

**REPORT ON PROCEEDINGS BEFORE**

**SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE GREYHOUND WELFARE  
AND INTEGRITY COMMISSION**

**CORRECTED**

**At Fort Scratchley, Newcastle East on Thursday 27 May 2021**

**The Committee met at 1:01 pm**

**PRESENT**

The Hon. Robert Borsak (Chair)

The Hon. Lou Amato  
Ms Abigail Boyd (Deputy Chair)  
The Hon. Wes Fang  
The Hon. Sam Farraway  
The Hon. Mark Latham  
The Hon. Mark Pearson

**PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE**

The Hon. Anthony D'Adam



**The CHAIR:** Welcome to the second hearing of the Select Committee on the Greyhound Welfare and Integrity Commission's Inquiry into the Greyhound Welfare and Integrity Commission [GWIC]. This inquiry was established to examine the operation of the Greyhound Welfare and Integrity Commission, in particular its policies, procedures and mechanisms, and overarching principles in relation to industry participants. The inquiry will also look at issues such as the appropriateness of disciplinary action and options for appeal; the relationship between the commission, Greyhound Racing NSW and industry participants; current funding arrangements; and the commission's role in improving the welfare of greyhounds. Before I commence, I acknowledge the Awabakal and the Worimi people who are the traditional custodians of this land. I also pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging, and extend that respect to other Aboriginals present.

Today is the first of four regional hearings that the Committee is conducting for this inquiry. Today in Newcastle we will be hearing from a number of greyhound owners, breeders and trainers. Tomorrow we will conduct a hearing in Bathurst and hear from representatives of GWIC and others. Next week we will travel to Temora and Goulburn, and we will finish our hearings at Wentworth Park racetrack. Before we commence, I make some brief comments about the procedures for today's hearing. Today's hearing is being broadcast live via the Parliament's website. A transcript will be placed on the Committee's website when it becomes available. In accordance with the broadcast guidelines, media representatives are reminded that they must take responsibility for what they publish about the Committee's proceedings.

While parliamentary privilege applies to witnesses giving evidence throughout the inquiry, it does not apply to what witnesses say outside of this evidence at this hearing. I therefore urge witnesses to be careful about comments they may make to the media or to others after they complete their evidence. Committee hearings are not intended to be a forum for people to make adverse reflections about others under the protection of parliamentary privilege. In that regard, it is important that witnesses focus on the issues raised by the inquiry terms of reference and avoid naming individuals unnecessarily. I also remind members of the media here today that while comments made during this hearing are protected by privilege, this may not extend to reporting potentially defamatory comments. All witnesses have the right to procedural fairness according to the procedural fairness resolution adopted by the House in 2018.

If witnesses are unable to answer a question and want more time to respond, they may take a question on notice. Written answers to questions taken on notice are to be provided within 21 days. Following the public hearing will be a public forum. We have a few time slots still available for speakers, so anyone who has not registered and would like to take part in the public forum, please see our Committee staff. In terms of the audibility of the hearing today, I remind Committee members and witnesses to speak clearly and into the microphones. Finally, could everyone please turn their mobile phones to silent for the duration of the hearing.

**DAVID JOHN IRWIN**, Private citizen and greyhound trainer, affirmed and examined.

**The CHAIR:** Would you like to start by making a short opening statement of perhaps no more than a few minutes?

**Mr IRWIN:** Right. We will kick off here with: I believe that GWIC has to be abolished, not from opinion but from the facts. No organisation can be successful with inexperienced people controlling something they know very little about. The Government-appointed boards always struggle to be successful in this type of environment. The facts show that GWIC has failed in its endeavours and one reason for this is that the appointees have failed to recognise the difference between canines and canine athletes. There is a very big difference. Every policy and rule that has been made by GWIC and its committees have failed to realise this about the difference between these animals.

The cost of the two bodies is not financially viable because of the existing agreements in place. The agreements do not reflect the true market share being given back to greyhound racing, but that is another point. On welfare, the breakdown of the welfare in greyhound racing shows that the improvements in this are because of Greyhound Racing NSW, not GWIC. Greyhound Racing NSW controls the rehoming, track safety, maintenance and upgrades. GWIC controls tracing the greyhounds' lifespan, kennel inspections, licensing, vets and, as you will see in this documentation that I have here to give you, the facts pertain to GWIC's failings. Do you want me to hand these out now?

**The CHAIR:** Pass them up, yes.

**Mr IRWIN:** GWIC's bullying, stand over and arrogant behaviour has caused a very toxic environment amongst licensees and even stewards and other workers under GWIC's auspices. The vets are a very contentious issue. This is a specialist industry. In real life, with doctors, they go and do their university degree and get their doctorate and for them to become a specialist, they have to do three or four years under a specialist. Greyhound vets that are employed now have given us the worst standard of welfare because of their inability of the chief vet to implement a specialised program. The misdiagnosis of injuries and the treatment of injuries—which I will talk about through that documentation I have given you—are just some of the reasons why there is a failing there.

The office staff at GWIC are sadly lacking in accountability, knowledge and service. I have never seen anything so disgraceful as to try to get some information from the GWIC office. For things that you need for the running of your training and things off stewards that have got to be found out pretty well immediately, the response will be, "I'll take what you want. I'll give it to the respective person and they'll get back to you." Two or three days later they get back to you—sometimes never. The documentation will prove that. The inspectors that the GWIC have employed are arrogant. Their lack of knowledge and standover tactics are just unbelievable the way they carry on. There is documentation there to prove that as well. Possibly lastly, the deplorable treatment of Gail Thorsby, our chief steward, was something to be forgotten about entirely.

Gail was well respected by all licensees, stewards and officials not only in New South Wales but Australia-wide. She was a person of her word. She was not a backbiter. She would speak to you and what she said was gospel. She was fair and impartial to everyone, friends included and even others. She was a problem-solver. She probably sold more problems for the GWIC staff than they have. She ruled with honour, integrity, compassion and correctness and it is sad to see how she was dealt with. These facts are not opinion and they must not be overlooked but assuming GWIC, as everyone says, believe the science. The science in this case is the facts and to say that GWIC has failed us miserably is quite true. GWIC seems to want to assassinate this industry, not improve it. The legislation has suggested that they work in tandem with Greyhound Racing NSW to better this industry. Thanks very much.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Questions? Just before we start, this handout that we just got, we have already resolved that these documents will remain confidential, so please do not go quoting directly from them.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Yes. Great. Thank you, Mr Irwin. I just want to pick up on one of the comments he made about GWIC conflating the idea of canines with canine athletes. Can you explain that? Is that just in relation to the vets not understanding and having that specialisation around a greyhound who is a racing dog, or is it broader than that?

**Mr IRWIN:** It is beyond that. It actually starts from the committees appointed by the Government to introduce new rules and codes of practice. If you have a look at the code of practice that they have just brought in, it relates to canines. Nearly every second or third question, statement or rule relates to giving a dog a toy to fix all the problems. You see, these greyhounds are bred to race. Even though there are a happy dog, but when they are racing they need to concentrate on the fact that they have got to race. It has made it so much harder with all

these, how would you put it, furry, fluffy squeakers for them to trace. If you have a look at the last item I gave you of Dr Peter Yore, he will mention in the second page, I think, what a greyhound actually is and why these things—now we are not advocating for live bleeding; there is no way in the world we want to go back to that—but, as he states, a lot of dogs will not chase synthetic furs. You see, they were bred—they came out with Captain Cook on the First Fleet. Was it the Cook fleet?

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Arthur Phillip.

**Mr IRWIN:** I think it was eight greyhounds that came out on the First Fleet and Cook said to him, "You'll need something to get rid of the vermin." That is what they were bred for to do and they do it quickly. They do it quicker than anything else. So, they have got to have an incentive. As Peter said, dead rabbits. Like, rabbits are rodents, the same as mice. People in the city probably do not understand. When you are in the city, all you see is that nice fluffy little rabbit. But when you get out in the bush and see the millions and millions of rabbits that the CSIRO spends millions of dollars on per year to invent new viruses to kill them—and then their death is something terrible, I can tell you, if you see a dead rabbit—that incentive is taken away from these dogs.

Now, getting back to what you are saying, these people do not understand the difference between a canine and a canine athlete. A canine athlete has to be trained to the minute. It is looked after. You go through the code of practice, I think rule 106.1 in greyhound rules says that dogs must have food and water at all times. They actually do not have food and water at all times so they do not understand the difference between that canine and a canine athlete. The canine athlete's day is programmed nearly to the minute. There is another rule where it says they must—we have got new kennel accommodation. They have got to have bigger kennels. They do not need bigger kennels because they work and then they rest. If they do not rest, they do not recuperate. A normal canine runs around the house, does what he wants to do, eats and drinks when he wants to. These people have not seemed to grasp the difference between a little puppy at home that does what he likes, gets fed and watered, and has a bed to sleep in—it is a lot different with a greyhound. They are trained virtually to the minute.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** When it comes down to the welfare of the greyhound, there is going to be that conflict between—GWIC was established as a body to reflect some of the community's concerns that these dogs were being treated more like a product than a being in their own right. You may not agree with that, but that was the direction the animal welfare concerns were going. They wanted to ensure that these dogs had as happy and more natural a life as they could possibly have while still being able to race them. What I am hearing from you is that these new rules make it perhaps harder to race them. Is that just a resistance to change? Is it because you did not agree with the original reforms, or is it the particular people within GWIC that you think are doing something that they should not be doing?

**Mr IRWIN:** This is where you look at something where—these greyhounds are very happy, even when they are in training, but they are not to be played with 24 hours a day. They have to rest. There is no resistance with the welfare because a greyhound trainer treats his dog with approximately as much respect or more respect as his children because you do not look after them, they do not perform. All of these things that have been introduced are not warranted for a greyhound to be happy. They are happy to go for a walk, they are happy to go for a run, then they are happy to come back and sleep. That is their life. It is the same as an athlete; if he does not rest between his training, he does not perform to his best. We see it with a greyhound—you will often get a dog off another trainer. Until he settled in and starts resting, he will not put his weight on. He will be losing weight and you have to keep his uptake of food up because he is not resting and the body is not recuperating.

So, when all these new rules that are not really warranted because—the greyhound is not unhappy. After he finishes racing, he will entirely change his habit. He will lie on the couch. He will hardly get up and walk. He just becomes a lovable person, which most people today are finding out. It is just the furphies that the animal haters or the greyhound haters want to put out there. We often hear that they should not be racing dogs because they are not happy. You go down to the kennel, you get your dog out and he wants to go for a walk. The next thing, he wants to go in the car because when he goes in the car, he knows he is going for a run or he is going to race. He gets to the track and he is wagging his tail, jumping around and wanting to go to the track. They are happy doing that.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** If I had spent 19 hours in a cage and then was allowed out, I would also want to run and jump around and be quite happy about that.

**Mr IRWIN:** You have got it all wrong, mate, because what happens—they might even spend 20 hours in that cage. But when they go out and they do their best—they run, they exercise and they want to go back and sleep. That is what they do.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Basically, it is conditioning that is the issue. You condition them, you train them and it is very regimented. It is X number of minutes running and feeding at certain times. And then when

they get to the track, where it is palatial, almost—food and water all the time, whenever they want. Does it have an effect on their conditioning? You have trained them up to be able to be at peak performance and then they get to the track and it is different conditions.

