

**Submission
No 516**

INQUIRY INTO GREYHOUND RACING IN NSW

Name: Mr Sandro Bechini

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Public Enquiry into Greyhound Racing in NSW

Submission by:

Sandro Bechini

Bechini and Associates

Monday 4th November 2011

Dear Sirs/Madams

My name is Sandro Bechini. I am 52 years of age, a self employed CPA and run an accountancy practice in Lansvale NSW.

I am currently and owner and breeder of greyhounds and own between 10-20 greyhounds at any point in time.

I wish to increase my involvement in the sport in the coming years by being able to whelp my own litters and to pre-train my own greyhounds and have them professionally trained, hopefully in NSW.

My involvement in the sport commenced 42 years ago as my father was a bookmaker at Non-TAB Tracks and all the TAB Tracks and Wentworth Park.

I used to go to the races with him for the years he was bookmaking and that involvement fuelled my passion to be involved in the sport.

At 18 years of age I obtained an owner trainer's licence and was an owner/trainer through my University years and trained my fair share of winners, all from a suburban block of land.

Since my professional life began I have owned dozens of greyhounds and have managed to place most of them in suitable homes and kept a few as pets.

I will address each point of the review in order;

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

During my 42 years in the sport I have seen the sport in NSW dwindle from a robust competitive environment to basically an industry that is battling to improve its infrastructure and facilities for participants and prizemoney that is plainly not being able to keep up with the costs of providing greyhounds to race at the professional level that is required.

The industry's revenue base, emanating from the Intercode Agreement, has not provided an adequate model for the industry to provide for themselves i.e.

- 1. To quarantine funds for future growth and development in the industry**

2. To allow for rising costs of running the industry i.e. higher administration costs due to increases in governance costs
3. Provide an adequate return for participants in the industry in the form of prize money increases
4. To adequately compensate breeders for breeding quality greyhounds
5. To provide adequate funding for a vibrant welfare and rehoming program for our retired greyhounds or those not suitable for racing
6. To allow private investors to invest in the industry and expect an adequate return for their investment
7. To encourage younger generations to invest their time in the industry as active participants or to invest as passive participants due to the very low chance of recouping their investment, let alone make any profit from their investment
8. Inability to develop tracks as entertainment venues to attract patrons
9. Inability to allocate funds to advertise and showcase the sport to attract new patrons and hence new participants in the industry

The Intercode agreement, which I am sure has been addressed adequately by most of the submissions represents the return that the industry receives as its portion of contribution of the revenue allocated from the TAB.

The Greyhound Racing Industry receives 13% of the Revenue despite the industry generating over 20% of the Revenue earned by the TAB.

What this proves is that Greyhound Racing is a popular sport with the public from a punting perspective.

However, the industry is not generating its correct revenue from providing the meetings from which the NSW TAB profits from and from which the NSW Government receives revenue from its turnover tax.

This is by no means an attack on the Government or the other codes, but it is mentioned merely to highlight the inequity of the situation and the disastrous effects that the lack of revenue is having on the progress of Greyhound Racing in NSW.

The industry is getting smaller, as participants who have been loyal to the industry are moving out of it, mainly because of the industry's inability to provide adequate return to them.

Most of our premium greyhounds are leaving NSW because the prizemoney and training infrastructure in other States i.e Victoria, WA and Tasmania & even in New Zealand are providing better returns.

Our industry loses , by GRNSW estimates, something in the region of \$15million annually because it is not being paid its market share.

No industry, with the amount of capital expenditure required to maintain tracks & infrastructure, maintain & increase prizemoney returns to participants, reward breeders

for breeding of quality, provide proper welfare solutions for greyhounds and to maintain a robust administration centre cannot afford to lose revenue of this magnitude.

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

It seems to be doing a reasonable job in trying to spread the funds available to it across all the varying needs and projects that it has.

GRNSW does not enjoy the same benefits that, say the Victorian government provides to their counterparts, GRV (Greyhound Racing Victoria).

GRV's revenue streams are much higher than NSW as they are taxed favourably in relation to returning of Wagering Taxes back to the Racing Industry.

Victoria seems to look after Greyhound Racing; as well as all of its Racing codes because of its commitment to return these taxes to the whole of the racing industry.

