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Submission to Parliamentary Enquiry into Greyhound Racing in Tasmania.

Background, I have been employed at the above practice since late December, 1980. The practice is a mixed practice servicing the rural areas of Launceston, as well as companion animals, zoo and wildlife species. The practice has also acted for welfare examinations for the northern branch of the RSPCA. The practice has provided a racetrack veterinary surgeon on course at race meetings of the Launceston Greyhound Racing Club for over 50 years, and our practice principal Dr Stephen King initially started practice in Tasmania with the Department of Primary Industry, then moving to private practice in Launceston. He has been on the committee of the Launceston Pacing Club, and was Chairman of the Greyhound Racing Board some years ago, and was instrumental in introducing the "Breeders Bonus", which was initially provided to subsidise the cost of vaccination and rearing of litters at a time when previously distemper and then parvo virus infection were causing mortalities in young puppies.

I have been sharing racetrack duties with Dr King over the past 34 years, and whilst acting under direction of the stewards, a racetrack veterinary surgeon's presence is primarily for the welfare of the individual racing animal, providing pre and post-race examinations, emergency first aid as required and taking of urine or blood samples for swabbing for drug testing as required by the stewards.

Our practice also acts as "Identification Officers" in the north of the state, usually earbranding and microchipping and identifying each individual puppy in a litter usually before 4 months of age. The practice also has a small greyhound medicine and surgery component, as well we have many clients who are proud owners of GAP or retired greyhounds.

As a practice we have had a broad exposure to many areas of the industry and have been witness to many changes that have occurred. The greyhound is an ancient breed dating back to Egyptian times, they are in general a healthy animal, with a good temperament and orthopedically sound (unlike many pet breeds at the moment). They have been selected since ancient times to chase prey and have been selected for athletic performance and short intense burst of speed – they are the ultimate canine sprinters.

Initially I will comment on the practice of “draining”. As a Red Cross blood donor myself I take great offence to this description. Circulating blood volume of a dog is approximately 85ml per kilogram body weight (range 79 – 90). So on average a 25kg bitch would have a blood volume of 2.1 litres, and a 35kg dog would have a blood volume around 2.6 litres. We would typically on blood collection take one pack from a bitch, an occasionally 2 packs from a dog. Pack volume at maximum is 450mls of blood.

Blood is taken from an anaesthetized animal that has been brought to our veterinary surgery for euthanasia and with the owner’s permission for blood collection prior to euthanasia. These greyhounds are unsuitable for rehoming often due to a very strong prey drive, temperament problems or a chronic orthopaedic condition. These dogs are anaesthetised as per standard veterinary protocol as per any procedure (for example desexing), with appropriate pre anaesthetic sedation and pain relief, with gaseous anaesthesia and anaesthetic monitoring by our nurses and electronic pulse oximeters. They are then humanely euthanased with an overdose of pentobarbitone as per standard veterinary protocols.

In our clinic blood is stored at 4 degrees Celsius before being discarded after 28 days. Often packs are discarded, we would usually only have 2 packs in the refrigerator at any one time. Having blood on hand has saved many lives – for example dogs with acute rat bait or pindone poisoning needing immediate transfusions on entry into the clinic, for dogs undergoing surgery for spleen cancer, for dogs with acute haemorrhage due to injury or car accidents, emergency caesarians with catastrophic blood loss and some medical conditions.

Commercial supplies of whole blood have been difficult and at times impossible to access (especially in Tasmania) and many veterinarians (myself included) have used their own pets, or clients animals or a resident clinic greyhound as a blood donor. Like humans whole blood donations can only occur quarterly so this can be problematic.

Our clients whose dog’s lives have been saved by a greyhound blood transfusion are very grateful and aware of the privilege that has been extended to their animal. They are aware of the origin of the blood and I tell them to give thanks to the animal that has provided their dog with life, I know that sounds twee and sentimental but as a veterinarian the ability to administer a life-saving product is very special. Blood transfusions in our practice would perhaps only occur once a month – I would have to check records for total accuracy but when they are needed they are needed.

I would be happy to meet the committee to discuss any questions about this practice if required.

