

Environment and Public Affairs Committee

From: Free The Hounds
Sent: Thursday, 6 October 2016 10:06 AM
To: Environment and Public Affairs Committee
Subject: Submission in Relation to Petition No. 130 – Oppose Greyhound Racing
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Hon Simon O'Brien
Chairman
Standing Committee of Environment & Public Affairs
Parliament House, WA 6000

env@parliament.wa.gov.au

6 October 2016

Dear Sir

On behalf of WA greyhound welfare advocacy group Free the Hounds please find attached a submission in relation to Petition No 130- Oppose Greyhound Racing for the consideration of the Committee.

We would be happy to provide additional information if required.

Yours Sincerely

Alanna Christiansen

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

Members of the Western Australian public have signed this petition expressing their concerns with the greyhound racing industry in WA. The consensus of petitioners is that these concerns cannot be resolved by reform and are therefore supportive of a total ban to the greyhound racing industry similarly to the recent legislation in NSW. The petitioners urge that the WA Legislative Council recommends the State Government ban greyhound racing in WA, ensures dogs currently in the industry are rehomed, and prohibits the export of greyhounds overseas.

Greyhound Racing Ban in NSW

The recently legislated ban to greyhound racing in NSW was subsequent to a special commission of inquiry into greyhound racing led by former High Court Justice Michael McHugh. NSW Premier Mike Baird summarised the report from the inquiry as “chilling, confronting, and horrific”. The comprehensive inquiry found solid evidence of systemic animal cruelty and corruption so entrenched in the industry that reform was unachievable. It highlighted the failings of a self-regulated industry where a conflict of interest meant transparency was purposely neglected. The premier described the industry as having “a culture of deception”. Over nearly 90 years in operation, with many opportunities to reform, and despite numerous warnings, the industry was simply incapable of self-regulation or reform. Paul Newson, the interim CEO of GRNSW, described industry participants as having little motive to change. He said “we often had to deal with the outright denial of the significant animal welfare issues in the industry” and “on many occasions proposed reforms were dismissed and resisted by industry participants”. The inquiry found high levels of unnecessary euthanasia of dogs (‘wastage’) along with a myriad of other animal welfare issues inherent to the ‘sport’ that simply cannot be policed or controlled. The inquiry confirmed the greyhound racing industry in NSW, enjoyed by only a minority, no longer had a social license to operate. WA petitioners are not convinced the findings of the inquiry are merely isolated to the state of NSW but are nationwide.

Welfare Issues with Greyhound Racing

Petitioners agree the welfare standards of racing greyhounds no longer meet the expectations of modern society that cannot condone the treatment of dogs as commodities for gambling purposes. Several factors that are detrimental to the welfare of racing greyhounds cannot be eliminated entirely regardless of the size of the industry.

The industry cannot achieve financial viability without the **oversupply** of dogs and subsequently **wastage** of dogs is rife. Greyhounds Australasia has said the average litter for a greyhound is 6 pups. Each pup in a litter is not guaranteed to become a racer. There will be pups that simply do not have the chase instinct or are uncooperative during training. Unless illegal training methods are implicated such as live baiting, this cannot be changed. The inquiry found 40 per cent of pups whelped do not make it to the track for these reasons or similar. It is naïve to suggest this is different in WA. In addition to this, dogs retiring from racing at a young age due to injury or poor performance results in huge numbers of dogs leaving the industry on an ongoing basis.

Severe **injuries** sustained whilst racing cannot be entirely avoided. These injuries can be attributed to the anatomy of the dog (thin limbs), track design (long straights & tight bends), number of dogs participating (8 dogs colliding with one another at high speed), medications (that can weaken connective tissue making injury more likely), performance enhancing or impeding drugs (causing cardiac issues), and track environment (racing in wet or hot conditions). Since November 1 2015, 41 greyhounds have been euthanised at WA tracks after sustaining bone fractures or collapsing. The most common fracture was the hock, the human equivalent of an ankle. Right hock fractures are the most common career ending injury of racing greyhounds. Hock injuries in racing greyhounds have been well researched and it has been suggested that racing significantly increases the likelihood of sustaining hock fractures. An industry veterinarian giving testimony at the inquiry explained “there’s only a certain number of circle runs in every dog, and sooner or later you’ll reach that point where structures that are repeatedly subject to stress will fatigue and fail”.