Victoria has a Premier who realizes what value Greyhound Racing is to their economy and fabric of life

From Racing Victoria's 2013 Annual Report:

"The Victorian Coalition Government is a strong supporter of greyhound racing and it's great to see the sport thriving," Dr Napthine said.

"Greyhound racing is enjoying a tremendous resurgence with more people than ever discovering its appeal, including some of the biggest modern day crowds at feature race meetings in Melbourne and regional Victoria.

"The greyhound racing industry is also a major contributor to the Victorian economy providing more than more than \$200 million in annual economic benefits and 2,000 jobs across the state," Dr Napthine said.

The GRV Annual Report highlights a number of significant achievements during 2012-13 including:

- revenue increasing by \$15.8 million resulting in a healthy profit of \$8.6 million;
- opening of the \$3.2 million Coalition Government/GRV funded redeveloped track and patron facilities at Morshead Park, Ballarat;
- an additional \$2.66 million over the next three years for animal welfare measures. This includes an additional \$1.035 million for the successful Greyhound Adoption Program (GAP) and adds to the Coalition Government's \$1 million four-year commitment to GAP;
- a 24.3 per cent increase in prize money and bonuses to a record \$37.8 million;
- on track attendance increasing by 11.3 per cent; and
- the introduction of the first ever Ready to Race Sale held at Lords Raceway, Bendigo on 24 November 2012

GRV has indicated, following its positive financial returns, that \$9 million will be added to its Infrastructure Reserve Fund. This will allow for infrastructure upgrades to be brought forward with assistance from the Coalition Government's Victorian Racing Industry Fund.

Dr Napthine said GRV and industry participants should be particularly congratulated for their ongoing commitment to the broader community.

I believe that our administration has lost touch with its participants.

When does our Administration ever consult their participants to ask them how things could be improved:

From GRV Website 23rd October 2013

REMINDER - CONSULTATION SESSIONS BEGIN TODAY

As part of Greyhound Racing Victoria's strategic planning process, important regional consultation sessions will be held with participants given the opportunity to discuss various matters that will help guide the industry over the next five years.

GRV has engaged an objective external company to assist with the development of the new five year strategic plan and one of the main sources of information for the plan will be derived from these sessions.

It is an opportunity for those within the industry to share their ideas about what would help the industry to continue to develop in all aspects, making the sessions vitally important to the development of greyhound racing in Victoria.

Please take the time to attend one of the three below meetings:

Warragul: Monday 28 October (7:00pm – 10:00pm)

The Meadows: Tuesday 29 October (7:00pm – 10:00pm)

Ballarat: Thursday 31 October (7:00pm – 10:00pm)

From GRV Website 4 September 2013

COURSING A KEY TO ANIMAL WELFARE VISION

Coursing is as rustic and traditional as greyhound racing gets.

Once upon a time the Waterloo Cup was the biggest race on the Australian greyhound circuit.

Thousands would get to the track for the event - which was bigger than today's Melbourne Cup, Australian Cup and Topgun combined.

For a small band of dedicated greyhound folk, the coursing season (run during the winter months) provides a trip back in time to a place where life was far less complicated, less time-pressured and people were more accommodating, social and laid back.

Fortunately, for the National Coursing Association of Victoria, one of its staunchest fans is the Premier of Victoria and Minister for Racing, Dr. Denis Napthine.

"It was so great that Denis Napthine came along to the Waterloo Cup," said NCA Secretary, Carolyn Mills.

"He loves the family connection of coursing, because he knows about it first-hand."

"Denis' grandfather or great grandfather was involved in coursing and won a Werribee Cup, which Denis is eagerly trying to prize from his brother," she laughed.

The presence of Dr. Napthine along with several Greyhound Racing Victoria board members at Sunday's 140th running of the Waterloo Cup was a huge boost for coursing.

"Denis Napthine loves the family connection of coursing, because he knows about it first-hand" - CAROLYN MILLS

Among the benefits of coursing is that it provides an avenue for trainers to prolong the careers of racing greyhounds, which ties in perfectly with GRV's number one priority – animal welfare.

However, there is no question that coursing needs support from more trainers, and Mills' passion stems from her firm belief that it is important for the industry.

"There's no question that greyhound racing would survive without coursing, but its importance from an animal welfare perspective can't be underestimated."

"It provides a racing option for greyhounds that aren't suited to racing on circle shaped tracks."

