

Review of the Queensland greyhound racing industry

Submission from the Australian Veterinary
Association



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The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the national organisation representing veterinarians in Australia. Our 8500 members come from all fields within the veterinary profession. Clinical practitioners work with companion animals, horses, farm animals such as cattle and sheep, and wildlife. Government veterinarians work with our animal health, public health and quarantine systems while other members work in industry for pharmaceutical and other commercial enterprises. We have members who work in research and teaching in a range of scientific disciplines. Veterinary students are also members of the Association.

Executive summary

The recent exposure by *Four Corners* of serious, widespread and unchecked animal welfare abuses in the greyhound racing industry has placed a question mark over the future of greyhound racing in Australia. While veterinarians and others have spoken out about live baiting and other serious animal welfare concerns within the industry in the past, the extent of the infractions appears to have surprised industry participants.

This demonstrates serious shortcomings within the industry with respect to animal welfare, and a complete failure to adequately investigate, address and remedy unacceptable animal welfare attitudes and practices. An independent regulatory authority is now essential to protect the interests of all animals involved in greyhound racing.

Greyhound owners, trainers and service providers who treat dogs well and would never condone or even consider live baiting have nothing to fear from an independent authority. Those who care appropriately for their animals, in line with community expectations, will be the winners if those who don't are identified and removed from the industry.

Live baiting is only one of numerous animal welfare issues associated with greyhound racing. Existing rules for greyhound protection are not functioning effectively. Veterinarians have concerns about how greyhounds are bred and reared, trained, raced and their post-racing fate including the unacceptable rates of animal wastage. Whatever improved integrity arrangements are made, there is a clear role for a significant increase in veterinary input to ensure adequate standards of animal welfare are maintained and enforced to the satisfaction of the community.

The evidence now appears overwhelming and compelling that major changes must occur in the Queensland greyhound industry if it is to continue. In fact, its very existence depends on successfully combatting the animal welfare issues within the industry, and restoring community faith in its integrity.

Recommendations - summary

- Regulation of animal welfare in the greyhound racing industry should be under the control of a separate authority which is wholly independent of Racing Queensland.
- Either a dedicated independent authority should be established for this purpose, or the role be ceded, with appropriate resourcing, to the existing animal welfare inspectorate of RSPCA Queensland and DAF.
- Industry participants should be excluded from being on the board of the independent authority in order to maintain the perception of independence and avoid conflicts of interest.
- Members of the board of the independent authority must include at least one registered veterinarian

proposed by the Australian Veterinary Association to ensure the interests of greyhounds are appropriately protected.

- The authority should report publicly on all complaints investigated.
- There should be a publicly available strategic plan to advance the welfare of all greyhounds in the industry (whether or not they race or are licensed). Public reporting of progress towards the targets in the plan in relation to animal welfare should be mandated.
- Greyhound whole of life welfare must be addressed. Veterinary involvement at all stages is key, including advice on breeding, early socialisation, routine care, healthy and humane training practices, injury prevention and treatment, and post-racing welfare.

Independent regulation of animal welfare

The systemic problems revealed by the *Four Corners* program and the recent Greyhound Racing in NSW Inquiry demonstrate that a truly independent authority is needed to regulate greyhound racing in every jurisdiction. Wholesale cultural change is required to transform the industry into one where transparency and accountability meet community expectations. In the immediate term, an independent regulatory authority will also be able to oversee the transformation of the industry into one where animal welfare and integrity are given the priority they should have.

Given the crisis of confidence now overwhelming the greyhound racing industry in Queensland, there is a strong case for different governing and controlling arrangements compared with the two other racing codes. As noted above, there is a clear case for an independent regulatory authority given the failure of existing structures to address significant animal welfare concerns, including live baiting.

Those on the board of an independent authority must include at least one registered veterinarian to ensure the interests of greyhounds are appropriately protected. An appointment process for the veterinarian could follow the process currently in place for the NSW Animal Welfare Advisory Committee – the Australian Veterinary Association puts forward three appropriately-qualified candidates and one of the three is selected to serve.