**Mr IRWIN:** No, not really, because they are used to it. They are used to going through the regimentation, as you say. It sounds awful, but it is for their benefit so they can perform properly.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** No, no. I have a very regimented life; I am not criticising it in any way. I am just trying to work out how the new—

**Mr IRWIN:** Rules?

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Rules, but also the way that we have got tracks now. The accommodation is obviously different to—it is trending towards bigger, larger accommodation, and food and water all the time. It is different to the way the greyhounds used to be conditioned. Is it having an effect on their performance?

**Mr IRWIN:** The only thing that has changed at the tracks—when you say food and water, they are not allowed food in the kennel. We are made to put water in their kennel when they are at the racetrack, which is another contentious issue. You see athletes running and drinking water; they just have a sip. They know what time they are racing. You cannot say to the greyhound, "You've got the water in the kennel." By the way, New South Wales is the only State that has mandated that, and there is no reason for it. We are against that because the dog is hydrated beforehand. He goes into an air-conditioned kennel at 21 degrees. He is there for a maximum of three hours. If that dog is racing, say, at two o'clock, I put him in the kennel at 12 o'clock. I cannot say, "Now, I don't want you to drink any more than five millilitres of water between now and two o'clock." This has happened. Some dogs, when they go in the kennel, because of the environment and because of the other dogs barking they might go six times without drinking the water.

Next time, they will drink all the water and then they go out and run. We have had dogs go bad, but GWIC do not understand that. They say, "No, it won't affect them," but all the science they have has not been proven. We have 60 years of experience knowing that—this rule was brought in because why? Because someone says it has to be? Sixty years prior—in my time, I have never heard of a dog being scratched from dehydration. Let me qualify that: Dehydration exists every day. We know that; we are dehydrating now, so we have to have a drink. But when you are training an animal that does not understand what you are saying, the best interest is for the trainer to have him hydrated before so that when he runs, he performs properly and then he is rehydrated after the run, not a rule that says, "You must put water in there." This is just one little thing where they do not understand, the people making these rules.

**The CHAIR:** Do you know on what basis that rule was created?

**Mr IRWIN:** I would say because it is a standover tactic. "We can do it and you've got to put up with it." No other State in Australia has used it. I have raced in America and trained over there; there is no water in the kennels in America. There is no water in the kennels in New Zealand. Some of the hottest places in the world are Arizona and Florida, where I trained, and there was no need for water. This is a furphy, this rule. We have presented the facts: A dog can die of too much water. We have a lot of evidence now and we are going through it now to see where we can take it further. A lot of dogs have gone bad as favourites at different tracks in New South Wales solely because they have drunk too much water.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Do you think it is fair to say that welfare standards were better before GWIC than now?

**Mr IRWIN:** I think they were, mate, because I think the new rules were made by people who do not appreciate the difference between a canine and a canine athlete.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** With the mention you made of the lure, Mr Irwin, isn't one of the big problems, in terms of the effectiveness of the racing industry and animal welfare, young pups that refuse to chase? It is an owner's worst nightmare, isn't it, that the dog trials for the first time, gets around the other side and runs back to where it started? Obviously the dog is not going to be competitive on the racetrack and you run the risk of wastage. What do you do with such a dog? Aren't we better off having a lure that the dogs actually want to chase? It seems to be such a contradiction. We can go down to Woolworths now, buy dozens of dead chooks and lamb and whatever, put them on a stick and our dogs at home can chase them for days on end, but you cannot do that at the greyhound track. What is the harm in having a lure of animal product that has been killed already for other purposes? I mean, you cannot hurt a dead chook, can you?

**Mr IRWIN:** No. They told us, "You can't use any meat products."

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** I know. They are out there chasing a plastic mop. It looks ridiculous. It is ridiculous. I am asking you: Doesn't it build up the number of dogs that actually do not want to chase, and run the risk of wastage?

**Mr IRWIN:** It is going to increase it, for sure. See, this is the funny part about it: Until the animal libbers got around and created all this noise through *The 7.30 Report* and what they showed, which—I cannot believe *The 7.30 Report* has not been rapped over the knuckles over it. Everybody, barring the five people who have been found guilty of live baiting—and I am not saying it never happened, but there were five. *The 7.30 Report* showed several other people at that track and because they were there, they were guilty by association. They never participated in the live baiting. In Queensland, I think 20 people were investigated and it was found to that fact. It was found because the same lure kept going around all the time.

Someone else they would show, poor old Reggie Kay, the loveliest person in the world, is now a vegetable through the pressure that this has put on him. He is not a killer; never has been. He uses a squeaker. Up until the new rule was brought in I had the same squeaker. Before *The 7.30 Report*, the RSPCA said it was okay to kill a wild rabbit—not a caged rabbit or a pet rabbit—that is classed as a rodent and vermin. The CSIRO spent millions of dollars a year to try to kill them. It was okay to use that rabbit to incite the dog or give the dog an incentive. What you are saying is that there are only a certain number of those pups that will not chase that need incentives; most of them do chase. But, as you can understand, it is increasing the turnover rate of rehoming.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** In nature what does a greyhound do if it sees a live rabbit out in a field?

**Mr IRWIN:** They cannot grab it with their hands; they have got no thumbs. They have got to grab it with their mouth.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** But they go straight after it and their instinct is to kill it.

**Mr IRWIN:** They will chase it and their instinct is to grab it and kill it before it hurts them. That is the whole idea. Here is another anomaly. I have six acres in Grafton. There are kangaroos everywhere. If one of my dogs got away and grabbed a kangaroo, I would be in jail. But my next-door neighbour has got a couple of big dogs and they kill kangaroos all the time and nothing happens. So it is another anomaly. When we sign up as a registered person, we agree to be bound by the rules of Greyhound Racing NSW and GWIC.

**The Hon. LOU AMATO:** It sounds like we need common sense in the industry. That is what you are saying.

**Mr IRWIN:** Pardon?

**The Hon. LOU AMATO:** The industry needs to have common sense and people with knowledge of the industry.

**Mr IRWIN:** The people making the rules have got to have a bit of common sense. It is all right to have hard blanket rules, but we are in a democratic society.

**The Hon. LOU AMATO:** It was when I woke up this morning.

**Mr IRWIN:** If you are a greyhound trainer, you are back in Nazi land. We have got no rights. The whole rulebook needs changing and, as you said, replaced with a lot of common sense.

**The Hon. LOU AMATO:** Common sense, yes.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** From what you are saying it sounds like you did not think there was a need for the reforms in 2017, is that correct? Did you think that the industry needed to be reformed?

**Mr IRWIN:** Let me put it to you this way: The code of practice was brought in by GWIC in 2018. This is another point, which is in the Australian Workers' Union [AWU] document. Have you got the AWU submission?

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr IRWIN:** It touches on it there. The AWU was asked to comment on the code of practice and it said, "Because of COVID, we could not get together and we asked for an extension. We met on 27 May." It might have been 27 March. They said, "We submitted our—"

**The CHAIR:** You are talking about 2020?

**Mr IRWIN:** The code of practice?

**The CHAIR:** Yes, or 2018?

**Mr IRWIN:** It was 2018, yes. There were 137 rules in that code of practice. We questioned 49. We got no changes because the code of practice was stamped on 20 March and we met with GWIC on 27 March. So that was just a waste of time. That is part of the arrogance that this mob have got.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Can I come back to the question, though, which is: Did you think that the industry needed any reform in 2017 before GWIC was established?

**Mr IRWIN:** Minor changes.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Would it be fair to say then that GWIC, as a regulator, in circumstances where not everybody in the industry felt that there was a need for reform, faces a really tough challenge in the context of that sort of opposition? What would you do if you were GWIC and you were tasked with changing the industry—reforming it? How would you have done it better to get people like you on board? Or do you think it was always going to be impossible because you did not think it needed reform?

**Mr IRWIN:** I would say that if the people at GWIC had an understanding of the industry and knowledge of the industry, they would have made the recommended changes or the three or four changes that needed to be done. As I said, the whole public opinion on greyhound racing got swayed by false reporting by *The 7.30 Report* that showed everybody killing.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** How many of your criticisms of the code of practice are because you did not think any changes were required so really it did not matter what changes were put out by GWIC because you did not think there needed to be reforms?

**Mr IRWIN:** We needed 49 changes in the new code. But this is a new code, not the old code. You also had the trouble about 18 months before with the puppy bill that went to Parliament and was thrown out because it was just a ridiculous document. This ridiculous document is the same because no experienced people in the industry with common sense were allowed to comment on it and the ones that were allowed to comment on it were not listened to. GWIC just went, "Bang, this is what we are doing", possibly because of public opinion at the time. I do not know. We have spent the past five years being castigated and treated like criminals. I can tell you it has got that way with the excessive arrogance of GWIC inspectors that someone has not been severely injured because you just cannot cop it. It has become—I have got to re-register by the end of June. If something is not done very shortly I will be gone and I have been in the game for a long time. I was first registered in 1967.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** You did say that you would like for GWIC to be abolished. If it was not abolished, what are some substantial changes that could be made to make it better for people like you?

**Mr IRWIN:** There are too many changes, in my opinion. If you go through that information I have got there that I have given you today, the first thing you have got is vets. On the first one I have only highlighted some because we have got four vets that are extremely—in my opinion, they have got to go. The welfare and their decision-making is only going to cause more welfare damage to these dogs. On the first page of that document you will see a dog called Speedy Boltalz. He ran fourth in a race, 5¼ lengths away. Michelle Ledger, the chief vet of GWIC, gave the dog 60 days for a dislocated hock. That is a major injury, a dislocated hock. It usually says that the dog is limping badly. The dog was taken to a greyhound specialist vet the next day, was X-rayed and there was no such injury. We have Peter Feyman who injected a dog with a mixture of drugs and the dog died. Peter Feyman, again, started The Gardens, where a dog—

**The CHAIR:** Mr Irwin, could you go through the examples but not quote the names?

**Mr IRWIN:** Okay, sorry. What we have highlighted here with these vet reports, which is the vet submission one—

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Is that a lack of specialisation because they are not familiar enough with—

**Mr IRWIN:** With the four vets that we questioned that the industry would be better off without, it is arrogance, lack of skill, lack of knowledge and "We can do it because we can."

**The Hon. MARK PEARSON:** Are you aware that we have come to this point because of three inquiries? The third inquiry by Justice McHugh, which was in 2015, and then, of course, the government of the day decided to take the first recommendation. After all those three inquiries, the first recommendation by Justice McHugh is that this industry is not worthy of a social licence and it must finish. I looked at a whole lot of reports that the Parliament ordered from Greyhound Racing NSW over the next six months. The reports in Greyhound Racing NSW of the injuries, collapses from drug overdoses and serious animal welfare matters including live baiting, that was all going on then maybe worse than it is now and that is what caused the call for the ban.

Then the Government flipped and we have the Greyhound Welfare and Integrity Commission being formed in a reactive way. It is a very difficult situation to navigate, but you are saying that one of the things that



the Greyhound Welfare Integrity Commission did not do was bring in the stakeholders who know about the details of this industry and the finer aspects of it. Are you saying that that body should have had on its own board or at least consulted with the key people in the industry, seeing that we had decided that we are going to go ahead with the industry anyhow?

**Mr IRWIN:** Two things there. The McHugh report was that false it was not funny, and what it has done is led to legislation that we have got today. The fact the McHugh report was not thrown out is a shambles, not because it injured the greyhound industry, but the mistruths, the information came from—I think 79 witnesses were called, and let us remember it was a special commission, and the only people before a special commission are the people that the judge calls himself. Out of the 78 or 79 witnesses, there were five greyhound people. They never even interviewed the chief steward at the time from Greyhound Racing NSW. It was that corrupt. Why do you think people like Ray Hadley and Alan Jones got on the wagon? Because it was that wrong it was not funny, but it went through Parliament.

