

Finlay Carson MSP, Convener
Rural Affairs and Islands Committee
Scottish Parliament

By email: rural.committee@parliament.scot

23 March 2023

Dear Mr. Carson,

We, a group of animal welfare organisations, write to you following the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission (SAWC) *Report on the welfare of greyhounds used for racing in Scotland*, to urge that the Committee recommends that the Scottish Government phase out greyhound racing. We will respond to the Committee's open call for views on the topic individually, in addition to this joint letter.

We agree with the SAWC that an end to greyhound racing in Scotland would be "desirable" and that "a dog bred for racing in Scotland currently has poorer welfare than the average of other dogs in the population." We also strongly agree with the SAWC recommendation that no new tracks should be permitted in Scotland.

The report details the many risks to the wellbeing of raced greyhounds. Injuries and deaths at Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB) tracks are documented, though not comprehensively broken down, and the high figures reported represent an unacceptable risk to dogs. Although no such records are available for Thornton, Scotland's only remaining, and unlicensed, track, the SAWC estimated that injury and death rates there are broadly comparable. The SAWC report describes that many of these injuries are caused by the fundamentals of how racing is conducted, and so are unavoidable if racing is allowed to continue.

Less documented are the many other risks to greyhounds, including being bred in Ireland where UK protection measures do not apply, a lack of socialisation, transport in unknown conditions from Ireland and within the UK, and an uncertain future for dogs no longer racing. Greyhounds' living conditions are also frequently inadequate. The SAWC concluded that kennels "do not appear compatible with giving dogs a good quality of life." An additional concern that SAWC acknowledged but excluded from the scope of its report is the use of banned substances to alter the dogs' performance.

It is also clear from reading the SAWC report that the industry is unable and unwilling to self-regulate. GBGB heavily cite their Welfare Strategy in defence of the industry, but the SAWC doubts that it will achieve significant impact. Particularly worrying is the lack of focus within the GBGB strategy on the mental state of the dogs, while consensus amongst animal welfare scientists is that an animal's subjective experience and affective (emotional) state are primary components of animal welfare. Equally troubling is the emphasis within the GBGB Welfare Strategy on genetic selection to try to modify dogs to be more resilient to the stress of racing, simply to meet human demands for entertainment. The SAWC also note that the Welfare Strategy is underfunded and that GBGB has limited ability to enforce changes in the industry.

The SAWC concluded that it "did not find any evidence that the industry was prepared to make the radical changes that would be required to achieve improved dog welfare."

As the SAWC report points out, the presence of an on-site bookmaker (and cancellation of races if that bookmaker cannot attend), handicapping of dogs, long distances travelled by some trainers, and the previous application to GBGB to become licensed, all disprove the claim that Thornton is a “hobby” track and thus less of a risk to dogs.

We agree with the SAWC that “any activity that involves commercial use of animals, carries a risk of exploitation or where the welfare of the animal involved is not the foremost consideration.”

We therefore believe that the Scottish Government should introduce a phased ban on greyhound racing in Scotland beginning immediately.

A recent survey conducted by PanelBase on behalf of greyhound protection group GREY2K USA Worldwide found that 60% of people in Scotland think that lawmakers should phase out greyhound racing. We urge you to make recommendations to that effect now.

We would be glad to discuss this matter further and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Marc Abraham OBE, BVM&S MRCVS, Secretariat, All-Party Parliamentary Dog Advisory Welfare Group (APDAWG)

Graeme Corbett, Campaigns Officer, Animal Concern

Chris Burghes, CEO, Blue Cross

Sarah Johnston, Director of Income and Engagement, Edinburgh Dog and Cat Home

Christine A. Dorchak, Esq., President and General Counsel, GREY2K USA Worldwide

Vanessa Waddon, Senior Head of Operations, Hope Rescue

Robbie Marsland, Director of Scotland and Northern Ireland, League Against Cruel Sports

Bob Elliot, Director, OneKind

Emma Slawinski, Director of Policy, Prevention and Campaigns, RSPCA

Gill Donn, Founder, Say No To Greyhound Racing in Scotland

Gill Docherty, Chairperson, Scotland Against Greyhound Exploitation (SAGE)

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