

Submission
No 42

INQUIRY INTO GREYHOUND WELFARE AND INTEGRITY COMMISSION

Name: Mr Warren Absalom

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I would like to concentrate on the following issues. Most relate to item (f).

Water Hydration Policy

This policy is one put in place by GRNSW when it had control of the regulatory functions. It is not a policy that is in place in any other state in Australia. Experienced greyhound vets expressed concerns relating to the increased risk of twisted bowels which can lead to a very painful death and greyhounds sustaining injuries by pulling at the bowls. Nevertheless, the vets concerns were ignored and greyhounds have died, become very or suffered injuries as a result.

GWIC have taken over the policy and are currently undertaking a study of a very small number of greyhounds. To date they have not released any results and we are not aware of where the study is leading. The majority of greyhound participants would like to see the policy as non-mandatory at least while studies are undertaken.

My main complaint about this policy is the action taken against my daughter by GRNSW. They refused many requests for an exemption even though they were aware that the greyhound had injured her metacarpal on the metal bowl. She was charged, found guilty, penalised, lost her appeal. She had nowhere to go if she wanted to race in New South Wales except to the Supreme Court. It meant long trips to Melbourne on the weekend to race at the Meadows where the policy is not in place. My daughter went to the Supreme Court and lost the case when GRNSW argued that animal welfare was not their responsibility and if a greyhound was harmed by one of its policies then it was the trainer's obligation not to nominate for the race. At that time the GRNSW Board Code of Conduct include a clause whereby they had to have regard to animal welfare. Also at the same time it came to light that there were trainers who were given exemptions for their greyhounds not to have to use the water bowl. We could never understand why, when my daughter's greyhound suffered an injury, that she did not receive an exemption for her greyhound even though she had made numerous requests. Could it be that she is a female? It was a very expensive exercise. After GWIC took over the regulatory function her greyhound was allowed to use a non-spillable plastic bowl but even this did not work and the greyhound was given an exemption.

This is an example of the peak bodies using their powers to run roughshod over participants and ignoring veterinary advice leading to a bad outcome for greyhounds.

Short Course Racing

Some years ago GRNSW introduced a prizemoney schedule which rewarded owners and trainers for racing their greyhounds over longer distances. This took into account, among other things, that greyhounds raced less often and undertook a proper training and fitness regime. Short course racing was usually for greyhounds of less ability and restricted to country racing. There are three distance categories for greyhounds. These are short, sprint and staying distances. Last year GRNSW changed the structure by increasing the prizemoney for most short course races to that of the sprint races while decreasing some staying races. These related to provincial meetings. The reason given was that it costs the same to feed a greyhound that races a short distance as it does to feed a greyhound that races over a staying distance. The argument did not take into account the additional costs in keeping a

stayer fit and the less prizemoney available to the connections of greyhounds racing a longer distance because they race less often. As a result, there has been a proliferation of short course racing and a steep decline in both sprint and distance racing. In fact, the staying races of 700m and more are almost totally conducted at the main track meaning those greyhounds with less early speed but with stamina are not viable in New South Wales. I would like to see a study undertaken on the animal welfare aspects of greyhounds racing over the short course more often instead of being under a training regime with variety of activities racing less often over the sprint and staying distances.

Bend Starts

It is my understanding that in the UTS Study it was found that bend starts were a cause of interference and GRNSW should look at straight track racing. The proliferation of short course racing has meant more racing from bend start, not less. To date there has been no public announcement on where or when New South Wales will have a straight track. In addition, tracks such as Bulli have introduced an additional shorter course race on what trainers consider to be a bend start. GRNSW is encouraging more of these races from unsafe starts contrary to the UTS report. Are GRNSW really concerned about animal welfare or is it all talk?

Appeal Process

My concern with the Appeals Tribunal is that it is funded by the Racing Bodies which gives the appearance of not being independent. This is not to say that those who sit on the tribunal favour the racing body over the participant but rather the perception could be there. It would be better if it was funded from another source.

Peak Body Costs

During my time involved with greyhounds, the industry purchased a building for the peak body. When the regulatory functions for greyhounds and harness were combined the greyhound building was sold and the regulatory body worked out of the harness building. When the greyhound regulatory functions went back to GRNSW, that body received a sum of money as its share of the harness building. The money was used, or so we were told, for a computer system. The industry is now funding the rental and associated costs for two peak bodies. Although GRNSW lost its regulatory functions and associated staff it moved from its premises at Rhodes to premises at Oxford St in the Sydney CBD at an increased cost. This does not seem like a prudent use of industry funds. I would like to see, if possible, for the peak bodies to be housed on the site of the premier track.