Parliament makes all these recommendations. Every recommendation that McHugh handed down but one was adopted. The one was that greyhound racing is not getting a fair share of the money coming back from the TAB. Nothing happened there. What happened to that one? Secondly, the people who have been castigated, as I said, were castigated by *The 7.30 Report* to make us all look like we were criminals—I am not going to sit here and say it did not happen. There are in human life and human nature some people who will do anything to get a quid, and that is what happened. It happened in the horse game, probably happens in Parliament. There are a few there doing a few dodgy deals.

**The CHAIR:** We have seen plenty of that.

**Mr IRWIN:** The thing is, when you have got a report that was so rotten and so wrong—to me a commission is to hear both sides of the story. He heard one side and made a 177-page recommendation. Is that fair?

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** You have been in the industry a long while. How many years did you say?

**Mr IRWIN:** I can remember going to Ballina helping my dad who was a trainer. He won his first race in 1938. I have been walking dogs—actually born with a lead and collar in my hand. It is going on 60 years.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** In that time has anyone ever said to you that you needed a social licence to be involved?

**Mr IRWIN:** No. I always thought social licence was between people who respect each other and can talk and have a joke, et cetera. This social licence business is, what do they call it, woke society or something. I do not know.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Wokeness. That is very good.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** That is the Hon. Mark Latham's favourite word.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Has anyone ever given you a social licence application form to fill out to be involved in greyhounds?

**Mr IRWIN:** No. I would say GWIC will next week.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Has anyone ever explained what a social licence might be?

**Mr IRWIN:** No. Not to me, Mark, no.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Do you know of anyone in the greyhound industry who has had a form filled in or got a social licence? This is like a mythology that is out there.

**Mr IRWIN:** The only time we have heard about a social licence is when Justice McHugh brought it up.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** He invented it. He goes to the horseraces all the time and there are obviously a fair few issues there that are unregulated and unattended to and he does not seem to care about that.

**Mr IRWIN:** He had three extensions of that commission for another million and a half dollars each, and I know he owes Robbie Waterhouse plenty of money.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Has he got a social licence to go to the horseraces, I wonder?

**Mr IRWIN:** Getting back to your second part, those people should not be on it. How could you run an industry or run a business without some sort of knowledge of what you are controlling? And this is what is happening. I go back a little bit; in the late sixties when Zoom Top came around, we had that many people wanting

to come into dog racing it was not funny. The greyhound people ran it themselves. TAB gets touted by Wran, was it, who brought the TAB in? They then decided that we will have to have government intervention to keep integrity. Since that time the greyhounds have just gone down and down and down, but the government of the day would appoint five people to the board, four of who probably did not want to be there but are getting \$20,000 or \$30,000 a year just to be a seat warmer, and they would appoint two greyhound people. But when you have got a committee of seven, and only two against the five, you do not win a thing.

It has slowly gone backwards and backwards and backwards, and now it has come to this situation where you have got a system that no other State has adopted. They have put these two in place, integrity and welfare, because the false McHugh report said that is what should happen. It gets worse, because then they appoint all these other people, probably good people, but how can they make a proper decision on welfare when, as I said, they do not know the difference between a canine and a canine athlete? Right, they are canines, but that is where it stops.

They are making rules. The investigators who come to our properties, they made rules for those investigators. Those investigators do not know what they are doing unless they read the rule book. The rules are not proper. We talked about the kennels. You want to be out and running after 19 hours, but you are not a dog. A greyhound, because he exercises—he is not like a horse. A horse you can hold them back and let them do half pace, three-quarter pace of whatever you want to do, and that horse will not spend his lollies, a term where he will not knock himself around. He will go back—a horse does not even lie down to sleep, he stands on his feet. But a dog, when you take them off the lead, they go at their own pace and they are explosive dogs. That is what they do. They run as fast as they can for as long as they can. They go back and sleep. They get fed, they get bathed, they get brushed, they have got a bed to sleep in, they have got all the comforts. They love to get in the car and go for a trip. They love to go to the track and go for a race. They go back and then they sleep. That is their life.

After they finish racing, they are that easy to train and that good an animal that you can take the fitness out of them, put them on a softer diet. The dog will lie around. He will probably take your spot on the couch. Clean, you could not get a better pet. We have got these people introducing rules to say they have got to be domesticated and lazy before they go and race. We are saying we need those pups to be educated from the time they are born so they can race, so they can race as long as they can and be as fast as they can with no distractions. Less dogs have to be rehomed and then when they are retired a lot of them, if they are good, go to stud, bitches have pups, stud dogs serve, the other ones will go and lie on the couch. So we have got everything upside down.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Could I ask you, you are obviously not alone with your discontent with GWIC, if I can put it in a polite way—discontent. How much of that discontent in the industry with GWIC do you think is based on the funding model, specifically the fact that the pool of funds is going from Greyhound Racing NSW to GWIC? Do you think if GWIC were independently funded and the funding arrangement was changed that there would be less discontent?

**Mr IRWIN:** There is no doubt that money that goes to GWIC the industry thinks is wasted because of overreaching and overregulation, et cetera, and there is a fair feeling within the industry that the Government banned the industry. Because of public backlash they had to put it back on the map and now they still are going to be in it because of over-regulation through GWIC. The funding, possibly minor. We have got a problem competing with other States as far as money, so there is money coming out of prize money that should be going into prize money to go into GWIC. But it is the fact that GWIC do not know what they are doing, they are arrogant, rude and bullies, and, as I said, we signed our licence to agree to those rules that they put in place but, mate, we are living in Australia, not China, and when you sign it you are back in China, because your rights are gone. They can walk into your place and go through your home. If you are an inspector, I invite you in for a cup of tea, he has then under the rules got the right to go through my house to check if I have got any drugs or illicit substances or whatever. That is all because—

**The Hon. LOU AMATO:** Has he got all those rights?

**Mr IRWIN:** Pardon?

**The Hon. LOU AMATO:** Honestly?

**Mr IRWIN:** They have got those rights.

**The CHAIR:** Without a warrant.

**The Hon. LOU AMATO:** Without a warrant?

**Mr IRWIN:** They can come into our place. Here is a funny thing: we have the Senate inquiry now going on.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** With body cameras on?

**Mr IRWIN:** With body cameras, and they only work when they want to turn them on. So if they want to be abusive or whatever suddenly that goes off.

**The Hon. MARK PEARSON:** Sorry, just for clarification, can they go into your private home?

**Mr IRWIN:** Yes, that is what I just said.

**The Hon. MARK PEARSON:** Not dwellings on the property but your private home as well?

**Mr IRWIN:** If you invite them in for a cup of tea they can go straight through your home.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** There was a case when a young fellow was home and they went and inspected the gun cabinet.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** They do not break in in the middle of the night.

**Mr IRWIN:** If we had another four days I could tell you probably 200 cases of breach of normal privacy.

**The Hon. LOU AMATO:** No warrant or anything else, they have the right to knock on your door and come in. Is that what you are saying?

**Mr IRWIN:** No, what I am saying is—

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** There are cases where it has inspected other animals, livestock, not just greyhounds.

**Mr IRWIN:** —if you are an inspector and you say you have come to inspect my property and I say, "Come and have a cup of tea first", as soon as I invite you into my home—

**The Hon. LOU AMATO:** You invite him in.

**Mr IRWIN:** —you are gone.

**The Hon. LOU AMATO:** Well, do not invite him in then.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Otherwise they would need a warrant, if you did not invite them into your home?

**Mr IRWIN:** Yes. There is another case where they had a warrant. The only time they have issued a warrant, or GWIC asked for a warrant, when we swap a dog we have a procedure where there are two samples taken—the A sample and the B sample. The A sample gets tested and if it shows a drug the B sample is then tested. In this case the A sample showed EPO. GWIC grabbed an inspector and went to the judge and said to the judge, "We need a warrant for this bloke's house." They have gone in and ransacked the house and what they found was—GWIC will say, "This is why we did it because we found an illicit substance"—a bottle of hormone that was 15 years old.

If they had tested it they would have found it never had a needle through the plunger in the past 10 or 12 years. What he did was he put it inside and forgot to get rid of it. It had not been used. The second sample came back negative. You can say, "How is that possible?" The only possible way is that it was contaminated at the first laboratory where the testing was done. That bloke was castigated. He was a 25-year-old up and coming young trainer and he has been lost to the industry and the poor bloke is on tablets to get him through his life. The things that they can do is inhumane in a democratic society like we are living in.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I have a few questions.

**The CHAIR:** We are on time now.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Can we keep going for just a minute?

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Very quickly, because we are on time, there has been a lot of talk about how many stewards there are at a race meet. Obviously at the moment we have two on track or on field and one in a bunker system.

**Mr IRWIN:** Yes.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Do you think that is working? Is two sufficient in your view or do you think there should be three stewards at every race meet?

**Mr IRWIN:** I have had a lot to do with Gail Thorsby because she is a real good person and a top operator. Gail says that they need three purely for the fact that they have to do their own writing up of reports, et cetera. All other States have two stewards but they have a stenographer there to do all the reporting. In that case they need three. If they put a stenographer there they would get away with two. The AWU has been sitting with Greyhound Racing NSW [GRNSW] and GWIC, or they tried with GWIC; we have had two goes. As I said, we had a meeting the other day since this has come up on the protocols of the inspectors going to people's places. Up until last Thursday we had the meeting and we put what our protocols would be so it made it fairer, but we could not get a look. With Greyhound Racing NSW we have had five or six meetings and we have gone through track maintenance. GRNSW had a track manager that was no good and the facts proved that he was no good, not opinions. We asked to get rid of him and get the right bloke in so track maintenance and safety are better implemented.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** I have one other question. I have been to a few race meets in the past month or so and I have spoken to a lot of trainers, breeders and participants. I have learnt that if you become suspended or have a disqualification or are under review with GWIC as the regulator, you cannot go to any race meet anywhere in New South Wales with your family at all. I am happy to be corrected by my colleagues, but is there another code that goes on? I think that would have to discourage participation in the industry, would it not?

**Mr IRWIN:** It does. The worst part about it is that most of these positive swabs that are coming back are from contamination. We have the best testing machine in the world. If you go through Peter Yore's thing he will go through the figures and show you how good it is.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** With respect, I think some of the instances I have heard are not even around swabs. If you have broken some form of protocol about pulling your dog from a race and you did not pull it in time, however that happened, and you then become disqualified or banned or are under investigation—and it may not have anything to do with swabbing, any sorts of drugs or any sort of investigation—you still cannot set foot at a race meet with your family, even just as a normal punter or as a normal person in the general public supporting an industry in your local community.

**Mr IRWIN:** That will depend on a few things. You can get suspended which means that you can go to the track but you cannot handle your dog. If you get disqualified you are banned from horses, dogs, trots, every track in the world, not just Australia, if you are disqualified. That disqualification/suspension part is a very wicked line because some stewards will want to disqualify you, some investigators will want to disqualify you, some will want to suspend you, and some will want to fine you. But there is one thing with GWIC, you talk about the money, everything the document on page 4 will show you that even for forgetting your dog papers going to a race meeting it is a \$100 fine. They have a gizmo that hits the what's-a-name in the neck that will show you what the dog's breeding is, who owns it and who trains it, et cetera. The papers are an unnecessary thing but it is a \$100 fine. What I have highlighted there is Brad Northfield, a chap who has been in the industry for 40 years. The first time he ever forgot his papers, no warning—in 40 years he probably had 25,000 runners—he forgot his papers once and he got fined \$100.