"Sure they can race at Healesville (Victoria's only straight TAB track), but once they go up in grade there coursing is the only other option."

"It is also an incredibly good preparation for young pups because it builds their confidence, and it makes race dogs chase harder."

"I grew up in coursing and used to camp in tents and, while there is a lot more money in TAB racing (the Waterloo Cup has a first prize of \$10,000), everyone is on an even keel in coursing."

"We were rapt with the crowd that attended the Waterloo Cup. We advertised in local papers which prompted a lot of new faces to come along, including many newcomers to greyhound racing."

(c) Government initiatives and assistance measures to support the industry and comparison of assistance to other racing codes

As mentioned above in the Annual report the Premier in Victoria has fully supported the building of new tracks and provisioned for vital infrastructure in Greyhound Racing

He makes himself available to the leaders in the Greyhound Industry to seek out how he can better their sport and make it more attractive to invest in

The Victorian Government assists the Greyhound Industry by ensuring that funds are made available from the Wagering Taxes that they receive to ensure that the Industry can remain viable, be vibrant and grow.

It recognizes its value to their economy and also recognize that it is a fast growing sport and that by increasing their investment in the industry with public funds, that they will receive a very good return on their investment, via higher wagering taxes and the flow on benefits to each region that has a greyhound track by way of employment, tourism, services to the track etc

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

The autonomy of the Board seems to be separated from the Management of the Industry.

However, I do feel that their inability to release major items like the Five Year Strategic Plan due in 2013 shows that Board is not really acceptable

It is the concept of many people in the Industry that the Board is inactive and unresponsive to the needs of its participants.

I feel that GRNSW should be trying to ensure that tracks in each Region is run by a Regional Club accountable to it rather than a huge amount of power given to one body with multiple tracks in several regions.

(e) The selection process for the board of Greyhound Racing NSW

I think that the Board of NSW should have professional people on it from all walks of life, including successful business people.

However, I also think that the people on the GRNSW Board should have a strong understanding of Greyhound Racing and be prepared to be available to open discussion with industry participants at formal structured meetings i.e. greyhound tracks

They should be prepared to listen to the concerns of all participants of the sport and try and be responsive to their needs.

(f) The effectiveness and accountability of the board and management of Greyhound Racing NSW

As per (d) & (e)

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

I think that the Integrity Auditor should be given far wider powers to investigate misdemeanours and allegations of such matters as animal cruelty, drug use and criminal activity within the industry.

I feel that the Integrity Auditor's role should be one where participants can lodge concerns about such matters to him directly and where the roles and actions of Stewards and their decisions can be reviewed and recommendations for change as deemed necessary

The Integrity Auditor should also have some power to effect these changes

With the current set of powers, the Integrity Auditor is basically a 'toothless tiger'

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

As per (d) and (e)

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

I believe GRNW has the highest rate of drug testing of all the States in NSW. It manages to do this with very limited resources and has a good record in its findings.

However, over the last few years there have been isolated cases where there has been severe inaction over some cases and this has proven to be a poor image for the Sport.

However, it now appears that GRNSW has embarked on a path to be more strict with serial drug cheats and I feel that it should be applying these penalties to the ir greatest extent to ensure that this element is out of the industry.

This will provide greater confidence to those participants who do race their dogs without drug use.

However, there needs to be a commonsense approach to review the use of therapeutical drugs and also further research done to ensure that the level of testosterone for bitches to keep them off season and racing for longer is reviewed and adequate going forward.

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

NSW is historically the largest breeding state in Australia.

It supports the rest of Australia with greyhounds and its success is vital to the racing industries around the country and overseas.

Historically, NSW used to have strong prizemoney and selling of dogs to other states were dogs that were not capable of winning in Sydney

Now, those dogs ar emoving to states such as Victoria and WA

The racing numbers in NSW are starting to dwindle as participants either sell the dogs to bolster their returns or race their dogs in other states for the same reason.

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

This has improved over the last few years but it is nowhere near where it should be.

Again lack of funds for this purpose is the key to rehoming greyhounds.

The more resources available the more effort can be made to promote the greyhound as a lovable family pet.

Where else could a family received a well looked after animal that has had the best of care and is trained to be friendly and adaptable to human beings?

There are tremendous marketing options for greyhounds if the funds were available.

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

No comment

(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

No comment

Regards

Sandro Bechini