



Greyhound racing: welfare and regulation issues

Ensuring animals have a good life by advocating on their behalf

Key facts...

- ★ The RSPCA is a member of the Greyhound Forum which engages with the greyhound industry to improve the welfare of racing greyhounds.
- ★ The Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB) published an eight point welfare commitment in 2018 which set a range of targets including a reduction on the number of dogs euthanased on humane grounds trackside as well as on economic grounds.
- ★ Some progress has been made against the targets but those for euthanasia have recently been moved back to 2023.
- ★ Voluntary contributions from bookmakers have been received but a statutory levy, which would provide a secure and consistent income is not forthcoming.
- ★ The absence of a secure and consistent source of funding means that the ability for every greyhound to be afforded at least a life worth living appears increasingly unlikely.
- ★ The RSPCA and Dogs Trust are concerned about both these issues and have written to the DCMS and Defra.

Background

The RSPCA has worked on the issue of greyhound welfare for a number of years and raised many different areas of concern during the passage of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and the Welfare of Racing Greyhound Regulations 2010 (which provide a regulatory framework for greyhounds raced in England).

We are a member of the Greyhound Forum which engages with the greyhound industry to try and encourage improvements to animal welfare for these animals. The forum has achieved several welfare improvements through engaging with the industry.

Despite this work, there remain significant welfare issues which urgently need tackling to ensure that welfare is adequately safeguarded. These include the number of greyhounds euthanased in the Republic of Ireland due to lack of speed and before they even get to the UK¹, lack of regulation of independent tracks, the protection of greyhounds away from the race track and the number of injuries, euthanasia and fatality rates during and, as a result of, racing (Table 1).

Table 1. Racing greyhound injuries and euthanasia for 2017, 2018 and 2019.

Year	Total injuries	% of total injuries against total runs	Number of dogs PTS on humane grounds trackside	Number of dogs PTS on economic grounds
2017	4837	1.19	257	348*
2018	4963	1.16	242	324**
2019	4970	1.21	207	265 (123*)

*Reported as number of dogs euthanased due to treatment costs and no home available.

**Reported as number of dogs euthanased due to treatment costs, no home available & PTS on vet advice away from the racecourse

The Greyhound Board of Great Britain's welfare commitment:

In 2018, the Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB), which regulates the majority of greyhound racing in Great Britain, published a Greyhound Commitment². The Greyhound Forum contributed to and welcomed this plan, however, fulfilling each of the commitments will be dependent on receiving a sufficient and sustainable funding

¹ <https://www.ioe.ie/news/rte-documentary-greghounds-673780>

² <https://www.gbgb.org.uk/about/the-greyhound-commitment/>

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source from bookmakers. The GBGB set clear objectives to reduce the number of dogs euthanased within the industry and aimed to halve the number of dogs euthanased by 2021. Progress against these targets are outlined in table 1 but the date has recently been moved to 2023.

Securing a statutory Levy:

Unlike horse racing there is no statutory levy for racing greyhounds and it is instead reliant on voluntary contributions from bookmakers. The contribution to welfare as a proportion of overall income is small. According to 2012 figures³, the retail betting turnover and gross win⁴, and core industry income amounted to £1.3bn and £119m respectively but only £4m was used by the industry on welfare expenditure. This sum is both inadequate and unreliable to address the various welfare issues inherent in the industry and is compounded by the knowledge that there is an overall movement of cash out of the industry which could reduce future contributions.

In January 2019, the Government announced an increased funding commitment from bookmakers. In 2019/20 the British Greyhound Racing Fund collected a total of £8.87m from bookmakers, up from £6.95m in the previous 12 months. The Government continues to encourage any remaining bookmakers that have not signed up to the voluntary arrangements to do so however this source of income is not consistent or reliable unlike that which would be provided by a statutory levy. In the absence of the levy, the ability to safeguard the welfare of racing greyhounds is not possible.

The recent coronavirus pandemic has had a major impact on GBGB's budget with a reported deficit for 2020 and expected in 2021. Funds earmarked for welfare initiatives were instead used to manage the immediate crisis. Of the budget potentially available in 2021, that set aside for welfare has been reported by GBGB to be unsustainable to fulfil their commitment.

Discussions between GBGB and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in the early part of 2021 indicate that they are unwilling to pursue a statutory levy and instead are seeking to negotiate with bookmakers for sustainable voluntary contributions.

Calls for abolition:

Recent years have seen organisations like the League Against Cruel Sports⁵ and Forever Hounds⁶ adopt policies against greyhound racing and further academic reports highlighting the welfare issues associated with racing have been published⁷. Other areas continue to raise concerns around greyhound welfare, for example the New Zealand Government is undertaking a review⁸ and bans⁹ continue to be introduced. In April 2021, a petition calling for the abolition of greyhound racing exceeded 100k

The RSPCA and major animal welfare organisations have corresponded with the GBGB expressing the need to make sufficient improvements such that our engagement is maintained. A range of welfare targets were sent to GBGB including some identified by GBGB themselves with their commitment document. A recent review of these targets using a RAG system has shown that of 11, only three were marked as amber and none green.

Conclusion

The ability for every greyhound to be afforded at least a life worth living and that all efforts are made to help ensure welfare is safeguarded appears increasingly unlikely. The RSPCA and Dogs Trust have written to the DCMS and Defra to raise concerns regarding the absence of a sustainable and consistent source of income and a shift in the targets by GBGB. We are currently awaiting a response to the letter.

³ Deloitte Report: Economic Impact of British Greyhound Racing Industry 2014.

⁴ Figures are for the year ending 31 March 2013.

⁵ <https://www.league.org.uk/greyhound-racing>

⁶ <https://foreverhoundstrust.org/news/position-statement-greyhound-racing-uk/>

⁷ <http://greyexploitations.com/resources-reports/injuries-in-racing-greghounds-by-professor-andrew-knight/>

⁸ <https://www.stuff.co.nz/sport/other-sports/300278714/review-into-greyhound-racing-and-welfare-launched-by-racing-minister-grant-robertson>

⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2018/nov/20/the-slow-death-of-us-greghound-racing-florida-ban>

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