He paid the fine and it will show you there he then got a dirty letter from GWIC, the staff, saying, "If you don't pay your fine you are going to be a defaulter" listed wherever you list defaulters. They made a big song and dance. Brad had already paid the fine. It was a clerical error or whatever but no apology. As I said you mentioned earlier if people were upset because of the money part. Honestly it points to the fact that this has gone too far with GWIC. With the people that you have got there you would have to get rid of all of them or just about 90 per cent of them because it has been instilled over the past three years, "We are the boss, you are the servants. We will tell you what to do", et cetera. It has become a very toxic situation.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** So all you are asking for is a bit of courtesy and respect both ways?

**Mr IRWIN:** No. Well, more than that, Mr Fang, because—

**The CHAIR:** I think it is a bit more than that.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** What I am saying is that would go a long way, would it not?

**Mr IRWIN:** It would help but you still have got rules that are not made with common sense. We have still got a code of practice that is made by people that do not differentiate or cannot differentiate between the two, the canine and the canine athlete. We have got toxicity with vets against stewards. The chief vet overrules the stewards. Under the rules the steward is the only one that can order a swab, an out of competition swab or on the track. The chief vet orders her own swabs whenever she feels like it. She has become a one-man band—"You do what I say or that is it."

**The Hon. WES FANG:** That comes back to my point that the rules are in place. What you are also saying is that we need some common sense, courtesy and respect between the operators, the industry and the regulators. If there is that mutual level of respect it is the implementation of those rules and how they are enforced. It becomes a lot more streamlined with a lot less aggravation between the parties.

**Mr IRWIN:** It would be helpful. But honestly I do not think that this situation can be changed or turned around. But the rules have got to be looked at—the rules, the regulations and the code of practice. When you go through the rulebook, rules override codes of practice. In the water policy, you have a rule 106.1 that says that food and water have got to be supplied at all times. You do not put food into the dog's kennel on race day. So that is straightaway gone. You have got another rule, 106.2, which states that if you fear that your dog could suffer pain and suffering, or gets pain and suffering, with the water rule we have got to put a bucket in the kennel. It happened a hell of a lot of times that the dog would knock the water bucket over.

The dog cannot pick the water bucket up because he has not got a thumb—he has got one, but he does not use it as we do. He knocks it, so he knocks his wrist. If he knocks it hard enough that that wrist bleeds he then goes around 20 minutes after. The smarting might only last for a couple of minutes—you know when you knock your elbow or knock a bone. He runs around while the bone is bleeding: under pressure it is more susceptible to hairline fractures. It is not only under rule 106.2. We should not have put that water bucket in there because we know that dog is going to knock it over, but the water policy says we could not. How do you win?

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** We are out of time, but I just wanted to clarify the status of your submission. When you introduced yourself you said you were not speaking on behalf of the union.

**Mr IRWIN:** Yes.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** But all of the documents you have given us say "union submission" at the top. I just wanted to check: Is this submission and the attachments you have given us on behalf of the union or are they from you?

**Mr IRWIN:** They are from me. I am an unpaid member—I have paid my membership but I am not employed by the Australian Workers' Union [AWU]. I am an area manager. Those documentations that I have given to you have come to me through the concerned AWU members, and even concerned other members of the greyhound racing industry.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much for your excellent evidence, Mr Irwin.

**Mr IRWIN:** Thank you very much. If you need another speaker I have got another four days' worth here. What you have got there, people, is only the tip of the iceberg, I am sorry.

**The CHAIR:** I am sure you are right.

**(The witness withdrew.)**

**TONY ATKINS**, Greyhound breeder, owner and trainer, sworn and examined

**The CHAIR:** Welcome, Mr Atkins. Would you like to make a short opening statement?

**Mr ATKINS:** I am not sort of up on all this sort of stuff. I am just an ordinary country bloke, I guess. I have been involved with greyhounds all my life—I am 61, 62 next Monday—through my parents, who had greyhounds. We used to travel in the car with the greyhounds to the dogs—four kids in the back brought up that way, going to the dogs with the dressing gown and slippers on and all that sort of thing. Then work gets in the way and you do what you do in life. Through my professional career I have had dogs off and on. Now I suppose I am semi-retired; I have a back injury from a mining accident.

I bought a little place up at Tamworth and we have had a few cows and calves and we grew a bit of hay, but when the hay became too heavy the kids left home and went to work and the hay had to stop. We run a few cows and a few sheep, and we had horses. I was involved with Australian Stock Horse Society as president of the branch and we just changed that back over to the dogs because it was easier for me and my wife to muck around with a few dogs. It is a lifestyle thing for us with the dogs. We breed our own dogs, we rear our own dogs and we educate our own dogs. We race our own dogs and I think we have nine or 10 retired dogs at home now. I think we have three racing dogs and nine or 10 retired. That is our go.

When I was a member of the Greyhound Breeders Owners & Trainers Association [GBOTA], through my actions I found some indiscretions at a local branch where I found cash, cheques, improper actions and that sort of stuff being caused and I made a bit of noise about that—it went nowhere. I went to GWIC and it just fell on deaf ears. I travelled to Bathurst from Tamworth, stayed overnight in a hotel and gave evidence—it just went nowhere. It was a waste of time. This money is the money that is owned by the average little old owners and trainers, backyarders, pensioners and that sort of stuff. They are being robbed of money. They go to a track and there is no toilet paper. There is no handwashing stuff. There are no facilities for people. The places are falling down—they are a bloody mess. The industry is a disgrace; it has been like it for many years. I believe the buck stops at the top. The buck stops with the Government. They get the money, they distribute the money and they should be administering the whole affairs of the industry from there. They have control.

As a local person at Tamworth I have had several meetings with Kevin Anderson, our local member up there. Kevin has been to our place, inspected the place and had a look when the ban was on. He pulled up at the front of my house and I said, "Kevin, before we go inside, see those sheep over there?" He said, "Oh yeah, yeah, nice sheep." I said, "There are 200 lambs there." I said, "They are booked in for Woolworths on Monday and by Wednesday you will be eating those sheep. That is what we do here." I said, "Now come have a look at our kennels." He walked in the kennels and he said, "This is better than some people live." I said, "That is the way we are. That's the dogs. They all have a purpose here."

I am a country boy. We have dead stock, we have livestock. We run the reality of life. We look after our dogs. I will not put a dog through the greyhound adoption program [GAP]. We just had my mother-in-law live with us for 14 months, totally bedridden. You do not put your own people in a home and forget about them—and you do not do it with dogs. Our dogs are part of our family. When our dogs get sick we put them down at the vet but we do not dump them on other people. Other people have not got that luxury, I guess—they have got to do that because they run a business and that sort of stuff—but that is just the way we are.

All the participants want is a fair go, an even playing field and some good reliable understanding and governance. That is all we ask for—not to be bullied and intimidated by stewards and incompetent vets that you go to track with who have got no idea in the world what is going on with a greyhound. I am lost for words with the vets and the stewarding in this game. It is just a terrible disaster. At 62 years old I should be enjoying my dogs and that sort of stuff, but it is at the stage now where we have got a litter of pups at home at the moment—nine pups that are nine weeks old—and we have got another brood bitch in pup. We are selling them and we are keeping two because it is just too hard. But we like the interest.

My wife has got a medical condition and she cannot travel, so she stays at home and looks after the pups and that works pretty fine with us. We have a nice property. We have our own purpose-built straight track. We have 10-acre paddocks that are fully fenced and we have got a great big John Deere lawnmower to mow the paddocks. We do everything for our dogs and we take them racing. We have got a Mercedes van that I carry them in with air-conditioning. We have got dogs there that are four years old and they have had 25 starts. I will not go to every track and any track and race my dogs. I pick where I go and I pick where I race my dogs. It is a lifestyle for us; it is not an income. There is no money. It has probably cost us a fortune. But that is where I am.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** We have heard quite a bit from people about the disciplinary function of GWIC and some people have said there have been delays in the process, there have been concerns over people who are

suspended and it takes a long time to work out whether they are going to be disqualified et cetera. Can you give us your views on that function of GWIC, how it is working and improvements that you might suggest?

**Mr ATKINS:** GWIC are a shambles. They are an absolute disgrace. Not so everyone. A couple of girls on the phone are very nice and they are very helpful. Some of the stewards we have dealings with are good people, no problem and helpful. The last steward who came to my place and earmarked our pups—did the branding of the ears and put the microchip in the neck—said, "I wear the shirt. I absolutely hate them. They are an absolute disgrace." He said, "I was driving the other day and I went up a hill to pass a car. I have got GPS on my car and I went 105 kilometres. I got a phone call straight away from someone in the office to say why was I going so fast. They do not realise what it is like driving on country roads. This fellow is a nice, easygoing sort of bloke and no dramas.

We cannot tar all of them with one brush but I think the whole problem is from the upper level—the people who are elitists who cannot engage with the ordinary, blue-collar workers, the blue-collar people of this game, people who have problems filling a form out, people who cannot read and write, some people who have not got a computer, people who cannot nominate their dogs on a computer because they cannot operate it and they have to ring up still, old people. There is no compassion or respect for any of those people whatsoever. It is an old person's sport because young people are not coming into the sport. They are being hunted away. Who would want to be involved in dog racing with this sort of garbage going on? Who would want bring their kids into something like this?

**The Hon. MARK PEARSON:** Do you think that might be the purpose?

**Mr ATKINS:** Definitely.

**The Hon. MARK PEARSON:** What makes you think that?

**Mr ATKINS:** We are being strangled all the time. We are being pushed away. There is no help. There is no assistance at all to help us complete our jobs and to help us complete what we have to do. They just make things harder all the time. There is always a speed hump, always a problem.

**The Hon. MARK PEARSON:** Why do you think they would not want veterinarians with expertise in greyhounds to be at tracks rather than veterinarians that do not?

**Mr ATKINS:** Because they do not want to help people.

**The Hon. MARK PEARSON:** Or animals.

**Mr ATKINS:** Or animals or anything. This is just ridiculous—the John Newells, the Peter Yores, all these great vets that know everything. I have a fellow who does my muscle work, who has been involved with the game. I think he is a 76-year-old and been involved in the game all his life. His father was great mates with Dave Irwin's father. They have been in dogs all their life and I take them to him. I travel four hours to see this person. I go past heaps of veterinarian places and I go to this bloke specifically. He can touch a dog—he can feel a dog—and he can feel where they are sore. He is the best around. I travel there for the best for my dogs and he is classed as a witch doctor. You cannot go to these people; they are not qualified. They have not got a piece of paper so you cannot go there. What a complete and utter load of garbage. And that is animal welfare. I travel four hours each way from my place to the Hunter Valley to get my dogs done and I go home again.

**The Hon. MARK PEARSON:** And he is a veterinarian?

**Mr ATKINS:** No, he is not veterinarian.

**The Hon. MARK PEARSON:** He is a fixer.

**Mr ATKINS:** He is a greyhound muscle man—they call them muscle men. They find problems because he knows what the problems are. This dog is sore in the front but that injury there comes because they have got an injury at the back here. That is their leading leg. The dog is injured there. That leading leg has failed. That puts extra pressure on this front leg here. That failed. That is why. This is the problem here but it is caused by problem back here—these sorts of things. A vet at Newcastle one day—a bitch of mine fell—they examined her and he squeezed the leg that hard and made her yelp. I said, "Pull up." The next morning we put her in the hydrobath and inside the leg she had finger marks on the inside where he had squeezed her hard to make her yelp. A rung that Michelle Ledger up and said, "This is not on. This is wrong." She said, "That is a racing injury." I said, "Don't give me that garbage." I have been involved in the dogs too long. It was actual fingermarks inside this bitch's leg.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Fingerprint bruises?