There must be a conscientious effort to ensure public transparency and accountability in the activities of the independent regulatory authority. This would involve excluding any person with an interest in the industry (such as a breeder, owner, trainer, sponsor or service provider) from being appointed to the independent authority's board.

Problems with the existing regulatory framework

Regulation of greyhound welfare is complex as it is split between two Acts in Queensland – the *Racing Act 2002* and the *Animal Care and Protection Act 2001* (ACPA).

Currently there is an exemption under the ACPA for activities authorised under the *Racing Act 2002*. However the Racing Act has a limited definition of animal welfare that only applies to licensed animals while they are involved in training and racing activities. Situations outside this are governed by the ACPA, including use of other species for baiting (this is a specific offence under the ACPA).

Theoretically, Authorised Officers appointed under the Racing Act currently have powers to audit animal welfare at licensed premises, however have no jurisdiction over unlicensed establishments where greyhounds are bred and trained for racing. These Authorised Officers are appointed by Racing Queensland and the Office of Racing who may not be sufficiently independent to effectively regulate the industry and may no longer enjoy community confidence to do so. Clearly the situation as it currently exists is inadequate and has failed to prevent extreme and systemic cruelty occurring.

The AVA suggests two possible solutions to achieve independent regulation of the industry:

Option 1

Remove the exemption under the ACPA so that the welfare of racing animals is regulated under the same animal welfare legislation as all other species. This would mean the current inspectorate appointed under the ACPA (RSPCA Queensland and DAF) would have powers to enforce animal welfare across the greyhound racing industry. A specific code of practice for greyhound welfare could be developed and adopted under the ACPA, including breeding standards which would address issues around breeding, rearing and socialisation. Enhanced powers of entry of the current ACPA inspectorate would improve surveillance to ensure issues such as live baiting and other unacceptable practices are detected and prosecuted.

Option 2

Should the current exemption be maintained, it is essential that a body that is completely independent of Racing Queensland be made responsible for animal welfare integrity in the industry. This would be most easily achieved by appointment of RSPCA Queensland and DAF inspectors under the *Racing Act 2002*. These inspectors would then have dual powers – powers to regulate the welfare of licensed greyhounds under the Act, as well as their existing powers under the ACPA which apply to all other species. Given the recent revelations around use of other species for “bleeding” of greyhounds during training, these dual powers would be useful and appropriate.

Whichever option is adopted, proactive independent monitoring as opposed to the current “in house” regulation is required, in order to restore public trust in the industry.

Better reporting mechanisms for animal welfare concerns are also needed, as well as anonymity and protection for those reporting. The widespread and systemic nature of live baiting suggests that many in the industry would have been aware of this practice. Reporting could be encouraged by establishment of an animal cruelty hotline along the lines of Crime Stoppers where the identity of the complainant need not be disclosed.

Similarly there must be open and transparent public reporting on all complaints investigated, to restore the community’s faith that animal welfare is being respected within the Queensland greyhound industry. Adequate funding will be essential.

Other greyhound welfare issues

A high percentage of greyhound pups bred for racing in Australia do not go on to race. There is an unacceptably high rate of attrition which is of genuine public concern. This unacceptable wastage is due in large part to the breeding and rearing methods used – lack of adequate socialisation and training of puppies mean that they are often not suitable for rehoming. A major gap in racing regulation is the lack of standards for breeding and rearing of greyhounds and any review of the legislation must address this omission. Solutions would include licensing of breeders, adoption of enforceable breeder standards and inspection of breeding establishments to ensure compliance.

Legislation and industry codes must be developed to ensure the welfare of greyhounds for their entire life, from breeding and rearing stages through training, racing and eventual retirement and rehoming. Veterinary involvement at all stages of greyhounds’ lives is key, including advice on breeding, early socialisation, routine care, healthy and humane training practices, injury prevention and treatment, and post-racing welfare.