

Animal Welfare Reports

The Welfare Of Greyhounds

Report of the APGAW inquiry into the welfare surrounding racing greyhounds in England

A Report on “The Welfare of Greyhounds” was produced as a result of the inquiry, by the Associate Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare (APGAW), into the welfare issues surrounding racing greyhounds in England, and published in May 2007.

The inquiry upon which the report was based was commenced in reaction to a July 2006 *Sunday Times* article alleging that for 15 years, a builders’ merchant had been killing healthy greyhounds considered by their trainers no longer fast enough to race and burying them in his house at Seaham, County Durham. This article caused a public outcry in relation to the fate of racing greyhounds once they retire. It was thought that other dog disposal operations may also exist throughout the UK. This situation prompted the Report to suggest reforms that would prevent large numbers of dogs being ruthlessly disposed of in the future and improve the welfare of dogs involved in the racing industry at all stages of their lives.

The objectives of the inquiry were to investigate the welfare issues surrounding racing greyhounds in England, to identify factors which may improve standards at all stages of dogs’ lives and to advise on

measures suitable for secondary legislation concerning the issue under the *Animal Welfare Act 2006*.

The Report notes that the greyhound racing industry falls into two sectors; regulated and unregulated, with 29 racecourses in Britain being regulated by the National Greyhound Racing Club (NGRC) and 14 unregulated, independent racecourses. The NGRC is the industry’s regulatory body and is a not-for-profit organisation. The British Greyhound Racing Board, on the other hand, is the sport’s governing body.

The Report finds that between 6 and 12 thousand puppies that are bred to supply the British racing industry never make it to the racing track and go missing between the age of 16 weeks and 15 months. Whilst some of these dogs will be re-homed, there is no accurate information about what happens to the remainder. The Report concludes that in the absence of evidence to the contrary, APGAW must assume that a significant number of these young greyhounds are destroyed.

It is further noted that in 2005, the NGRC created its Retired Greyhound Department which involved the recruitment of a Retired Greyhound Coordinator. The NGRC has, since 2005, had one person working

full-time on issues relating to the retirement of dogs. In addition, the Retired Greyhound Coordinator works alongside the NGRC’s Registry Department to ensure that owners are not allowed to register further greyhounds if they have previous unregistered greyhound retirements. Despite these changes, APGAW believes that the system remains inadequate and that the greyhound industry must improve its tracking of dogs as a matter of urgency. It advocates sanctions for failure to register the fate of retired

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dogs that are strictly and consistently imposed and carry substantial penalties.

The Report notes that decreasing the number of greyhounds bred each year would be an important welfare-related measure. Whilst it would be difficult to restrict the number of greyhounds bred and

transported from Ireland without contravening EU trade regulations (although see decision of ECJ in *Nationale Raad van Dierenkwekers en Liefhebbers VZW, Andibel VZ, Belgische Staat* decided post-Report and summarised below), it may be possible for DEFRA and its counterpart in Ireland to investigate the instigation of joint initiatives aimed at tackling the problem, by, for example, introducing spot-checks to

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ensure that transporters are complying with EU transport regulations. Further, the Report recommends the introduction of a licensing system for breeding as well as a system for the registration and regular inspection of breeding premises.

The Report refers to evidence provided by a number of witnesses to the effect that presently, too many races take place and each requires too many dogs. The result is increased injury rates, lack of sufficient time for ground staff to prepare the racing surface to optimum safety standards, lack of sufficient time for trainers to diagnose and treat injuries and lack of sufficient rest for greyhounds in between races. The Report recommends, *inter alia*, that a prohibition on greyhounds racing more often than three times per week should be built into regulations. The

Report also suggests the extension of the racing life of greyhounds through handicapped races and the expansion of veteran races.

Currently, tracks and trainers' kennels are inspected by NGRC Stipendiary Stewards. They are also inspected by their own vet prior to each day's racing with the vet having the final say as to whether the racing should be allowed to go ahead on that day. However, the fact of the vets being paid by the trainer whose kennel they are to inspect may lead to a conflict of interest. As a result the Report recommends that inspectors be independent of tracks and trainers and that employment directly by the regulatory body be explored.

The Report also recommends that it should be a condition of the licensing of tracks and trainers that a certain standard of training for all staff including kennel hands should be introduced. All training should have a welfare component and, if appropriate to the post, should include assessment of practical skills in the care of greyhounds. The establishment of Centres of Excellence should be considered by the industry. These would provide hands-on training and the dissemination of information relating to good practice in greyhound care.