**Mr ATKINS:** Bruised from being squeezed and over pressurised. You do not have to pressurise a dog like that. And in at least half of these races, you cannot find an injury in a dog when a dog is still hot. It just does

not happen. A vet will give you 10 days for something or whatever. I always go back to my vet or my muscle man next time. I go to John Newell, I go to Peter Yore, I go to all of them fellas. They will say, "No, this is the problem here." They are wrong 90 per cent of the time. They say, "I'll give you 10 days." I say, "That is fine. You give me what you want. I don't care because I will get it sorted out."

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Can I take you back to the disciplinary stuff? Have you had any disciplinary action taken against you by GWIC?

**Mr ATKINS:** Yes.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Can you tell us about that and the process, and how it was handled?

**Mr ATKINS:** I had a dog that I started at Maitland—his maiden race. And because we cannot use furs or meat or that sort of stuff, he was educated on a squeaker. I had a business and we made squeakers and he was educated that way. I put him in a race. He raced up the straight. He turned and wanted to play with the dog next to him so they give him ticket for failing to chase, I think it was, or something like that. He was going to win the race. He pulled up. The other dog won by that far. So I took him home and did my homework with a teaser and played around.

I went to Grafton to get this dog cleared to race. So I put him in a clearance trial and he was cleared. I said to the fellow there, "Is he clear?" He said "Yes, clear everywhere except for Maitland". I said, "That is fine, no problem. I don't want to go back to Maitland. I want to get the dog up to Wentworth Park eventually and go back to Sydney." He wrote in the papers "Cleared all tracks except Maitland". That is fine. So he cannot go to Maitland but he can go to every other track. I nominated him next start for Grafton. He won. I nominated him for Grafton again. He won again. They advertised the versatility stakes, which was a race which was two parts. The first race was over 407 metres. The second race was over 480 metres. I thought this is good because I will get the 480 metres. That gives the dog a bit more experience of racing. I can take it to Wentworth Park. I can jump up and off I go. I can get \$5,000, which might pay some of the bills. That will be good. So I put him in the heat and he won again. So he won three in a row.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Which track is that?

**Mr ATKINS:** Grafton.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Third time at Grafton.

**Mr ATKINS:** I go to Grafton race. I travel 5½ hours to Grafton to race my dogs because it is a good track.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** He was going alright at Grafton, this dog.

**Mr ATKINS:** That is good. So I qualify. He wins the race. I come home. I get home at four in the morning I suppose, after travelling all night. I sleep. At nine o'clock the phone rings, "We have got a problem with your dog, Tony." I said, "Yes, what is the problem?" They said, "We can't put him in this race—in the finals." I said, "Why?" They said, "He is not eligible to start." I said, "What is all that about?" They said, "No, he has got clear over 447 metres or 450 metres or whatever it is before you can go there. Your dog is not eligible to go in the final." I thought, "Fair dinkum!" I said, "Just give me a bit of time and get back to me." So I rung round. I rung the stewards, I think. They said the only way you can race at Grafton on the Monday is if you clear his trial over 447 metres. I said, "What am I going to do here?"

Anyway, long story short I nominate the dog for a clearance trial at Newcastle on the Friday and I rung the nomination people back. I said, "Richard, I have booked this dog for a clearance trial at Newcastle on Friday." They said, "We will draw the dog in the race but if he does not pass that clearance trial we will have to scratch him." I said, "Righto. No problem. All good." Fair enough—it is all I can do. So I go from Tamworth to Newcastle—four hours' drive after the big drive Monday night home with the dog backwards and forwards to Grafton. I take him to Newcastle. He had been around Newcastle a couple of times before when I broke him in. A good time at Newcastle is 30 seconds. I put the dog in. He runs 29.07—flying. He has passed. He is fine. No problem. I go back to Grafton on the Monday for the final, which I should not have done, but I was going to prove a point—that I know how to train this dog. I put him in the final and he ran third. They cost me the race. I then get, some months after that—

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Are you saying what the trial took out of him has cost him the race? Is that what you are saying?

**Mr ATKINS:** Yes.



**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** I do not understand, why did he have to trial? That was never the specification.

**Mr ATKINS:** It was not to start with. They said "clear all tracks".

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** They moved the goalposts on you.

**Mr ATKINS:** Exactly.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Originally they said, "You can't run at Maitland," but nobody said you had to trial to go the longer distance.

**Mr ATKINS:** No.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** They invented that midway.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** That is the point I want to know.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** They invented it.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Is there something where that was a requirement beforehand or was that at the discretion of the—

**Mr ATKINS:** Apparently it was there but I did not know about it. The steward did not know and the steward wrote there "cleared all tracks except for Maitland".

**The CHAIR:** The steward did not know the rules.

**Mr ATKINS:** The steward of the day was not aware that—

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** But why is it a requirement? A dog that chases over 440 metres is going to chase over 487 metres, is he not? He is either chasing or he is not.

**Mr ATKINS:** This dog had run places at Wentworth Park in big maiden heats.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** He has won three in a row at Grafton.

**Mr ATKINS:** I know.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** The dog is chasing.

**Mr ATKINS:** We bred the dog. We had the dog since he was smaller than that bottle. He was that big. We had him all the way through. We still have him at home now. He is a 4½ years old.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** When does GWIC get involved?

**Mr ATKINS:** GWIC had the steward. We ran the second. Then after that I get a letter to say, "You weren't eligible to win the races. We're taking those races away from you. You're at fault. You nominated a dog for a race and it was not eligible to be in it." I said, "I've nominated the dog, the steward said okay. I have faxed my nom into the nomination department." They accepted the nom. They knew what the race was.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** They should not have accepted it.

**Mr ATKINS:** GRNSW accepted the nom. The GWIC steward said, "Yes, you're right for all tracks except Maitland, where I got the ticket from," and I am not eligible to race the dog.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Who took it off you in the end? Who is the official?

**Mr ATKINS:** GWIC.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Who at GWIC took it off you? The head steward?

**Mr ATKINS:** One of the head stewards. One of them on the judiciary thing.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** After you had already run.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** To go back, there is an administrative bunch of errors and some weird requirements and things.

**Mr ATKINS:** Both sides. It should never have gone through their system at the nomination period.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** The left does not know what the right is doing.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Sure.

**Mr ATKINS:** If I nominate a fourth-grade dog for fifth-grade race, it comes up and says "You're not eligible." When I nominated this dog for this Versatility stakes, it did not come up and say "You're not eligible" because their system had failed because it could not factor in the 407 and the 480. If it had been in there and if they had come and said "You're not eligible," I would have asked questions.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Was a penalty issued or was it just that you were not eligible?

**Mr ATKINS:** I got called a liar and a cheat because I nominated a dog that was not eligible. I do not lie and I do not cheat and I do not do those sorts of things. I have never had a pinch. I have never had a positive swab or nothing in the greyhound industry all my life. I have never, ever had one. I have won group races. I had a dog that won 17 at Wentworth Park. I have never, ever had a pinch in all these years.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Was there an option to appeal?

**Mr ATKINS:** There was an option to appeal. I appealed and I was knocked back. I could not take it any further because of some sort of thing and that was the end of it; I could not appeal any further. I could not go to the racing tribunal.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Is it an internal appeal process? Do you appeal back to GWIC?

**Mr ATKINS:** Yes, internal. Back to the same people.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** There is no external process. There is no NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal [NCAT].

**Mr ATKINS:** They sent me the paperwork and the folder in an envelope. They mailed it to me. That envelope is still at home. I chucked it in the cupboard and did not even open it up. Then they take the race off me. At this stage the dog was at another fellow's place being trained because my wife had a brain tumour and she was in hospital. We were backwards and forwards. I was looking after her and my mate took the dogs to train. He nominated his dog and he rang me and said, "Mate, this dog, they've drawn him in a fifth-grade race, what's going on? He's fourth grade." I said, "They took that race off me, they dropped him back in grade," and we won the race again. The other poor buggers in the race had this dog that is better than theirs that has beaten them.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** It does not really help with participation in the sport, does it?

**Mr ATKINS:** It is just garbage. It is just petty bullshit, that is what it is. It is just nitpicking garbage. This is because I have been targeted for helping out a friend of mine who had problems prior to that sort of stuff as well. I had a mate that took his dog and said, "Just come to Tamworth." He paid \$6,000 for this dog. I followed this trainer and he says, "I'm going to have a go at training myself. My kids like dogs." His wife got a trainer's licence in her name and the kids had the dog. She is working. He put the dog in the back of the car with the kid and came to Grafton to race the dog. As soon as he got there, the stewards are onto him. He had another trainer who was registered to handle the dog for him, so this other fellow took the dog and put the dog in the kennel. Straightaway there is an inquiry—"What is this dog doing here?" Because the name of the implicated dog was owned by other people who had previous misdemeanours with the association, blah, blah, blah and they thought they were setting up races and that sort of stuff.

They put the dog in and there was a problem—the dog did not act good and that sort of stuff. Anyway, there was a blue and no-one wanted to take the dog out of the kennel. I went to see Gail Thorsby. I said, "Gail, what's going on here?" She said, "He hasn't got a licence." I said, "Listen, this bloke's here. He's got his 14-year-old son here. He's from Tamworth." I said, "We'll get the dog out of the kennels, into the car and home." I said, "I've got a bloke with me who's come with me, he's a licensed trainer. He'll take the dog, go with the dog in the car and go home." She said, "Righto."

So I have gone into the kennel and the fellow who was handling the dog said, "I'm not going there. They're going to pick on me", and that sort of stuff. This fellow was going round with a camera and that sort of stuff and videoing everything. So I said, "No problem, I'll get the dog." I went and got the dog. I came out and straightaway there were cameras on me—straightaway every move I made, that sort of thing. I walked the dog over to the car and the fellow, Neville, said, "I'll take the dog." I said, "No, Neville, you won't." I said, "Dave's going with you in the car. Dave, take the dog, put the dog in the car and hop in the car with Neville and go home." That is what we did.

After that this person put this dog in the Tamworth Cup heats. He had won a heat of the Tamworth Cup and he was swabbed. The following week he was in the final and one of the two top favourites. He ran second, so first and second get swabbed. The dog came back with a positive swab—metabolites of cocaine, one nanogram, contamination. Someone has patted the dog—no other way. That is the contamination level. The vet said, "Well, someone's patted the dog, they've handled money. Someone with cocaine on their hands has handled money,

they've patted the dog—that's contamination." It is not a hit-along, it is metabolites—it is not even cocaine. Where is the video footage? "Oh, the security cameras weren't turned on in the kennel. Sorry." So there is no security, there is no nothing.

The dog is in the lady's name—a 37-year-old or 38-year-old woman. She is pulled before. Never had as much as a speeding fine or anything in her life. Found guilty—two years' suspension. Went off her head, broke down—mess. They are now divorced. One boy lives with the father. She moved back to Narrabri with the other boy. They moved to Tamworth originally because the older boy was playing up over there. He has gone back over with his mates, gone off the rails. His mother has just bailed him out of court in Queensland, caught with drugs and a gun. The boy in Tamworth does not speak to his mother. The boy over there does not speak to his father. There is a blue on. It has stuffed the whole family. An absolute disgrace at the hands of these low-lives at GWIC. Absolute disgrace over one nanogram of a contaminated substance. Someone said if you stand in a swimming pool and shake the salt shaker into the pool, that is the volume of it.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** This is a common story for those who stand up to them, who stand up for their own rights, and speak up.

