

ANIMAL WELFARE — GREYHOUND RACING INDUSTRY

Grievance

MS L.L. BAKER (Maylands — Deputy Speaker) [9.14 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Racing and Gaming. In April this year, I received the news that as a result of the closure of the Macau Canidrome Club in China—thanks to the efforts of international, Australian and Western Australian rescue groups and charities, and with the support of Greyhounds Australasia—over 520 greyhounds have been saved from the dreadful abuse and certain death they were facing. It is worth mentioning the specific groups that have been working with us: Animals Australia worked with Greyhounds Australasia to set this in motion; along with Free the Hounds; Greyhound Adoptions WA; and GreyhoundAngels of WA. Many other groups have also worked with us on this.

The context in which I bring this grievance to the minister is best cited by one of the rescue groups—a UK group that describes how it also rescues dogs from China. This woman had just come back from a trip to China and she said that there were greyhounds everywhere in the meat markets and slaughterhouses, and their treatment is horrific. No-one with an ounce of integrity or compassion would send an animal to a country where there are no welfare laws; where dogs are eaten, beaten to death, boiled alive or slammed to death. We have footage of all of these things happening, unfortunately. Most of those 520 greyhounds were originally exported to Macau from Australia by disreputable people using loopholes in the existing federal legislation. I am pleased to say that 21 of these beautiful greys are on their way to new homes in Australia, and I am particularly pleased to say that one of these is winging her way into the hearts and home of the member for Forrestfield's family. Gracie Price is due to arrive on 7 June, and she is the second grey that the member for Forrestfield will add to his family. Thank you so much for that, member for Forrestfield.

Minister, the export of these dogs is illegal, but people are using loopholes in the federal legislation to send our dogs into terrible conditions in countries like Macau. I am not alone in asking for action and an assurance from the minister that this government will do everything in its power to stop the export of greyhounds to countries that have no, or poor, welfare standards that do not match our expectations. I want to know that we will continue to pursue the incoming federal Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources to make the necessary changes—they are federal changes—that will ensure that this disgusting situation never occurs again.

MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro — Minister for Racing and Gaming) [9.17 am]: At the outset, I thank the member for Maylands and acknowledge her incredible efforts—unparalleled, I think, in the Parliament of Western Australia—on behalf of all animal welfare, not just for greyhounds, but in particular for her advocacy and leadership in greyhound welfare. I also acknowledge Hon Alison Xamon's interest and advocacy in the other place. She has been active in asking me questions and has also demonstrated a keen interest in the welfare of greyhounds, so it is worth acknowledging her efforts here.

I want to bring to the attention of the house some of the things that the member for Maylands has done. Members may recall that she co-chaired the greyhound welfare working group alongside the chief executive officer of Racing and Wagering Western Australia, Richard Burt. This group was unique in Australia. It was the very first time that greyhound welfare advocacy groups were brought together with the authority responsible for racing and wagering and sat down and worked together in the interests of animal welfare in the industry. It enabled those advocacy groups for the very first time to have a direct role in setting policy for animal welfare in the greyhound industry. That was a significant thing. It has not been done anywhere else. I do not know whether it has been subsequently done, but the model should be adopted in other states. It would have helped New South Wales incredibly with the troubles that it confronted.

I would like to join the member for Maylands and place on the record my thanks to the people who participated: the WA Greyhound Association; the Western Australian Greyhound Breeders, Owners and Trainers Association; GreyhoundAngels of WA; Greyhound Adoptions WA; Free the Hounds; and, of course, the RSPCA. As the member pointed out, the export of greyhounds from Australia to places like Macau and China was a terrible and concerning issue. Greyhounds there found themselves in a terrible situation, and probably do to this day—although hopefully not the ones from Australia. But the fact that they were taken there and the circumstances they encountered is well known. The member has already raised that and placed it on the record. One of the actions of the working group, which was chaired by the member, was that I, as minister, wrote to the federal Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources, Hon David Littleproud MP, to request that he urgently make the necessary changes to the Export Control (Animals) Order 2004 to ensure that no more greyhounds would be exported from Australia to countries with substandard welfare standards. That minister's response was woefully inadequate. Minister Littleproud pointed out to me that states and territories regulate their greyhound racing industries, and, therefore, it was within our control to ensure that this does not happen. That is despite the fact that WA does not export any greyhounds directly to any other country. The federal government is responsible for their export.

Racing and Wagering Western Australia has put a lot of resources and measures in place over recent years to ensure greyhounds that enter the racing industry in WA are tracked from birth to death, through strict licensing, breeding and tracking mechanisms. However, once a greyhound leaves Western Australia for legitimate reasons, having possibly being sold to a buyer in another state, we are unable to control where they finally end up if the federal government does not take an interest. The tracking of greyhounds is done through the state racing authorities. There are some greyhounds that may be the responsibility of persons unknown or unlicensed who are responsible for greyhounds that are therefore outside of the oversight of our state racing authority or other state racing authorities. I am advised that improving the oversight and prevention of greyhound exports from Australia to countries that do not meet the necessary welfare requirements can easily be achieved through regulatory changes by the federal government under the Export Control (Animals) Order 2004.

I understand that Greyhounds Australasia, the representative body for the greyhound racing industry nationally, liaises with the relevant state industry authorities, such as RWWA, on a regular basis. Greyhounds Australasia has on several occasions lobbied the federal government to change the relevant regulations under the export control order to add the much needed layer of oversight under federal law to help stop the export of greyhounds to other countries without proper oversight and accountability, to ensure they are going to a country with appropriate animal welfare standards. Greyhounds Australasia has implemented a passport scheme to help implement a consistent national approach across the industry and to prevent unconscionable export practices. But Greyhounds Australasia does not have the required legislative or operational powers to prevent greyhound exports by people unlicensed or unregistered by them or the relevant state racing authorities.

It is clear that Greyhounds Australasia, as the peak national industry body, is proactive and supportive of ensuring that appropriate mechanisms are put in place to protect greyhounds and their welfare when it comes to export controls. I am calling on the federal government, whoever it is going to be, and the incoming responsible minister to support the industry and the greyhound population and make the changes that it as a government is responsible for. I will also be writing immediately following the election to the new federal Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources, whoever that is, on 18 May to call for their support to make the necessary changes to ensure that a national approach is adopted. We are going to take that action.

I want to quickly bring to the attention of the house some of the achievements of greyhound welfare, in particular, of the government in recent years. The greyhound welfare working group achieved some significant improvements to animal welfare standards. Some of those improvements are, first, a review of the code of practice, with participation from welfare experts and advocacy groups to include the highest national standards of welfare; and the code, which is enforceable under the rules of racing, has been adopted and is being communicated to industry. Second, a foster carer workshop and program was developed; the first workshop took place on 4 November 2018. Third, a pilot program commenced with GreyhoundAngels for second chance Greyhound as Pets greyhounds. Fourth, additional funding was secured for GreyhoundAngels, through RWWA, to support veterinary care and rehoming expenses. Fifth, the injury track rebate scheme commenced and valuable feedback was provided through the working group, leading to a further expansion of the scheme to commence in 2019. Sixth, the long-term publication of steward's reports on RWWA's website was made available to improve transparency. Seventh, the provision of extensive industry data by RWWA, as requested by the group, has been recommended and has taken place.