APGAW expresses its concern in the Report that the surface, design and dimension of tracks could have a significant impact on the welfare of dogs racing on that track. It would be very interested in the results of the two industry-commissioned research projects into track surface and design and would encourage future research projects looking into this welfare issue. In the meantime, the Report

indicates that it is imperative that tracks are maintained to the best possible standard.

The Report notes that the industry has had an extremely poor record of recording, collating and reporting injury data. Whilst this is beginning to improve, the publication of injury data requires substantial further improvement as a matter of urgency. At present, the main organisation collecting injury data is the Racecourse Promoters Association, which has a financial interest in maintaining public confidence in the track.

Representatives of the NGRC indicated to APGAW in its preparation of the Report that the existence of an independent sector makes it difficult to enforce NGRC rules because, if trainers are found to be contravening rules and their license is revoked, they always have the option of continuing to race on independent tracks. The existence of an independent sector also makes it harder to track dogs as some who retire go on to race on independent tracks under different names.

In view of this, the Report recommends the establishment of a broad regulatory body along the

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lines of the type of organisation described by grassroots industry

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representatives, the Greyhounds' Voice, which felt that the role of the organisation should be to agree and administer reform, monitor and stringently police all aspects of greyhound welfare from the birth of the greyhound until their becoming pets. All tracks, owners and trainers would be obliged to adhere to its welfare rules and regulations. The body would be transparent both in terms of policy and funding with annual financial accounts clearly displayed in the racing press. It would include representation from parties such as the NGRC, BGRB, Greyhounds' Voice, the Dogs Trust, RSPCA and other recognised greyhound charities, each with a voice, but with no party having overall control. The body would have overall control of all areas of greyhound welfare to ensure that the greyhounds' welfare is paramount. It would assume various roles, including the employment of vets.

Under the *Animal Welfare Act 2006*, DEFRA has plans to introduce both Regulations and a Code of Practice relating to the welfare of greyhounds. The Welsh Assembly Government also intends to introduce regulations and a Code of Practice. Regulations are made by a Statutory Instrument and are binding whilst the Code of Practice will be approved by Parliament but will not be legally binding. The Code is also likely to be connected to the rules of the regulatory body of the industry so that a breach of the Code could result in, for example, the suspension of a license.

A Consultation was conducted by DEFRA, setting out a number of questions to which a detailed response was made by the Associate Parliamentary Group for Animal

Welfare (APGAW). The response is summarised below.

- Regulations should set minimum animal welfare standards for all tracks through the promulgation of one broad system of regulation for all and one set of national standards that apply to all greyhound racing;
- All tracks should be licensed;
- All tracks should be regulated to the same standard regardless of whether they are run by the Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB) or are independent. This could be achieved through a requirement of accreditation through one body;
- Any regulations should provide protection for greyhounds throughout their lives and not simply while they are racing at tracks;
- Tracks and trainers' kennels must be regularly inspected by independent bodies to ensure high welfare standards;
- Veterinary attendance at all tracks should be compulsory. Vets in attendance should be independent;
- The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons should introduce a greyhound specialism – just as a specialism exists for vets wishing to attend horse races, who must possess postgraduate training as well as mandatory mid-career training;
- A vet must examine each dog before it races as well as at the conclusion of a race to ensure that no injury has been sustained;
- A record of all veterinary attendance at tracks should be kept and stored for at least three years;
- Vets should have access to suitable permanent facilities for treating greyhounds;
- All kennels and tracks should be ventilated;
- When greyhounds are transported or kennelled, they should, at all times, be able to stand up at full height and turn around;
- Greyhounds should be properly and permanently identified, possibly through microchipping;
- Track managers should be responsible for ensuring that only greyhounds that are properly identified and registered race on their track;
- Both the owner and trainer of a greyhound should be required to produce identification at least the first time a greyhound runs at any track;
- Tracks should be required to keep injury records and prompt action should be taken if a track appears to have an unusually high number of injuries;
- It should be illegal for a registered greyhound to be put down by anyone other than a vet except in exceptional circumstances;
- All greyhound breeders and their premises should be registered if not licensed by the national regulatory body and regularly inspected;
- The racing calendar should be reorganised in order to require fewer dogs, which could result in each individual dog racing less often;
- The registration fee should be regularly reviewed and significantly increased;
- Present guidance should provide more information to ensure the welfare of racing greyhounds.