**Mr ATKINS:** I support this bloke.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** There is a pattern of harassment and bashing people into submission by GWIC, is there not?

**Mr ATKINS:** They pick on people and they target them all the time.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** They target them until they submit.

**Mr ATKINS:** It never stops.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** It is very common. It is tragic.

**Mr ATKINS:** They go to innocent people's places. Like Dave said, they go through people's houses, pull ladies' lingerie out of their bloody drawers and their bedrooms, that sort of stuff, and chuck things on the floor looking for something that is not there. Just filth, absolute filth. There is no need for it. The buck stops with the Government. The buck stops at the top. Stop the bullshit. It is a Government failure.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** In that regard, what is your local member, the Minister, saying?

**Mr ATKINS:** When I took this stuff about the money going missing at the Gunnedah track, I presented it to him. I showed him the cheque with the cash, a cash cheque written and money taken out over the counter at Gunnedah. I have some documentation to give you about bits and pieces of minutes of meetings before with no documentation. That is their minutes of the people before. There were no minutes. There are bank cheques there, one cheque signed each year with the whole amount of money taken out of the member's branch and turned into cash and that sort of stuff and disappeared over the counter. He said, "This happens in sporting clubs and soccer clubs and baseball clubs."

**The Hon. LOU AMATO:** Mr Atkins, are you tabling those documents?

**Mr ATKINS:** Yes. "It is just something that happens."

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Seriously?

**Mr ATKINS:** Dead serious.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Embezzlement is just something that happens and gets—

**Mr ATKINS:** Mate, the Muswellbrook club has just gone through it—\$140,000 gone and no-one held to account. The Dubbo club—money gone and no-one held to account. The whole industry has been rotten and rife all the way through because of poor management and accountability by the Government who appoints people. They take the money. They take all the income from the betting revenue. They take the money and share no responsibility. If in a school the teachers are in the lunch room drinking coffee and giggling and going on and the kids are down the back and one kid bashes a kid and breaks his leg, who is responsible? Exactly the same situation here. They are in charge. They get the money. They are administering. They are failing to do their duty.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Could I ask you about the funding and the way that it is structured so that we have a certain amount going to GWIC from Greyhound Racing NSW? Do you think that is the ideal funding arrangement or do you think GWIC should be entirely separately funded by the Government? Do you think that there is that tension between people in the industry and GWIC because of the funding arrangement?

**Mr ATKINS:** I am not up on all the funding arrangements, the money. I do not really know who is funded by who. To be honest, I do not really care who is funding it, as long as it is funded and it is done properly. One thing I will say is that the amount of staff they have in the eyes of the participants is just overboard. The way they do things—when stewards from, say, Gosford travel up to be stewards at a Wauchope meeting and they spend three or four nights at the resort to attend. The overspending there gets seen by participants and it is not real nice. We travel the morning of the race, do our dogs and we go home because we have dogs. We cannot go to the resort and we cannot do things and we have got other dogs at home. But when this thing gets seen—the overspending and the exorbitant waste of money—it just puts a lump in everyone's throat.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Could you just elaborate on that? If someone is coming from Gosford, which is an hour and a half away from the track at The Gardens—

**Mr ATKINS:** They are at the tracks at Wauchope.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Right.

**Mr ATKINS:** Near Port Macquarie where the resort is.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Okay, so a bit of a longer drive. I am trying to work out why they would be coming from Gosford, but I guess they are coming because there is not sufficient stewards.

**Mr ATKINS:** The head steward wants to go there because there is a couple of nights at the resort at Port Macquarie.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** When you say resort, what are you talking about exactly.

**Mr ATKINS:** There is a resort at Port Macquarie. The Port Macquarie resort—some big flash motel thing there. If they race on a Saturday—I know Wauchope raced on a Saturday and they raced again on Monday, so they got to the resort the Friday night, done the meeting, they stayed there Saturday night, they stayed there Sunday night, they done the races on Monday, they stayed there Monday night and went home Tuesday.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Okay.

**Mr ATKINS:** Why did they not just go to the caravan park, the little motel down the road at Wauchope, that is a hundred dollars a night instead of a \$500 resort? This is industry money. This is people's money that they are spending. This is wastage of people's money.

**The Hon. MARK PEARSON:** Could I just ask a question about maintenance of tracks? What is the money that pays for that? Is that from the betting or does the Greyhound Welfare and Integrity Commission allocate money?

**Mr ATKINS:** As I see it, all the money that comes through greyhound racing is from betting revenue; it all is. That betting revenue is a big earner for the Government and the revenue—

**The Hon. MARK PEARSON:** When it is decided for a track to require maintenance—there might be some problems, including potential welfare issues for the dogs—who or what decides how much money goes to that track for the maintenance?

**Mr ATKINS:** I think the tracks are allocated so much per meeting to run meetings and that sort of stuff, and they are allocated a certain amount of money to run tracks and that sort of thing.

**The Hon. MARK PEARSON:** Are you aware of any tracks that require maintenance that are not getting it?

**Mr ATKINS:** Heaps. They are all a mess.

**The Hon. MARK PEARSON:** Why is that?

**Mr ATKINS:** Because the whole industry is totally incompetent with the staffing levels. They advertise for a track curator, so a fellow who might have been mowing the lawn out at the local golf course for 12 months applies for it. He gets the job. He gets the badge of a track curator and knows nothing. He is now the track curator. He is now the expert. They would not have a clue about a dog track. I come from the motoring industry and I was service manager at a number of dealerships and we educated a lot of apprentices. They do not bring apprentices through. They do not train and every year bring three or four through to teach them how to weld, splice ropes, how to operate the gates, how to operate the starting boxes, how to do the judges job, how to do the lure driving job. If they bring them through and do those sort of things, then you might—"You are a good lure driver. You can do the lure driving later on." So that over a number of years you have a profile of competent people built up, who have experience and who can teach other people coming through.

We have just gone through an experience in Sydney, Wentworth Park, over money. The judge there was being paid \$60 an hour because back a few years ago it was a two-person job and they combined two jobs and they give him \$60 an hour to do the job. The man has been there 38 years. Someone decides to cut his money back to \$35 an hour, so he walks away over a funding agreement. The lure driver at Wentworth Park, 22 years—gone over money issues. The judge at Maitland refuses to drive to work at Maitland anymore. He judges at The Gardens in Newcastle and he judges at Taree—will not work there because of money issues. The penny pinching that goes on is unbelievable. These places that have robbed and pillaged the industry over the years walk away scot-free.

**The CHAIR:** On that happy note, Mr Atkins, thank you very much for your evidence. You are just another witness today in a long line of witnesses that are telling us some very interesting truths.

**Mr ATKINS:** I am just another one of thousands of people who are too scared and too frightened to come here and open their mouths because they are afraid of being victimised even further.

**The CHAIR:** I would say publicly here that if anyone feels that they are being victimised, please document it and contact my office.

**Mr ATKINS:** There are heaps. There are people everywhere. There are people who will not come, who will not turn up because they are being victimised.

**The CHAIR:** I know that. It has been hard to get witnesses for this inquiry because—

**Mr ATKINS:** That is why.

**The CHAIR:** —owners, trainers and others have simply been too scared to say what they think, even in private, in camera, at all because of what we are hearing—this litany of stuff today.

**Mr ATKINS:** People have signed agreements that they will only get three months instead of a life sentence. If they sign this and keep their mouth shut, they will be fine.

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** I know a person did not want to come today and asked another person to give evidence because, "I do not want to be seen" and that sort of stuff. "I do not want to rock the boat. We cannot handle any more in our lives." That sort of thing. That is the problem.

**The CHAIR:** That is a common refrain.

**Mr ATKINS:** It is just wrong, and, as I say again, the buck stops at the top—simple as that. Get your act together and listen to the people in the industry and let some industry people be involved to run the show and keep the bloody dollars and the figures maintained by the properly qualified persons and do it that way. Get advice from people who know dogs and we will get operations from people who know money and that sort of stuff and everything. They must work together.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much.

**(The witness withdrew.)**

**ALEX VERHAGEN**, Greyhound breeder, owner and trainer, affirmed and examined

**The CHAIR:** Would you like to make a short opening statement?

**Mr VERHAGEN:** I am here of my own volition. I have been a policeman for 30 years, retired with post-traumatic stress disorder. I got involved with greyhounds 20-odd years ago after that and find some satisfaction in looking after greyhounds. One of my biggest concerns with being an owner, trainer and breeder is with the penalty system. I think it is very unjust, the way they hand out penalties. I have included some of that in my submissions. GWIC produces forms. One of the forms that they produced was the greyhound sample collection operations sheet and chain of custody form. That is used in the handling of swabs.

Back in September 2019 I got a positive swab for cobalt. How I found out that I had a positive swab was I had some greyhounds leased out to people and they rang me up and said, "Mr Verhagen, what's the go? We can't nominate your dogs. They've scratched your dog that we had nominated." I did not know why. I rang GWIC. They said, "You've got a positive swab." I said, "Thank you." I said, "This is the first I've heard of it." "Didn't you get the email? Didn't you get the letter?" "No, I didn't." I have the same email address. I have lived at the same address for 40 years. I have to tell these people that the dog has been scratched because I have got a positive. That was the first I heard of it.

Then I get served their brief of evidence and, as I said, the GWIC form—the greyhound sample collection operations sheet and chain of custody—is not completed. I ring their—I actually did not ring; I sent an email to the head of their legal services in at GWIC, and he said "None of that is going to make any difference to what's in the bottle—the swab." I said, "But it shows the integrity of the sport if it's completed. Not being completed, I don't know where that swab's gone; I don't know who's handled that swab." So they go out, they get statements from the stewards concerned about the handling of it, the movement of it. One steward says he leaves Gunnedah at such a time in the morning, stops at Mudgee on the way to Bathurst, takes pictures at Mudgee greyhound track, but at all times keeps an eye on the car. If you know Mudgee, Mudgee greyhound track is inside the racetrack and you do not park within 200, 300 metres. This is the integrity that we were expected to accept.

Subsequently, I pleaded not guilty because of this form not being completed. I engaged a solicitor. The solicitor comes along and says he spoke to the director of legal services and, "If you accept eight weeks' suspension, that is going to be a lot better than 24 weeks' disqualification". That is an inducement to me—an inducement held out to me to say I am guilty. That is not right. Because I have a bit to say about some of their policies, the next thing the solicitor is ringing me, telling me, "The eight weeks is off the table; they are going to give you 12 weeks' suspension", if I plead guilty. His advice to me was that is going to be a lot better than 24 weeks as a starting point for a disqualification. The positive was for cobalt. To this day I have no idea how cobalt got in the dog's system. It is a mineral. It is in everything you touch, in the ground. I do not know. So from there I—

**The Hon. LOU AMATO:** Sorry, sir. That is what was found—cobalt?

**Mr VERHAGEN:** The mineral cobalt.

**The Hon. LOU AMATO:** Can I ask you, only because I do not know—

**The Hon. WES FANG:** It is an opening statement, though.

**The Hon. LOU AMATO:** Sorry. I just want to know a bit more about it, that is all.

**Mr VERHAGEN:** Because I have gone and tried to make some waves about the non-compliance with this form, I have been harassed, bullied by them over it. I have had kennel inspections, three in no time at all, and I have got there and—when they come out I want a kennel inspection notice that they have been there. They will say, "We'll email it to you." It never arrives; you do not get it. "I'll give you 14 days to rectify the faults." But you do not get the kennel notification. They do not come back in 14 days to see whether it has been done. On one occasion I waited six weeks for the kennel inspection form.

