



Joint Select Committee on Greyhound Racing in Tasmania
House of Assembly, Parliament House
Hobart 7000

11 June 2015

Submission by Animals Tasmania to the Joint Select Committee on Greyhound Racing in Tasmania

To the Joint Select Committee on Greyhound Racing in Tasmania,

Thank you for requesting the input of Animals Tasmania (AT) into the matter of greyhound racing in Tasmania. AT is an animal rights organisation, and as such we are always pleased to be able to have a say in how the industries that involve animals should operate.

In saying this, AT differs from an organisation like the RSPCA in that our ultimate stance in regards to these industries is always abolition. We do not condone the use of animals for entertainment, and in accordance with this we deem greyhound racing to be unnecessary. As such, we believe the Committee's priority should be constructing a plan for how best to phase it out, while minimising the suffering of greyhounds that are already a part of the system. It is also for this reason that we approach the word "welfare" with caution, and as such please let it be noted that anytime it used in this submission, it should be interpreted with the knowledge that abolition is still our primary and ideal stance.

In the interim, while greyhound racing is still in practice, this is our response to the Terms of Reference you have provided:-

(a) practices in the Tasmanian greyhound racing industry, including whether live baiting, 'wastage' and 'draining' of greyhounds is occurring, and if so, to what extent;

AT strongly suggests that a thorough investigation is required into live baiting practices in Tasmania. Since the release of the Four Corners program, *Making a Killing*, there have been 9 complaints of possible live baiting made to RSPCA Tasmania. These have all been investigated with none identified as needing any further action¹. However, it should be noted that the "surprise element" of being investigated would have been removed due to the publicity the program received, and as such questionable training facilities may have been able to adequately alter their methods with the knowledge that they may soon be under the same scrutiny. If this is true the change is almost certainly going to be a temporary one, and for this reason AT recommends that all bullrings should require registration (ie. Ban private bullrings), and furthermore, that all training facilities and bullrings should have 24/7 CCTV monitoring to ensure the practice of live baiting does not ever occur. While the RSPCA may be considered to be the best organisation to undertake such an investigation (preferably with the help of Tasmania Police), AT would also like to have some input in regards to recommending appropriate person(s) who have knowledge in the area. If the investigation does discover live baiting practices are occurring, the persons responsible (including all trainers and owners) must be brought to justice. Specifically we refer to the case of the *Herbert Inquiry* (2008) in which proof of live baiting was discovered on a trial track, but the track owner was

disqualified for only 12 months and the lure driver for only 6 months (after an appeal)¹. These penalties are not adequate in deterring people from committing the horrendous crime that is live baiting, and AT expects if any similar cases arise in the future the Government will take a zero-tolerance stance.

Moving onto the issues of 'wastage'. In the Tasmanian 2013/2014 racing season, of the 607 greyhounds that exited the industry, only 121 were rehomed while a staggering 486 were euthanased. For the 2014/15 season, up until March 2015, 98 have been rehomed but 267 have already been euthanased.¹ It should also be noted that these figures are entirely reliant on the reporting of greyhound owners. In light of the mass greyhound graves that have recently been discovered around Australia, it would be reasonable to assume there is a large amount of greyhound euthanasia that happens unofficially too, with no limit to the cruelty of the methods involved. This is unacceptable, and while more funding and effort into the rehoming of greyhounds is a great idea that has already been put forth, it is likely that the euthanasia of greyhounds not fit for racing will exist as long as the industry does, simply because the demand for greyhounds will never match the industry's lack of use for them. This is one of the main reasons AT will always maintain the position that greyhound racing can never be free of cruelty, and as such should be banned.

(b) the role of regulatory authorities in upholding animal welfare standards in the industry and encouraging best practice;

AT has issue that the primary authority responsible for upholding animal welfare standards is Racing Services Tasmania (RST), as it is a division of the Department of State Growth. It seems that any government or State

entity would also have interest in the revenue of the industry, and hence cannot be totally unbiased when considering the welfare of the animals it is supposed to be representing. For this reason, AT would like the authority to be made up of third-party representatives, with a background in animal rights, so as to remove any potential for bias or conflicts of interest. AT would be happy to set up this authority, or at the very least would like to have some say in whom the representatives are. We make a point of this because, as an abolitionist rather than welfarist organisation, we do not recommend the RSPCA be given responsibility over such a body.

Furthermore, AT would like to enquire into the Committee's definition of "best practice". AT's definition would be what is best for the greyhounds, and assuming your definition includes economic gain (and therefore the compromising of animal wellbeing), we have a clear disagreement with the use of that term.

