

Hon Lynn MacLaren MLC  
Petition 130 – Oppose Greyhound Racing

#### **Submission in Relation to Petition No. 130 – Oppose Greyhound Racing**

This petition was submitted on behalf of Western Australians united in their concern about greyhound racing in WA and supportive of a ban as has been legislated in NSW and is forthcoming in the ACT. The petitioners have requested that the WA Legislative Council recommends the State Government ban greyhound racing in WA, prohibits the export of greyhounds overseas and interstate and supports adoption programmes for dogs currently in the industry.

This submission endorses these calls and briefly provides some further information and highlights a number of unanswered questions and issues. These matters have not been taken to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations (Ombudsman).

#### **The Ban on Greyhound Racing in NSW and ACT.**

The recently legislated NSW ban followed an independent report by former High Court Justice Michael McHugh into the greyhound racing industry in that state which provided extensive evidence of systemic cruelty and malpractice throughout the industry. It also highlighted that despite being given ample opportunity and numerous warnings, the industry was simply incapable of self-regulation or reform to address the numerous revelations of poor animal welfare outcomes, extreme animal cruelty and misconduct. Foremost amongst these is, as the industry euphemistically terms it, “wastage”. This refers to dogs euthanised/killed as either a result of their failure to perform, an inability to be suitably re-homed/adopted after racing, or as a result of injuries sustained.

The practice of live baiting (using a live animal such as a rabbit, possum, kitten or piglet) as a lure for the greyhounds to chase (and eventually kill) has been illegal nationwide, however the practice was revealed to be systemic throughout NSW. The report confirmed what has long been suspected: the industry is underpinned by cruelty and has forfeited its’ social license to operate.

#### **Greyhound Racing in Western Australia**

It is clear from the available evidence, including responses given to Parliamentary Questions by Lynn MacLaren & other MPs, that greyhound “wastage” is certainly a major issue in WA too.

Getting an accurate picture of the greyhound racing industry’s operations in WA has been difficult however. Parliamentary questions into the greyhound racing industry have been stonewalled or stymied. The Government’s responses have included: “*there is no data available*”, “*the government is unable to respond in the given time frame*”, the information was “*contained in a legacy database within a structure that has not been retained...*” or “*it would require several weeks of work and an [unacceptable] diversion of resources from other projects and duties to [respond to the queries]*”.

Given this lack of data available from the peak body WA Greyhound Racing Association (WAGRA), is it of great concern that the WA government has been so blasé about concerns raised about the industry, downplaying the need for any further inquiry. The Minister’s admission that at least 860 dogs had been euthanised in the previous two year period 2013-2015 however (equating to 43.5% of retired greyhounds, or more than ten times the mortality from natural causes) is certainly cause for alarm. Given that WA only legally permits racing at three venues, the number and rate of greyhound deaths remains unacceptably high and justifies further investigation and action to reduce the ghastly toll.

The Government’s position that the industry does not need further investigation and is capable of self-regulation however flies in the face of evidence uncovered by a recent court case involving a leading industry figure. Anthony Glenny, a WAGRA Board member and trainer, involved in the industry for over 45 years, was charged and convicted of a number of racing-related misconduct

offences. These included using a blood-soaked rag to train dogs with, and failing to co-operate with investigations into live-baiting. While he admitted he had used live baiting himself in the past, he refused to disclose who it was that had recently approached him *“asking to use live bait and carcasses”*. These practices are not only illegal within the industry, but also contravene existing animal welfare legislation. At the time Racing & Wagering WA (RWWA) stated that *“the refusal [of Glenny] to answer the questions strikes at the heart of the proper controls and regulation of the industry”*. It's clear however that this criticism could be levelled more broadly at the government and industry as a whole.

When questioned in 2015 about live baiting the Government cited an *“inability to respond in the given time frame”* as a rationale for not answering numerous questions about how many inspections had been conducted of WA trainer's properties and facilities, how many complaints had been received by the government and what were the result of the complaints, whether any inspections had taken place in WA subsequent to the revelations of live baiting interstate and whether anyone of the 24 people suspended at that time interstate had ever trained or raced in WA.

This demonstrated lack of transparency is clearly a major impediment to any objective assessment of the true animal welfare impacts of the greyhound racing industry.

Other systemic animal welfare related issues that were revealed to be commonplace in the industry elsewhere include the rate of catastrophic injuries on track, resulting in euthanasia. Sadly WA is no exception. In the two year period 2013-2015 over 520 dogs were put down citing injuries sustained.

#### **Export of Dogs Overseas.**

Only eight countries still permit greyhound racing and it is illegal in 40 out of 50 US states. While euthanasia rates are unacceptably high in WA and elsewhere in Australia (~40-50%+) in overseas jurisdictions like Macau the rate is 100%. With numerous other animal welfare concerns also having been raised, it is clearly inappropriate for Australian dogs to be exported to face such a cruel fate. The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) concurs noting: *“export of greyhounds to countries which lack robust animal welfare standards is not supported”*. The WA Government should ensure WA greyhounds can not be exported overseas to jurisdictions with poor or non-existent animal welfare standards.

#### **Support for Adoption Programs**

It's unarguable that the numbers of greyhounds euthanised is excessive and more needs to be done to support greyhound adoption and re-homing for racers after they are retired from racing. Statistics for years 2012-2015 show only 12.5% of animals were rehomed by the Greyhounds As Pets (GAP) program run by RWWA (formerly run by WAGRA) and only another 13% by other organisations. Between 2013-2015, 157 greyhounds were euthanised in WA because they were deemed not suitable for rehoming or adoption. While funding had increased substantially between 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 from \$118,769 to \$425,947, the numbers of dogs rehomed actually declined from 113 to 77 – the lowest number for the nine years previously that figures were available.

The AVA notes *“breeding, rearing and training practices must be conducive to eventual rehoming of greyhounds to reduce euthanasia rates”* however this has clearly not translated into practice. Until greyhound racing is banned the Government should look at introducing a model that mandates all retired dogs be re-homed. This would be similar to that operating in the 10 US states that still allow greyhound racing and requires a reduction in numbers of dogs bred to the number retired and rehomed annually.