Another time they came out and brought a vet out with them. I had a couple of unexplained deaths in the kennel. I had autopsies done by my local vet. The local vet said the pathologists do not know what caused the death of these dogs. I said, "Okay." GWIC was not happy with that. They sent out a vet and an inspector. The vet walks around the property and says, "Your dogs look really good. Geez, they're a credit to you, Alex, but I know what caused the problem." I said, "Oh, right." So he said, "I will put it all in a report." I got that report nine months later. This is the sort of stuff that we have got to put up with.

**The Hon. MARK PEARSON:** Did he tell you what the problem was?

**Mr VERHAGEN:** It was something—E. coli. I am not quite sure, but I have got the report.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Verhagen, what does cobalt do to a dog and at what level is it effective?

**Mr VERHAGEN:** I have read professors' reports. Cobalt is not a goer. It is just a mineral that is required by—the system needs cobalt. It is a mineral. It is in everything. It is in food, made up. It was a post-race swab in the last race, and professors say the cobalt can only be tested by blood. This was a urine sample. Another one of the offerings—

**The CHAIR:** Just to go a little deeper into it, on what basis is cobalt banned? Do you know?

**Mr VERHAGEN:** I do not know.

**The CHAIR:** You do not know?

**Mr VERHAGEN:** No.

**The CHAIR:** Is there a level of acceptable cobalt in the—

**Mr VERHAGEN:** One hundred nanograms.

**The CHAIR:** I see someone up the back is putting up their hand. Do you know the answer to that question?

**UNIDENTIFIED:** It is a funny thing but cobalt first came in with a swab of horses, with levels of 2,500 to 3,200 nanograms per mil. I have got a document here—statement of cobalt testing in greyhounds—which this person says is unacceptable. Cobalt is a naturally occurring essential micro mineral. The body cannot make red cells unless it has cobalt in it. What they are trying to do with the cobalt business—those levels with the horses, they were administering cobalt substances like B12, iron et cetera, trying to cheat. The level that the cobalt comes back with the dogs is around 180 grams/150, which is possibly the right amount to make the body continually develop red cells. Without red cells we die; it is like asphyxiation. So it has been a contentious point and it is one of the things that we are trying to correct with the cobalt level, the testing materials, the testing machines, when you get a level higher, you know it has been administered and you are trying to cheat. If there are no levels, it is just a natural process in the body.

**The CHAIR:** Okay, that is a good answer. Sorry, Mr Verhagen, I just wanted to get a bit of clarification since a hand was going up.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** There was a theory that it helped thoroughbreds run better over a distance.

**The CHAIR:** Long distance, not short distance, that is right.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** It is hard to believe it does anything for greyhound racing.

**The CHAIR:** Not a 20- or 25-second race. It is complete rubbish.

**Mr VERHAGEN:** From my experiences with getting a 12-week suspension—as an owner, breeder and trainer, I have a lot of dogs leased out to people. My default training with a positive swab affected people in Victoria, Queensland and all over New South Wales because if I have a positive swab, they cannot race my dogs. As a breeder, I cannot sell pups. It has nothing to do with racing, but as a breeder I have to maintain these pups. I cannot sell them. I cannot do anything with them except feed them at home. That is one of the issues that I have. They say, "Bring us some with approval, we will let you sell them."

I applied but I do not get responses. They will let you sell one but you have to keep five. Even to the stage where you are going broke—you cannot afford to keep them without an income. This is cobalt; it is not performance enhancing. And then I get onto sending emails, seeking direction in things you should do in relation to breeding and you just do not get replies. You cannot ring them. Ringing Bathurst's GWIC office down there is like a castle—you cannot get past the frontline customer service. You can ask to talk to someone—"We will send them an email and get them to contact you." It does not happen.

It is very frustrating and that happens quite regularly. Another area of penalties that was brought up today is with your identification card not being presented. You get fined \$100. If you are 0.2 of a kilo over in your dog's weight, you get fined \$100, then \$200. GWIC makes mistakes everyday but there is no penalty against them, only the trainer. Only Monday I spoke with them over a registration of a litter. It was a litter I whelped for some people. I rang them and said, "Can I do the litter registration?" The customer service girl said, "No, you can't. It's in the rules. You can't do it. You have to be the breeder." I said, "How come on the online form I have right in front of me right now it says I have the authorisation to complete this form by the owner?" She said, "It's not on my form." I said, "I'm telling you, it is on the online form." She said, "We will have to have a look at that." Then she goes away, comes back and agrees with me that I could do the online nomination. But this takes time and it is a

frustration. I should not have to be doing that—ringing up and talking to them. They should have it right to start with.

**The CHAIR:** You are talking about talking to them. In your submission you say that quite often you get instructions verbally and you get promised written follow-up but that never happens.

**Mr VERHAGEN:** It never happens.

**The CHAIR:** And that subsequently they will deny that they told you that.

**Mr VERHAGEN:** They deny that they say that. I was one of the five trainers to give evidence at the commission of inquiry with Justice McHugh. I was one of those people there. I was the bloke who took dogs from Caroon to Kempsey to have them euthanised. The ranger at Kempsey in the commission of inquiry is a good friend of mine. He said, "If you have dogs"—and this was at the time that there were no records kept—"I could euthanise them and dispose of them for you if they are broken down or whatever." Which was fine; that was not a problem. I had a couple that I took up to him. At the commission of inquiry I thought I was going to be out of greyhounds for life.

I was being honest and truthful and I was the worst at the commission of inquiry for getting dogs put down by a council worker and having them disposed of at the council. You would sign a form to say that you had surrendered the dog. Then, after the commission of inquiry, I get investigators coming round and they say—well, first up, their experience was they cautioned me. "Anything you do say may later be used in evidence. Do you understand?" I said, "Yes. I have nothing further to say—not when you caution me like that. I am compelled to answer under the Greyhound Racing Act, but I am not compelled once you caution me. I have a right to remain silent."

So they are there, they have a tape recorder in the middle of the floor, they are holding their cameras up for you to say who you are and they said, "We've got documentation here to say that the ranger at Kempsey was told that that practice had to cease." I said, "Well, he is a good friend of mine and I have no reason to disbelieve what he told me. If he was told to cease that practice, he would have got a directive memorandum." They said, "No, he didn't get a directive memorandum." I said, "The steward that went up there to investigate the complaint in relation to this matter would have gone to the council and issued them a directive memorandum." They said, "No." I said, "Do you know why there is no directive memorandum?" They said, "Why?" I said, "Because that is not the way it happened. He was told that it is a pity there are not more people in the greyhound industry that can do this sort of thing." And they denied it. This is the sort of thing you cannot get in writing and this is what happens regularly.

**The CHAIR:** You say in your submission that the new code of practice will bring greyhound racing to its knees. Do you want to elaborate on that?

**Mr VERHAGEN:** I spend more hours doing paperwork for GWIC than I do attending to the dogs. Everything you do has to be—I do not mind being accountable but being accountable to this degree is just not warranted. I cannot submit something unless I tick seven boxes to say that I am accountable for what I have just said. I am human. You might make a mistake but the minute you do make a mistake and you have ticked the seven boxes to say that it is all true, correct and you are authorised to do this—we have no freedom. You cannot submit the form unless you tick those seven boxes. You might disagree with one of their terms and if you do not tick the box you cannot submit the form. That is everything you do online. You have to agree to all their terms.

**The CHAIR:** You say in your submission that some trainers and some owners have difficulty interacting with GWIC because it will only interact online through its website, which is difficult to navigate.

**Mr VERHAGEN:** I get there. For probably 10 or 15 years I have assisted two trainers. One trained a winner at 91 on Sunday and another bloke, 87. I am not allowed to assist them online because of the integrity. I used to do their nominations. I used to transfer their dogs. I have been doing that for 10 years.

**The CHAIR:** So what good purpose does that serve?

**Mr VERHAGEN:** They are forcing these people out of the game.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Does GWIC offer them any training or any support to assist them to actually get up to speed with it or do they just—

**Mr VERHAGEN:** They can do it on hard copy, but they do not know how to use printers. They do not know how, except SMS messages.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** But GWIC has not—like, they restrict you from assisting them but they do not offer these people any assistance to actually upskill themselves in order to be able to do it?



**Mr VERHAGEN:** No.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** No? Okay.

**The CHAIR:** Or there is no facilitation process. That is really what you are saying, is it not?

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Yes.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** Options.

**The CHAIR:** In other words, offer them options, yes.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** But also, it is one thing to insist that they are not assisted with it but it is another thing to then ensure that they are trained to be able to do it. That is I think where the issue is. If you are not going to allow somebody to assist you to do it then, you know, it is almost incumbent upon you to provide training in order to be able to do it.

**The CHAIR:** If not to training at 91—

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Another way of doing it.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, that is right.

**Mr VERHAGEN:** Even for them to go and post a letter, it is a difficult process for them. They have got to get someone to take them down to do it or get someone to do it for them.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** I think we often forget that some people are not as mobile and as technically savvy as everybody else and that is a shame.

**The CHAIR:** That is true.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Alex, could I ask about your experience in standing up for your rights? Is it true in your experience that those who arc up and stand up against GWIC end up being targeted and harassed?

**Mr VERHAGEN:** Definitely. You are bullied. With my suspension, the 12-week suspension, on the Friday before it was due, four days after, for me to get my licence back I get an email that I have an interim suspension and I am to respond as to why it should not be enforced. Now this time I did not use a solicitor. I used an ex-steward. He put a submission in to them and he got there and, in the end, I had nothing to answer to. Everything that they were saying that they were doing wrong was not my responsibility. So they did not enforce that interim suspension. But that is what they do to you to keep you quiet. But the inducement that they hold out to get you to plead guilty, you know, probably sticks in my side because I was a policeman for 30 years—you do not hold out inducements.

**The CHAIR:** You are also used to natural justice too.

**Mr VERHAGEN:** Natural justice, yes.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** What sort of inducements are you referring to there?

**Mr VERHAGEN:** They will disqualify you but they will offer you a 25 per cent discount for an early plea, whether you think you are guilty or not, and whenever you read their final notifications on their site everybody takes the early plea. Now, even with mine, I pleaded not guilty. I appealed. But when I got my 12 weeks it said I got it because I took the early plea. You only do it for the sake of, if you have a disqualification, you have to reapply—start all over again—and they drag that out. But instead of 12 weeks it is going to be more like six months. So a lot of people take the early plea, whether they are guilty or not.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks very much, Mr Verhagen, for coming in and being so honest with us. You are continuing a long line of familiar themes. Thank you very much for coming.

**Mr VERHAGEN:** Thank you for the opportunity of being here.

**(The witness withdrew.)**

**The CHAIR:** We will now move on to our public forum. Before we get started, I will read an address. Welcome to today's Public Forum for the Select Committee on the Greyhound Welfare and Integrity Commission's inquiry. This session is about hearing directly from the people who are part of the greyhound racing community or have views about regulation of the greyhound industry at present. We have a few time slots available for speakers so anyone who has not registered, but who would like to take part in the public forum, please see the Committee staff when I finish speaking. Before we commence I would like to make some brief comments about the procedures for today's public forum. Speakers are asked to register in advance for today's forum. Those who have been registered will speak or be called upon to come to the lectern in turn.