Greyhound racing may be considered a **breach of the Animal Welfare Act 2002** that states "(1) a person in charge of an animal is cruel to an animal if the animal – (c) is worked, driven, ridden or otherwise used – (i) when it is not fit to be used or has been over used; or (ii) in a manner that causes, or is likely to cause, it unnecessary harm".

The standard **housing & keeping** of racing greyhounds has its welfare concerns and consequences. Another veterinarian giving testimony at the inquiry stated "it's common practice for greyhounds to spend a significant period of their adult life under conditions of individual housing, which is unacceptable from an animal welfare standpoint. Dogs are highly social animals and single housing eliminates their ability...to express normal behaviour". The impact of restrictive high-stress environments with **little or no socialisation** and **minimal human interaction** is often evident in adopted dogs. Consequential behavioural issues often result in 'too difficult to rehome' dogs. The likely fate for these dogs is a premature death, unless they are lucky enough to be intercepted by an independent rescue group. The industry's adoption programmes are only able to deal with dogs without behavioural issues, due to the significant costs associated with rehabilitation to pet life. In early 2013 the WA industry's adoption programme celebrated rehoming their 1000th dog after approximately 15 years in operation. According to Greyhounds Australasia between 2003-2012 roughly 6198 pups were produced in WA. Large numbers of greyhounds discarded by the racing industry creates **a heavy burden on members of the community** who do not wish to see young healthy greyhounds euthanised. Volunteer-run rescue groups work tirelessly to save these dogs and successfully rehome significantly more dogs than the industry's adoption programme. These groups receive no financial assistance from the industry and cover veterinary, rehabilitation, promotional and operational costs from their own pockets, fundraising and donations. A small adoption fee barely covers basic veterinary expenses.

Greyhound Racing in WA Financially Unviable

The most recent Financial Statements for the Western Australian Greyhound Racing Association ("WAGRA") reveal an organisation already on the brink of financial oblivion. As at 31 July 2015 WAGRA had only \$728,895 cash on hand, not enough to pay their current payables of \$2,226,748.

Successive operating losses of growing magnitude over the past five years, including a whopping loss of \$1,675,000 in 2015 up from only \$12,000 in 2011, have dwindled away cash reserves despite successive increases in TAB distribution income from Racing and Wagering Western Australia ("RWAA").

In July 2015 the former CEO of WAGRA, David Hobbs, said "WAGRA's current business model is flawed" and "we are currently restructuring the organisation in an attempt to survive this". Given his recent and unexplained departure it could be concluded that the attempt has been in vain. It is clear that WAGRA are not in a financial position to implement welfare initiatives that are required to meet public expectations.

The NSW independent report by former High Court Justice Michael McHugh into the greyhound racing industry in NSW identified 79 recommendations to be implemented if the industry were to continue and even then Justice McHugh had no faith the industry would change its ways. To implement these recommendations would cost the state of NSW a minimum of \$20million per annum. If even a fraction of those were implemented in the WA greyhound racing industry the financial impacts would cause the end of WAGRA.

This is all despite WAGRA admitting that it will need "major focus on both integrity, and Animal Welfare if it is going to be a sustainable, commercial business". The new structure, implemented to ensure its sustainability, has no mention of integrity or animal welfare in any of the restructured organisation chart. The key performance indicators reported annually have no mention of integrity or animal welfare.

It remains unclear how this 'key focus' has or will be undertaken, especially in its dire financial circumstances and impossible to assess from the information provided by WAGRA.