

Submission
No 71

**INQUIRY INTO GREYHOUND WELFARE AND
INTEGRITY COMMISSION**

Name: Ms Gail Thorsby

Date Received: 1 February 2021

Partially
Confidential

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Written responses published by resolution of the committee 5 May 2021
are hyperlinked below:

- [Ms Judith Lind](#)
- [Dr Michelle Ledger, GWIC](#)
- [Mr Steve Griffin, GWIC](#)

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Submission Gail Thorsby

I write this submission as the former Chief Steward of the Greyhound Welfare Integrity Commission (GWIC). I was in that position from November 2018 until July 2020.

In my 21 years working within the industry, I have participated in and witnessed various approaches to the regulation of compliance within the sport.

However, there are significant problems with respect to the manner GWIC has approached the overall regulation of welfare and integrity within the industry.

It was the culmination of these problems and the bullying & harassment I was subjected to which led to my early retirement.

GWIC's Recruitment Strategy & Industry Inexperience

The following fundamental basic issues arose from the commencement of GWIC:

- In June 2018. Stewards were interviewed by the Senior Legal Advisor & Inexperienced HR.
They were selected without the engagement or input of a Chief Steward being in place. Common practice is for the Chief Steward to participate and advise throughout this phase as they are best placed to judge the prospective candidates.
- Upon commencement in July 2018 the "Steward Team" were employed under the Crown Employees Award, working a 35hour week Monday to Friday.
No operational contingencies were put in place to cover weekend work or additional hours of work.
Upon my engagement I was informed by several stewards that during an induction session the question was asked "what happens after I have worked 35 hours a week", the response was that you can go home. I could not believe what I was hearing as this was not practically plausible as the Steward had to remain on the racetrack until the conclusion of their duties well after the last race.
- GWIC's lack of insight in applying the Crown Employees Award to the role of a Steward within the industry, resulted in numerous workplace industrial and safety issues.

Some of these include:

Travel/Fatigue Issues

Employees upon initial engagement directed to supplement their normal hours of work with up to 5hrs travel per day, with the travel component being paid at of ordinary rate of pay. No risk assessment or fatigue policy was in place to mitigate any WHS concerns from the employees. Some aspects of this issue remained until my departure.

Administration/HR Issues

The Human Resources and payroll system does not accurately reflect the hours worked. The SAP system does not match work/rosters/travel or engagement rates of pay. Effectively, it does not cater for hours worked and does not allow people to put in time after midnight. This inevitably means that there are hours not accounted for, continual ongoing errors in payslips.

In July 2018, the CEO of GWIC oversaw and met with OzChase team offsite.

The CEO arranged for the development of a OneGov system.

Two years later the system is not able to be used effectively.

Due to the system's short fallings, it required Stewards entering information into both systems for a period time.

If the CEO and executive team had genuinely consulted the "Steward Team", it would have provided integral insight to operational needs and led to considerable savings rather than the considerable cost that was incurred.

Authority & Treatment of the Stewards

In my 21years of experience within the industry, a Vet's role predominately involved matters pertaining to the direct diagnosis, treatment and welfare of a greyhound. Vet's other indicative duty is of an advisory basis to Stewards on matters pertaining to the welfare of greyhounds which related to the role of a Steward.

During my tenure with GWIC, the role and authority of both the Chief Vet and OTVs are contrary to my understanding. They are also contrary to all other jurisdictions throughout Australia. This approach to the authority was initiated and supported by the CEO Judy Lind.

Under GWIC's structure of authority, effectively Vets have an ability to override Steward's decisions relating to a Steward's role.

Decisions under the auspices of the role of a Steward need to be made by a Steward.

Examples include:

- Unprofessional conduct from Vets regarding pressuring Stewards to change race day reports.
- Vets directing Stewards to nominate which dog would be vetted, when the vet had not even watched the race.

To compound matters further, the Chief Vet and a vast majority of the Vets have little or no knowledge of the greyhound industry or the rules.

Often this inexperience has led to decisions that are against the interests of animal welfare. For example, a greyhound at The Gardens racetrack, for whom it is in the interests to euthanise often having this process delayed.

There has been a culture of Vets treating Stewards in a demeaning manner. The culture of in fighting between them is significant. This includes instances of bullying and harassment of stewards.

Furthermore, Stewards are often the subject of unfounded allegations. They are in a position where they have to demonstrate their innocence. The presumption of innocence does not apply to them.

GWIC's approach to this issue has not only undermined the role of the Chief Steward & Steward in undertaking their core duties but compromised accountability measures within these roles.

GWIC Bullying & Harassment Culture

From the point of my engagement with GWIC, then CEO Judy Lind made it perfectly clear that I was to be answerable to both her and the Chief Vet Michelle Ledger. I recall a comment to me from Mrs Lind early on, "You will do what we (Michelle Ledger) want you to do". She was referring to them deciding on what my role involved instead of what industry best practice were.

GWIC's executive structure included CEO, Director, Senior Legal Advisor and Chief Vet.

It is an accepted principle throughout other jurisdictions within Australia that both the Chief Vet & Chief Steward are of an equal authority within the regulatory body.