Before you begin, you will be sworn in by either an oath or an affirmation. The words of both will be provided to you. You will have five minutes to speak to the Committee with a warning bell to be rung at four minutes and again at five minutes for speakers to conclude their speech. What you say today will be transcribed and will be included in evidence in the inquiry. While all participants are covered by parliamentary privilege Committee hearings are not intended to provide a forum for people to make adverse reflections about others under the protection of privilege. In that regard, it is important that participants focus on the issues raised in the inquiry's terms of reference and avoid naming individuals unnecessarily.

**ROBERT WHITELAW**, having been affirmed and examined: Thank you, Chair. Please excuse my voice. I have been like this for a long, long while, since I had the COVID injection—believe it or not.

**The CHAIR:** Well, you are still upright, so that is good.

**Mr WHITELAW:** Yes. That is a positive, not a negative. I have been involved in the greyhound industry for some 51 years. Sadly, when the ban was put in place it ruined my life because I was a greyhound educator, greyhound rearer and had a greyhound property and a greyhound business through trialling and education of greyhounds. Sadly, with the ban after 48 years of marriage my marriage fell over because my wife wanted me to walk away because of the ban. I decided to stay and fight because I love the industry so much, which was a part of my life since a five-year-old. With that, I now am at the end of my tether for the simple reason of overregulation. I took up the challenge to bring my business back up but, unfortunately, because of the regulations put in place by GWIC, my business actually fell over and my wife walked away after so many years of marriage. So it has been devastating for me and for a lot of members of my family.

To you, Madam Deputy Chair: You asked a couple of questions earlier in respect to greyhounds lying down. The thing is with greyhounds, they are single-jointed. Horses are double-jointed, so they stand all day. That is just one aspect of that. Now, with GWIC, it has been a big thorn in my side because I tried to keep my business going, but unfortunately the fact is that the regulations pushed me out of the industry. Some of the things that they came up with, for me to operate in a way—now, I am going to say something to you which does not worry me anymore because I have walked away from the industry. I have finally given up after so many years, after 50-odd years. In my education of greyhounds since the ban, we could not use fluffy toys. We could not use any live animal meat matter whatsoever.

But I did not, because the dogs that I was breaking in—I very rarely had a failure. For the simple reason that my meat man that turned up with my meat for my dogs—it came in the old white shopping bags. On my arms that I used to educate the dogs, I bit the bullet and I thought to myself, "If I get caught here, I'm gone, but I've got nothing to lose." The prime target of the exercise was to educate the greyhound to get him to chase. All dogs, Mr Pearson, work on a reward system; you reward them and they will abide for what you want them to do. So, I never washed those bags. I left the taste of the meat on the bags, put them on that mechanical arm and, boy, didn't they chase. They used to tear it into ribbons, but I had to get it off them first because I did not want them chewing the plastic.

That is another reason why the industry has not gone forward. If GWIC, with their regulations, had got onto me with that—mate, I'd probably be sitting in Goulburn jail. I do not know where I would be. That is the sort of overkill on behalf of GWIC. Madam Deputy Chair, regarding the funding: If it was not for us earning the dollars through the TAB and the corporate bookmakers funding GRNSW, who are funding GWIC, we would be a lot worse off than what we are. Now, you asked the question, "Do you believe funding should come from the industry participants"—us people who supply the product—"or the Government?" The Government put GWIC in place and the Government should fund it. Thank you, Madam Chair and Mr Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you.

**SAMUEL REES**, having been affirmed and examined: I would like to thank you for the opportunity to be here today. I am a bit unlike some of these older guys who are here. I have only been involved in this industry—I came into it just before the McHugh report and that disaster. It was a bit of an accidental happening. A bit of history: I have been involved in the rural industry all my life and I have had working sheepdogs—good sheepdogs, too, I might add, that I could take to sheepdog trials and win sheepdog trials. I could take them out into a 1,000-acre paddock, muster 500 sheep, bring them in and draft them, and that sort of thing. To train those dogs is a damn sight harder than it is to train a greyhound, with all due respect to the greyhound trainers who are here. Through the goodwill of a greyhound trainer, who took on the first dog that I had—and he took him on because another trainer told me, "Get rid of him, he's no bloody good."

This trainer was able to win races with this dog for me. Unfortunately he had a very serious car accident and lost a leg. Through my goodwill back to him, I became a volunteer for this fellow and I was able to work with him and his dogs. I had a couple of dogs of my own, in my own kennel, and eventually moved those dogs to his kennels because I was there on a daily basis. The GWIC inspectors came. They saw the dogs. We openly declared that the dogs were there. There was no problem until—I am not sure why it happened—all of a sudden those kennels became uncompliant to me, not to the owner. Through the agreement we had that I could have these few kennels there, we decided that if they are noncompliant, let's lift them up and make them compliant. We started renovating them. The inspectors came along and said, "You are doing a great job here. This is wonderful work, but you can't have your dogs here. They're noncompliant."

"Please tell me what I have to do to make them compliant." They would not tell me. It was through a lot of insistence—I said, "Send me something formal. Send me something in writing. Tell me why." After lots and lots of phone calls, eventually I got an email saying, "The kennels aren't compliant." Why? They are still not compliant. Then an order comes because they knew that I was rearing some pups that I had with this fellow out of a bitch that we shared. We were rearing the pups in partnership on this property. "Now, you've got to get rid of the pups. You can't have them there anymore." "What can I do with them?" "Send them to another public trainer." For heaven's sake! So, at great expense and inconvenience, call it whatever you like—by the way, I am a pensioner and at that stage I had no income at all—I have to transport them to other people. I have to pay them a weekly rate to rear those pups, and yet they were with a licenced public trainer of my choice. Now, I have them with my second choice.

I have a concern that when I try to appeal all of this, I am appealing to the hangman. I am appealing to the same people who are telling me I cannot do this. We need an independent person who we can appeal to. I do not have a problem with having somebody regulating our industry. It is like if you did not have a referee in a football match; what sort of a rabble would you have? You do need a referee, but it has to be somebody who knows something about what we are doing. It is a pretty simple formula. You must have people who are trained in what they are doing. We have had inspectors come onto the property. I have walked around with them. A dog did a wee and the guy said, "You've got to pick it up." I am sorry, I am telling you the truth; I just swore it. The dogs are drinking dam water. All animals drink dam water. I told you I worked in the rural industry; I have worked through droughts. Sheep and cattle get bogged in dams. Dogs will come along and swim in that water and they drink it.

There is no issue with that. The dog's digestive system can handle it. Dogs run up and down the runs and they jump in tubs full of water that eventually becomes contaminated—not contaminated, but dirty—and then they drink it. Why do they drink it? Not because they are thirsty, but because it keeps them cool. Dogs get cool through their tongue. They do not have sweat glands, so they have to drink cool water. That is why greyhounds get hosed down and they get a hose drink after a race—because it cools them down, not because they are thirsty. They have only just run for 25 or 30 seconds. It is simple. My sheepdogs would run for hours. They would jump over sheep and come under sheep. They would jump over barbed wire fences. They would do all of that. I never, ever, ever had a sheepdog checked by a checker or a vet unless it had to have stitches from getting caught in a barbed wire fence.

My greyhounds—as anybody will tell you, I only have slow ones. I hardly win a race and when I do, I get pretty bloody excited. It is for the dog, as well as me. Anyone who knows me will tell you that all my dogs are spoiled. I fall in love with them and you should not do that. If my dog runs, it gets checked. It gets massaged every day. If there is something wrong with it when it gets checked, we take it to the vet. We do all that sort of stuff. But with working sheepdogs I never had to do that; they were pretty tough. These fellas are fine-tuned athletes, as it was pointed out earlier. They need to be treated a bit differently, and I think everybody here does a wonderful job.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Mr Rees.

**TREVOR HAGNEY**, having been sworn and examined: Honourable members, I appear before you today representing the membership of the greyhound branch of the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party. We have a membership of over 200, comprising mainly licensed greyhound trainers. I speak today on concerns our membership has with GWIC's veterinary practices.

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY:** This is stitch-up.

**Mr HAGNEY:** Far from a stitch-up, honourable member, we are concerned trainers. The greyhound industry—

**The CHAIR:** He was only joking, don't worry, Mr Hagney. We had a Nat before.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** He needs a few more of you. That is all.

**Mr HAGNEY:** Fair enough. The greyhound industry relies heavily on the services of greyhound-specific veterinarians. Without their examination and assessment of our dogs, without their advice on physio and treatment plans for our dogs and without their skills in performing surgical procedures on our dogs, we would not have a greyhound industry. Yet since the inception of GWIC it has become obvious that the commission will not engage the services of veterinary specialists from the industry. Instead, the commission has gone out of its way to engage the services of vets with no greyhound experience at all. Judith Lind stated early in her tenure that she would not employ anyone who had former relationships with participants for fear of collusion and participation in criminal activities. This is a slight on the reputations of career industry veterinarians and

borders on paranoia. This situation does not provide the best outcomes for participants and it definitely does not provide the best outcomes in regard to animal welfare.

This was never more evident than the farcical situation last month at the Golden Easter Egg Carnival—the premier carnival of the New South Wales greyhound racing calendar. One of the nominal favourites for the series, Flying Ricciardo, ran near track record time, winning his heat. But seven days later, in his semifinal, he ran 10 lengths slower. Connections were that concerned they requested the dog be vetted. After examination, GWIC vets on duty found no injuries with the dog. Connections were that distraught they requested a second examination. Again, the GWIC vets found no apparent injury. The next day connections presented the dog to a greyhound-specific veterinarian, who diagnosed a fracture in the dog's hock and a torn muscle in the hip support. This is all in the stewards' report. These are not minor injuries. The dog has not raced since and may not race again.

We ask, as a membership, that the Committee recommend that industry-specific veterinarians have input into GWIC veterinary policies. We also ask that training be provided for GWIC vets, who lack greyhound-specific experience and knowledge. This may be in the form of a cadetship or internship with experienced vets. We also ask that the Committee investigate race day veterinary treatments for injuries. Some injuries are best treated at the time of the incident, such as minor stitching for lacerations, skin tears and some split webbings between the toes. This maximises tissue adhesion and minimises the chance of infection. Yet, at present, some of these injuries are only afforded first aid, with participants told to consult their greyhound-specific veterinarian the next day.

We ask that the Committee recommend amendments to legislation regarding GWIC's Animal Welfare Committee, who produced the industry's code of practice. Legislation stipulates the departments that the five members of the committee are to be drawn from, but does not stipulate any greyhound experience as a prerequisite. At present, only one member on the committee has any canine experience at all. There are plenty of ethics experts on the committee, but not of the canine variety. Industry veterinarians are not represented on this panel. Finally, we ask that the Committee seek a submission from Dr John Keniry, the Coordinator General of the Government's 2016 Greyhounds Transition Taskforce, and a founding commissioner of GWIC. His views on GWIC policy could give some meaningful insight to the Committee. I thank honourable members for your time.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much. That brings our hearing for today to a close. Thank you very much for attending and for your input. I think we have learnt an awful lot today in our hearing. I am not going to pre-empt anything, but there is a theme to what is being said to us and the evidence is almost overwhelming. We will hear from GWIC itself at Bathurst tomorrow. Thank you very much and have a good evening.

**(The witnesses withdrew.)**

**The Committee adjourned at 15:21.**