

# **FREE THE HOUNDS INC**

## **PETITION 001 – OPPOSE GREYHOUND RACING – SUBMISSION**

Greyhound racing is a small industry in WA that relies on demonstrating the highest standards for welfare of greyhounds in order to retain its social licence to operate. Community expectations concerning the welfare of racing greyhounds have changed significantly over the past decade leaving this industry struggling to keep pace with new public scrutiny including demand for the industry to be banned.

The current crisis in public confidence is exacerbated by the absence of independent regulator for this industry. This conflict of interest has been described by the Australian Productivity Commission as “regulatory capture” - when the same agency is charged with maximising the profitability of an industry as well as regulatory enforcement and protecting the welfare of greyhounds.

If greyhound racing is to be considered an asset to WA then there is a need for Government intervention to significantly improve the quality of life and welfare of racing greyhounds in WA throughout their whole life cycle. Greyhound industry participants in WA need to demonstrate more responsibility, including financial, for the whole of life care of the greyhounds owned/bred.

Key initiatives suggested to address this include:

1. Limit the number of greyhounds bred and removal of the WESTCHASE breeding incentive bonus
2. Introduce a bond/levy payable by owners for each greyhound born or imported into the WA greyhound industry to be used towards each greyhound’s veterinary and other costs associated with its retirement from the industry
3. Increase industry transparency by providing publicly available data and information on industry operations, and remove the ambiguity of terms used
4. Remove the integrity and welfare racing functions from Racing and Wagering WA (RWWA) to a separate entity to improve oversight of greyhound welfare and avoid conflicts of interest
5. Invest in infrastructure developments designed to improve greyhound welfare

Any welfare improvements should be implemented using the existing funding provided to the industry and a requirement be the industry is to be financially self-sufficient without additional government financial support.

These initiatives are consistent with the parliamentary internship report prepared on the WA Industry; the recommendations from the NSW Special Commission of inquiry into Greyhound Racing, and the Regulatory Impact Statement released by the Victorian Government in association with its draft new Code of Practice for the Keeping of Racing Greyhounds.

### **KEY ISSUES EXPERIENCED IN WA GREYHOUND RACING INDUSTRY**

- there is an unacceptably high “wastage rate” currently tolerated by this industry. Around 40% of greyhounds bred do not go on to enter the commercial racing industry. The data that is retained on the destiny of the greyhounds that don’t make it to the track is limited and not reliable. There are too many of these ‘failed’ pups and dogs to be rehomed with families as companion animals. Many will be killed. This is why the industry is accused of overbreeding or puppy farming by contributing to the oversupply of unwanted animals.

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- inadequate track safety measures and maintenance is leading to greyhound injuries that can result in premature death or retirement, this includes WA's use of circular tracks rather than the much safer straight tracks used in other jurisdictions.
- insufficient attention is given to adequately socialising greyhounds during their rearing stage
  - jeopardising their potential to be successfully rehomed as pets post racing, so leading to more unnecessary wastage
  - increasing the time needed to transition greyhounds post racing to a pet home
- undue reliance is placed on independent, community based volunteer groups to rehabilitate and rehome greyhounds, with these groups rehoming around 70% of the greyhounds in 2016
  - creating significant financial burden for these groups to fundraise to cover the associated veterinary and other costs to enable a greyhound to be rehomed as a pet. This is exacerbated by the fact that
    - only around 15% of owners or trainers make any financial contribution to the group taking on the care of the greyhound post racing
    - an increasing number of greyhounds being retired are requiring significant veterinary attention for injuries such as damaged hocks; untreated facial issues; untreated Pannus (eye condition causing blindness) and dental and gum decay
  - placing considerable social pressure on group members to take greyhounds into care prematurely as owners refuse to pay for the greyhound's care post racing with foster carers often housing, at their own cost, multiple greyhounds awaiting rehoming
- allowing unsterilized greyhounds to be rehomed post racing potentially contributes to the existing overpopulation of dogs generally in the community
- information and data on greyhound racing activities are not readily accessible to the public and are potentially misleading
  - detailed race injury data is not available thus encouraging a public perception that greyhound and track safety is not being taken seriously
  - greyhounds can be recorded as retired from the industry, which implies that the greyhound is still alive, whereas it may actually have been euthanased, thus understating the real number of greyhounds dying in the industry each year
  - records kept are incomplete or inaccurate, greyhounds have been exported out of Australia in breach of current racing rules
- maintaining the regulatory and service related functions within RWWA provides for a perceived conflict of interest and lack of public confidence that effective oversight of the industry is achieved
  - there was an announcement late year by RWWA that prizemoney would be cut to increase GAP funding which was subsequently quietly reversed after opposition by industry representatives
- greyhound racing infrastructure maintenance and development has been undertaken without sufficient attention to greyhound welfare resulting in increased injuries and loss
  - the new Cannington track was closed shortly after opening due to sand kick back issues and the continuing high injury rates along with informal advice by trainers suggest this may not have been appropriately rectified

*This complaint has **not** been taken to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations.*

**KEY STATISTICS COMPARISON - WA GREYHOUND RACING INDUSTRY (MARCH TO MAY 17) TO NSW GREYHOUND RACING INDUSTRY (OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 16)**

Our proposed initiatives are consistent with recommendations from other greyhound racing jurisdictions. To give this a greater context, the below table shows the similarity in injury and death rates occurring in greyhound racing in WA and NSW (as the time periods are not identical it is possible there could be some seasonal variations but that is not felt to be a significant factor).

	Total number of injuries		Injury rate per 1000 starts	
	WA	NSW	WA	NSW
<b>On Track Injuries</b>	249	523	35.6	22.2
<b>On Track Deaths</b>	9	41	1.3	1.8
<b>Race Starts</b>	7,000*	23,486	*Data unavailable, figure based on approximately 25% of 2016 race starts of 27,705.	
<b># of Tracks reported on</b>	3	28		

*References – WA:* Data compiled through information in RWWA stewards reports. These reports are only available for a short time period online so we are unable to provide references. Given the information available, it was unrealistic to be able to compile the actual race starts during this period so a conservative average based on 2016 data is used.

*References – NSW:* Data reported in GRNSW quarterly injury report, primarily Table 2 as shown below [http://www.grnsw.com.au/uploads/4thQuarter2016\\_Greyhound\\_Racing\\_Injury\\_Report\\_final\(1\).pdf](http://www.grnsw.com.au/uploads/4thQuarter2016_Greyhound_Racing_Injury_Report_final(1).pdf)

**Table 2: Number of injury incidents, injury rates and severity in NSW race meetings between 1 October 2016 and 31 December 2016**

Rating	Incapacitation period	Total numbers of injury incidents	Injury rate (injury incidents/1000 starts)	Injury rate * (injury incidents/100 greyhounds)
<b>Minor - I</b>	0 days	43	1.8	0.8
<b>- II</b>	1 to 10 days	165	7.0	3.1
<b>Medium</b>	11- 21 days	210	8.9	3.9
<b>Major</b>	Greater than 21 days	105	4.5	1.9
<b>Catastrophic</b>	Deceased or euthanased immediately	41	1.8	0.8

\*The percentage of individual greyhounds racing in the reporting period that suffered an injury in each of the injury severity rating categories. Note that some greyhounds were injured more than once in the period resulting in a summation of this column exceeding the 9.8% statistic which reflects the percentage of individual greyhounds to incur at least one injury.