For a period of approximately 18 months I experienced a combination of belittling and demeaning comments, segregation and aggressive unfair email correspondence from both Judy and Michelle.

I also experienced bullying in relation to the continual day to day authority of the management of my Stewards.

One particular example

Three of my staff witnessed a disturbing incident at The Gardens racetrack whereby a Vet they believed unreasonably delayed the euthanising of a fatally injured greyhound. My staff immediately reported the details of the incident to me, they explained that the public and race club staff who witnessed the incident were appalled with the management of the injury.

The next day I sent an email to CEO, Chief Vet and Chief Legal Advisor informing them of the extent and seriousness of the incident and potential implications.

I received an aggressive reply email from Judy Lind implying that I was undermining other GWIC staff. I replied explaining that my correspondence had good intentions in the form of a heads up in the case other parties contacted her about the matter.

Around June 2020, Chief Vet Michelle Ledger circulated email correspondence to Senior Legal Advisor Matthew Tutt proposing changes to policy and practices relating to the role of Stewards under my management. The email was later forwarded to me as an afterthought. This was typical of the overarching segregating bullying treatment I had suffered for over 2 years.

These two more recent examples of the bullying and harassment I had received led to me submitting my resignation.

I did have plans to further develop the skills and industry knowledge of my "Stewards Panel" members for a further 6 months, however the relationship had become untenable.

After submitting my resignation with dignity without wanting to ruffle any feathers I attended a meeting with Steve Griffin, Matthew Tutt and (HR) and (AWU Support Person). The purpose of this meeting was to specifically discuss internal/external third-party reports of bullying harassment that I had been subjected to.

See attached meeting minutes.

From the minutes of this meeting, it is very clear that I had significant concerns about the way I was treated.

Steve Griffin informed me that there would be a formal investigation into my bullying & harassment allegations.

After the meeting I had a Skype meeting with Commissioner Alan Brown.

In that meeting I made it very clear to him that I believed that the Stewards had not been supported and that I personally had been bullied & harassed on numerous occasions. I also sent Mr Brown examples of email correspondence which demonstrated examples of bullying & harassment.

To this day I am unaware of any investigation conducted regarding my allegations of bullying & harassment.

Upon reflection I would have reported the many instances of mistreatment, bullying & harassment, however I really did not believe that I had the support or avenues to lodge such a complaint.

Restructure

After spending significant amounts of money on 4 internal reports, one significant recommendation in relation to the manning of Stewards on race day advised that 3 Stewards was an appropriate number. It stated that 2 Stewards on track was "unworkable". The "Murrihy Report" specifically advised against an alternative "Bunker" type system whereby 2 Stewards attended the race day in person with 1 Steward observed and assisted from an offsite control room.

GWIC's executive team chose to ignore this expensive reputable recommendation and implement the "Bunker" system.

This system is extremely problematic as with less resources on the ground it has compromised the enforcement of race day compliance of rules.

Furthermore, the third Steward allocated to the offsite role is located at home with access to Foxtel facilities like anyone else.

NSW greyhound industry has become the laughingstock of the country in respect to this aspect of Stewardship.

The decentralisation of the industry which involves the shutting down of certain racetracks creating fewer racetrack hubs throughout NSW.

This will create significant issues in relation to circumstances where Stewards have to travel long distances, there is every chance that something may go wrong for one of them or both of them may not be able to attend. This would put the race day in jeopardy and create implications to participants.

Other Information

Since my departure I remain regularly in contact with many of my ex GWIC Steward colleagues. The reliable information I have received is contrary to the "Murrihy" report and problematic.

My initial replacement lasted a month of the dictatorship and resigned,

The position remains vacant, creating a crucial integrity & compliance industry experience void. The "Steward Panel" are currently being managed by Senior Legal Advisor & Acting CEO. I was in the midst of implementing a comprehensive education & training program focusing on much needed conflict resolution and interview procedures.

Upon commencement GWIC stated there would be 20 fulltime Stewards and 6 fulltime Cadets engaged.

During my employment, the numbers only ever reached 13 fulltime Stewards and no Cadets. A key recommendation of the "Murrihy" report was to introduce a "cadet" program with training which required added resources.

To my knowledge, no resources has been added to the "Steward Panel" since I commenced employment with GWIC.

Summary

The reasons for my early retirement were due to the matters that I have raised in this submission. This was denied by the CEO of GWIC on the Ray Hadley show. My purpose in making these submissions is to make the public and decision makers know the situation so that hopefully it can be fixed.

I care deeply about greyhound racing but I worry for the future of the industry if these problems are not fixed. For this Industry to prosper stakeholders need to have confidence in the decision makers that their Industry is managed in the highest regard. With my experience of being a former Chief Steward in Queensland and the knowledge I have gained within the Industry unfortunately had no weight with GWIC.

Over the latter months of employment as Chief Steward I was left out of committee meetings I would have contributed valuable information to.

In my time as Chief Steward I had a panel of Stewards that respected my leadership and became very distressed with my resignation.

My choice to tend my resignation was a very sad day for me as I knew my voice and experience was being ignored yet my knowledge had been taken from me by others.