(c) the level of state government funding provided to the industry in Tasmania in the form of a 20 year funding deed signed in 2009;

As stated on numerous occasions, AT believes this industry is unnecessary and will always be cruel, and hence it should not be the role of the government to use its resources to keep it running. When profit and animals are mixed the animals always end up worse off, and this has been demonstrated on numerous occasions, not least in this very industry. Perhaps illegal activity and corruption of the industry (such as live baiting) can be controlled (though there is no evidence so far to suggest this is the case), however, 'wastage' of greyhounds will always occur, regardless of the initiatives put forward. Furthermore, the "normal" conditions of how racing greyhounds are kept are inarguably

cruel. Most spend their lives in confined spaces, and are only allowed outside during the 1-2 hours in which they train. There isn't the capacity to breed and train greyhounds in a way that maximizes their wellbeing, and if a practice is inherently cruel AT believes the state government should not play a part in backing it. Hence, AT would like the state government to cease funding of greyhound racing immediately, and instead fund a plan to abolish greyhound racing in Tasmania, rather than put any further money towards continuing the industry.

(d) the comprehensive report already completed by the Director of Racing and the Chief Veterinary Officer into these issues and the 29 recommendations for consideration by the State Government;

While this report is certainly comprehensive in terms of welfare, it is AT's belief that this is a misdirected viewpoint to take, and would recommend another report being conducted based on the rights of the animals.

In regards to the content of the report, AT's main criticism is in the introduction section of the report, where they use the claim that greyhound racing is steeped in tradition as a way to justify it's presence in modern society. I'm sure the Committee is well aware of many traditions that are no longer around due to the inherent cruelty involved, so it seems needless to explain why this is a rather feeble statement to make.

AT agrees with a lot of the recommendations that have been made, with a few already been touched on above. A point we feel should be considered is in the regulating of bullrings. While this is a welcome suggestion, there must be a protocol put in place to stop corruption between the racing authorities and the track owners/operators. Again, having 24/7 CCTV monitoring would be a solution to this.

Another point is that while it is agreed there should be an urgent focus on decreasing the number of dogs being euthanased, and this can be achieved by decreasing the incentive to breed, transferring the current funding allocated to the Vaccination, Microchipping and Rearing rebate (recommendation 14)¹ to this cause seems to be a case of reducing the welfare of dogs being bred to increase the welfare for when they retire – which makes little sense. Breeders will be less likely to vaccinate and microchip their dogs if there is no reimbursement for it, and as such the welfare of the animals will be decreased. The monetary value of the rebate can possibly be decreased, but getting rid of it all together is a step in the wrong direction, and perhaps funding can be attained from decreasing other rebates (such as the Tasbred bonuses which are awarded based on quality and performance of the greyhounds) or prize money. Once again on this point, if the Committee cannot find enough resources to rehome every greyhound to a loving home when required, then the industry should be abolished.

In regards to point 11, AT suggests introducing a rule in which there is a decrease in the legal amount of dogs that can be bred, which will help to decrease the number of greyhounds euthanased also.

For points 17 and 18, education is certainly important, but AT suggests education about animal rights should also be included, not just about animal welfare.

Point 24 discusses the practice of a Tasmanian racing greyhounds being exported interstate. AT would like any live export of greyhounds to be banned, on the basis that it is impossible to be certain of the “welfare” standards of other states, and hence the wellbeing of the greyhounds in question could be compromised.

AT agrees a central point of contact, for which people with concerns about the industry can easily contact, is needed (point 25), however we do not think it should be limited to welfare complaints as it is at the moment. Hence, we do not believe the RSPCA is the right organisation for the job and would be happy to provide recommendations for an alternative.

If the Committee does deem it appropriate for AT to have a part in coordinating the central body of contact, we would like the Memoranda of Understanding to be extended to AT as well (recommendation 26).

(e) any other matters incidental thereto;

The final matter AT would like to bring to the Committee's attention is the huge discrepancy in animal law between companion animals and animals in use for entertainment. At the moment industries that use animals prioritise them based on their usefulness, not on their capacity to suffer. Our long-term recommendation (that can start being implemented now), is to change legislation to make the law a voice for all animals, not just the animals that society has deemed to be worthy. This overhaul in legislation would require an input from all the animal industries, as well as all animal protection organisations (including AT), and we hope the Committee can agree it is something they would like to be a part of. If so, please consult *Voiceless – The Animal Protection Institute*, a leading body in animal law, for how to approach this.

In conclusion, AT truly appreciates being asked for an opinion into this matter. Hopefully our recommendations are of use to the Committee, and we are looking forward to hearing the feedback and observing the changes the industry makes. Our priority, as an animal rights

organisation, is for greyhound racing to be banned as soon as can be achieved while still maintaining the maximum wellbeing for all greyhounds. It should be noted that this has occurred in many US states already, so there is a clear precedent there for how best to approach this.

Please do not hesitate to contact AT if you would like further clarification of any points that have been suggested. It should also be noted that an AT representative would be very happy to attend a meeting in person if the Committee deems this appropriate.

Yours sincerely,
Mehr Gupta
Secretary
Animals Tasmania

References

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