

Inquiry into greyhound racing in Tasmania

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 failure to adequately investigate, address and remedy unacceptable animal welfare attitudes and practices.

The AVA has not heard concerns from members about specific animal welfare issues such as live baiting taking place in Tasmanian greyhound racing. However given the scale of problems uncovered in three states by *Four Corners* and now emerging in other reviews, it would be naïve to think that animal welfare concerns did not exist in Tasmania.

Tasmania is in a better position than many jurisdictions as there is already independent regulation of the greyhound racing industry through Racing Services Tasmania. The AVA supports many of the recommendations made by the recent *Review of arrangements for animal welfare in the Tasmanian greyhound racing industry* by the Tasmanian Chief Veterinary Officer and Director of Racing.

Live baiting is only one of numerous animal welfare issues associated with greyhound racing nationally. Veterinarians have concerns about how greyhounds are bred and reared, trained, raced and their post-racing fate including the unacceptable rates of animal wastage. The use of greyhounds as blood donors is not considered a problem in itself by the veterinary profession providing the procedures are undertaken humanely. It is more of a concern that healthy greyhounds are being presented for euthanasia in the first place rather than being rehomed.

Whatever improved integrity arrangements are made in the Tasmanian greyhound racing industry, 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 nationwide in the 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

- Implement the recommendations of the *Review of arrangements for animal welfare in the Tasmanian*

greyhound racing industry by the Tasmanian Chief Veterinary Officer and Director of Racing, especially those highlighted below in this submission.

- Refer any person suspected of being complicit in live baiting in the greyhound industry to the police for investigation and criminal prosecution where the suspicion is supported by evidence.
- Develop legislation and industry codes to ensure the welfare of greyhounds for their entire life, from breeding and rearing stages through training, racing and eventual retirement and rehoming.
- Encourage cultural change through an ongoing industry education program on contemporary animal welfare standards, more veterinarians in leadership and other roles within the industry, and strong independent enforcement of animal welfare and integrity regulations.
- Address overbreeding of greyhounds and provide more resources to greyhound adoption programs.

Independent regulation

Truly independent regulation of the greyhound racing industry is essential to help undertake the cultural reforms needed for the industry to regain community trust. Tasmania is in a better position than many jurisdictions as there is already independent regulation of the greyhound racing industry through Racing Services Tasmania.

The AVA supports many of the recommendations made by the recent *Review of arrangements for animal welfare in the Tasmanian greyhound racing industry* by the Tasmanian Chief Veterinary Officer and Director of Racing. The AVA strongly supports the following recommendations to strengthen governance arrangements.

28. Consider the development of an appropriate formal arrangement between the Racing Services Tasmania division of the Department of State Growth and the Biosecurity Tasmania division of the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment.

29. Rebrand Racing Services Tasmania to the Office of Racing Integrity to emphasise its role and differentiate from the commercial body, Tasracing.

Effective enforcement is an essential component of truly independent regulation. It will also play a role in the wholesale culture change required to re-establish community trust in greyhound racing. The AVA strongly supports the following recommendation of the *Review of arrangements for animal welfare in the Tasmanian greyhound racing industry* to strengthen enforcement.

15. Enhance the powers of entry for animal welfare officers under the *Animal Welfare Act 1993*, and RST stewards under the Rules of Racing, to ensure they are properly supported with respect to live baiting and other animal welfare issues.

Other greyhound welfare issues

AVA members have not reported rumours of live baiting in Tasmania specifically. However, given the scale of problems uncovered in three states by *Four Corners* and now emerging in other reviews, it would be naïve to think that such animal welfare problems do not exist in Tasmanian greyhound racing.

Live baiting is completely unacceptable and every effort must be made to eliminate this practice forever. We would go further than the recommendations outlined in the *Review of arrangements for animal welfare in the Tasmanian greyhound racing industry*. New rules and mandatory penalties for live baiting under the Rules of Racing for any person found guilty are worthwhile. However, the AVA would also seek criminal investigation and prosecution for any industry participant found to be complicit in live baiting.

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.

The use of greyhounds as blood donors prior to euthanasia is not a welfare issue in itself providing the procedures are undertaken humanely. Greyhounds are not 'drained' of blood, and as for all canine, feline or equine blood donors, the blood collection procedure must be humanely performed.

The greater concern for the veterinary profession is that healthy greyhounds are being presented for euthanasia when they are of no further use to the industry. Some greyhounds are presented for euthanasia because waiting lists for adoption programs are too long. Additional resourcing for these programs is required to meet the current demand. Effectively addressing overbreeding through a range of measures should be the ultimate goal.

Not all greyhounds are suitable to be rehomed as some have an excessive prey drive or behavioural problems that are difficult to treat. However, improved early socialisation, training and education of all greyhounds will increase the number suitable for rehoming after their racing career ends.

The AVA supports the following recommendations of the *Review of arrangements for animal welfare in the Tasmanian greyhound racing industry* to address animal welfare concerns.

7. Ensure races are programmed specifically for greyhounds with less ability and for mature age greyhounds
8. Ensure that the Grading Schedule provides further racing opportunities for greyhounds that are no longer competitive in their current grade.
9. An assessment be made of funding and opportunities for greyhounds to be rehomed once they have completed their racing careers
13. Ensure incentives to breed are properly balanced with responsible breeding and welfare considerations.
14. Transfer current funding allocated to a Vaccination, Microchipping and Rearing Rebate (formerly referred to as a breeder's bonus) to retirement and rehoming opportunities for greyhounds.
17. Implement an industry education program with respect to contemporary animal welfare standards.
18. Link licensing requirements to attendance and assessment at education programs in respect of animal welfare standards.
25. Establish a central point of contact, that being the RSPCA, for persons with information in relation to live baiting or any greyhound animal welfare complaints. The contact details of the RSPCA to be included on all greyhound-related published documents.
26. Establish formal Memoranda of Understanding between Racing Services Tasmania, the RSPCA and Tasmania Police for the exchange of information.
27. Consider the establishment of an independent, national animal welfare taskforce to consider jurisdictional findings and to make joint recommendations to state and territory Racing Ministers and Greyhounds Australasia.