With respect to live baiting I have no knowledge of this practice, but as many have said I would be naïve to state that this does not occur. It is indefensible and the challenge facing the industry in my opinion is the role of the regulatory authorities and the entire industry to ensure it never occurs.

I have read the AVA’s submission and agree with the majority of its content, as I agree with most of the comprehensive report of the Director of Racing and the Chief Veterinary Officer, and I think that the 29 recommendations should be thrashed out and discussed by industry representatives, veterinarians close to the industry, RSPCA, welfare officers from DPIWE and Tas Racing and Racing

Services and some independent persons, and then legislated as part of an industry code of practice and incorporated into the rules of racing.

With respect to the level of state government funding, the deed was signed after the sale of the TAB and industry representatives would be able to give a more accurate picture of the deals and promises made at that time. Racing was sustained by a proportion of taxes generated from gambling turnover. The racing industry in Tasmania contributes a great deal to the Tasmanian economy but that analysis should be left to economists.

Wastage is a complex problem in the Thoroughbred, Standardbred and Greyhound racing industries. Again a more specific definition of the term is needed. Animals are bred for a purpose, ie racing, and the number of animals making the track, and competing, and the number of animals either being disposed of before racing due to poor performance or unsuitability for purpose, and the numbers surviving during their racing careers, and the numbers surviving after their racing careers. This can all be statistically documented from data collected by the racing bodies and SHOULD BE SHARED BY TAS RACING and RACING SERVICES.

Most greyhounds just love to race, it is inherent in their genetics and one can go out to the track on race night and see the excitement and dare I say joy these dogs experience pre-race. The onus on us is to provide the safest environment (eg track design and surface and lighting and camber and lure design and speed and safety rail and catching pen) for these animals that provide a “product” that the public gambles on, flow on industry beneficiaries (eg petrol stations, veterinarians, pet food companies, race night employees, public service employees) as well as government monetary benefits from the taxes derived from this industry.

In my opinion – wastage starts from conception. The industry needs to uphold animal welfare standards and encourage best practice. What follows is idealistic, but my vision would be for a pregnant bitch to have the best nutrition, the best anthelmintics, and a birth with live puppies and a normal lactation. Puppies are then raised in a suitable environment that corresponds with the FIVE FREEDOMS, with best practice nutrition and worming and freedom to run. They are taught to chase a dummy, they are socialised at the critical 5week to 4 month age to be exposed to people, noises, starting boxes, the rough and tumble of multiple greyhounds at speed. And after that they are reared with company of their peers, continue to be exposed to social situations before reaching the breaking in kennels. They are trained and athletically prepared appropriately for their racing careers, race sound and at the finish of their careers continue to live to the end of their natural lives.

Experts in greyhound behaviour and welfare should be defining best practice, and that knowledge should underpin education of industry participants and regulatory authorities. Wastage needs to be addressed on a whole of industry basis, and the approach to analyse areas of improvement should be undertaken in a similar manner to a risk assessment process. I feel that that would enable key focus areas to improve best practice outcomes for an individual animal.

Our community benefits from income generated from the industry. Our community will not tolerate recent revelations of abhorrent practices that have been documented on mainland Australia.

I feel the industry as a whole needs to develop clear, definable, enforceable standards that they will adhere to for animals in their care. Regulatory authorities should treat industry participants

equitably and transparently. The GAP program in Tasmania has been underpinned by the dedicated work done initially by June Phillips and at the moment by Susan Gittus. The latter is truly doing a wonderful job, ex racing animals cannot be rehomed without proper temperament testing and training, improperly rehomed animals have caused death of other animals.

These standards should be compatible with current expectations of animal welfare standards and have the ability to change as these standards change with expanding knowledge. I subjectively feel that this would create and even playing (wagering) field for the “product”, and give benefits to the individual animal from conception to grave and enhance chances for an individual greyhound to live to the end of his/her natural life. This also includes ethical behaviour by the trainer, handler, breeder, owner, veterinarian and regulatory and administrative officers as well.

I hope this provides some insight, I realise this is very subjective and my biased view of the industry that I have been exposed to in Tasmania. I am an Australian Veterinary Association member and have been a member of the special interest group the Australian Greyhound Veterinary Association. The greyhound breed is in my opinion a truly magnificent example of the canine species.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Kim Barrett.