist with the detection and treatment of minor injury, which is very important in the prevention of more serious, and potentially career ending, injuries.

Areas to focus on for the prevention of injury are track design, race distance and speed, all found to be significant factors in the injury rate of racing greyhounds (Sicard et al, 1999).

Minimum standards of care should be developed in consultation with government and the public, and be enforced with oversight from an independent third party. Formal training in line with these standards should be provided, particularly with regards to breeding, rearing, training and competition.

The GRNSW Code of Practice for the keeping of greyhounds in training is encouraging but it is paramount that the number of kennel inspections of trainers' and breeders' facilities continues to increase so that those responsible for the keeping and care of greyhounds (of any age) are subject to independent, regular spot checks of their facilities.

The areas of practice requiring improved reporting standards in the public interest include (McEwan & Skandakumae, 2011):

1) Summary data on breaches of animal welfare related to the Rules of Racing and the penalties applied.

2) Codification of welfare offences under the Rules, as was suggested in the Scott Review for the NSW racing industry. As part of this, the Stewards' responsibilities would be limited to minor offences, which may mean that some welfare offences would be referred on at the outset.

3) Where other authorised officers have responsibility for referral of possible cruelty

offences to the RSPCA, regular publication of data as to the number and nature of those referrals.

GRNSW must ensure welfare rules and standards are enforced and penalties severe enough to send a clear message that the industry is serious about welfare.

Independent auditors should conduct regular, and spot, inspections of breeding establishments and trainer's facilities. Penalties for failing to provide adequate care should be appropriate to state's existing anti-cruelty penalties and harsh enough to encourage compliance. Depending on the severity of the offence, offenders should be prevented from continuing their participation in the industry.

(l) Financial incentives for reducing euthanasia and prosecutions for animal mistreatment

Alternative channels for ex-racing greyhounds should be pursued, such as the scheduling of 'veterans' and 'picnic' races.

Adoption levels must increase significantly, and funding for their development and advertising should come from industry. Prior to adoption, behaviour must be assessed by a qualified behaviourist in order to reduce the numbers that are euthanased.

Figures of the numbers of greyhounds euthanased by veterinarians must be kept for a minimum of five years and reasons for euthanasia given in order to track the efficacy of this proposal.

(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

There is no requirement at present to collect data and report on the number of greyhounds that are killed prior to being licensed. This is a significant short-falling of the industry as it is during these years that a lot of the young, healthy dogs are killed. If these dogs are brought into existence for the purposes of a specific industry, it is only right and reasonable that the regulations should take a life span approach (McEwan & Skandakumae, 2011).

All greyhounds must be microchipped and registered with local councils as either racing or companion greyhounds. All litters must also be microchipped and registered to enable tracing of pups, as above. This information must be stored on a national database such that greyhounds can be tracked over their life span and data collected regarding the number of young dogs killed before they start racing, dogs exported to Asian racing markets, euthanasia subsequent to injuries sustained on the track, and those euthanased when they are no longer useful for racing. The RSPCA and veterinarians involved in providing euthanasia services for the greyhound industry must report on the numbers of dogs euthanased each year and reasons for euthanasia for example, post-injury or 'retirement' (McEwan & Skandakumae, 2011).

Improving welfare standards across the industry is vitally important but this cannot be done without enforcements of these standards. Being able to trace an animal through its entire lifecycle is vital to help ensure compliance. This tracing should occur under the provision of a national database and used industry wide to ensure all greyhounds are accounted for (McEwan & Skandakumae, 2011).

References:

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