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Convener
Rural Affairs and Islands Committee
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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28 January 2026

Dear Convener,

I am writing in response to the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee's Stage 1 Report on the Greyhounds Racing (Offences) (Scotland) Bill. I would like to thank the Committee for its careful and detailed consideration of the Bill.

I am pleased that the Committee agreed with the general principles of the Bill and that it considers the intentions behind the Bill to be important. I am also committed to collaborate with Mark Ruskell MSP as far as possible to improve the Bill in line with the Committee's recommendations.

With that in mind, I wish to respond in more detail to some of the specific issues raised by Committee members and to the recommendations made by the Report.

My comments below follow the main recommendations in the Report.

42. In its interim report, the Committee set out its view that a licensing scheme – under consideration at the time – would be unlikely to address the welfare concerns associated with greyhound racing. The Committee also noted the Minister's view, at that time, that there was not sufficient evidence to conclude that the welfare risks at independent tracks were the same as those at GBGB-regulated tracks. Members shared the concerns expressed by stakeholders about the lack of data for injuries, fatalities and associated risk at the independent track at Thornton and asked the Scottish Government to consider how data on injuries, fatalities and associated risk could be gathered from the Thornton track.

43. As part of this stage 1 inquiry, the Committee has sought to establish whether additional evidence is now available to sufficiently support the case for a ban of greyhound racing at independent, as well as GBGB tracks. The Committee notes the Minister's view now that there are inherent welfare risks associated with greyhound

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racing at speed on oval tracks which would not be eliminated entirely with good practice or a licensing scheme.

44. Following the Committee's stage 1 inquiry, some members did not feel a case has been made in support of a ban.

45. The Committee asks the Scottish Government to provide further information about the evidence base underpinning its support for the Bill, including its reasons for now assuming welfare risks are comparable between independent and GBGB tracks. The Committee asks for this information ahead of the stage 1 debate.

Response: There is strong and consistent evidence showing that racing greyhounds on oval tracks puts greyhounds at a significant risk of injury.

Studies and veterinary reports have found that when dogs run into bends at high speed, they experience strong sideways forces that make them more likely to lose balance, collide with each other, or hit the track barriers. An Australian report [Identifying optimal greyhound track design for greyhound safety and welfare](#) calculated that approximately 80% of all catastrophic and major injuries were caused by congestion and incidents such as check, collision and galloping.

These impacts can and do cause serious injuries such as broken bones or muscle and tendon damage.

The Scottish Animal Welfare Commission's 2022 report [Welfare of greyhounds used for racing: report - gov.scot](#) on the welfare of greyhounds in racing concluded that track design is a key factor in injuries and deaths due to the combination of bends and the speeds at which racing dogs enter these bends, and that these risks cannot be fully mitigated against.

SAWC considers that it is clear that track design has a significant impact on injury rate, but only by racing on straight tracks would the risks and injuries associated with greyhounds running around bends be eliminated.

Similar concerns are echoed by animal welfare organisations and veterinary reviews, which point to thousands of recorded injuries and numerous fatalities linked to racing conditions each year internationally. Taken together, this evidence provides a solid animal welfare basis for arguing that greyhound racing - as currently practised on oval tracks - exposes dogs to significant risks that cannot be eliminated by other measures as the risk is inherent to the oval design of tracks.

50. The Committee notes that, whilst the Bill would have a very limited impact given there is currently no greyhound racing in Scotland, the Bill would both prevent racing recommencing at the Thornton track and prevent another (oval) racetrack from opening elsewhere in Scotland.

Response: The Scottish Government agrees with this recommendation.

The aim of this Bill is to prevent greyhound racing on oval tracks in Scotland which puts greyhounds at a significant risk.

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53. The Committee notes the Bill would not prevent greyhounds kennelled in Scotland from being raced in other parts of the UK. Given the Minister’s concerns about the “inherent risk” of greyhound racing on oval tracks, the Committee asks the Scottish Government for its response to the different level of protection afforded to these greyhounds as a result of a ban on racing in Scotland.

54. The Committee asks the Scottish Government, after stage 1 of this Bill has been completed, to provide a full response to its interim report on petition PE1758.

Response: The Scottish Government concedes that it is unfortunate that greyhounds kennelled in Scotland which are raced in other parts of the UK will have a different level of protection afforded to them: however greyhound racing continues to be a lawful activity in other parts of the UK.

It is not the intention of this Bill to make it an offence to transport greyhounds to other areas of the UK. This Bill focuses on a proportional, targeted measure to address welfare risks associated with running greyhounds on oval tracks in Scotland.

The Scottish Government will provide a full response to the committee’s interim report on petition PE1758 as requested after stage 1.

62. The Committee agrees, if a ban were to be introduced, with the approach taken in the Bill to make it an offence for both the greyhound owner and track operator to allow a greyhound to race.

63. The Committee is content with the provisions related to penalties set out in the Bill.

Response: The Scottish Government is in agreement with this recommendation and is content with the provisions set out in the Bill.

70. The Committee notes that the available evidence relating to the welfare risks associated with greyhound racing is most strongly associated with oval tracks; accordingly, the Committee agrees that, if the Bill is passed, the ban should only apply to oval tracks. The Committee notes the Scottish Ministers would have the power to extend the offences to other tracks, if required.

Response: The Scottish Government would not expect this power to be used unless there was evidence that racing on other designs of track involved a similar risk of injury to racing on oval tracks.

77. The Committee is content with the Bill’s provisions in sections 3 – 9 on enforcement, deprivation orders, disqualification orders, and seizure orders. The Committee notes the Scottish Government’s intention to amend the Bill to streamline the provisions and ensure they are consistent with existing animal welfare legislation.

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78. The Committee requests the member in charge provide an update to the Committee, ahead of stage 2, on how discussions are developing with COSLA and the Scottish SPCA regarding extending responsibility for enforcement.

Response: The Scottish Government considers that rather than having bespoke provisions in the Bill, as is currently the case, there are a number of reasons why it is preferable to apply provisions under Part 2 of the 2006 Act.

One example of this would be that there is a case for the powers in the 2006 Act for disqualification, seizure and deprivation orders to be made post-conviction to be applied to offences under the Bill:

- there is no obligation on the Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service to establish and maintain a record of reasons relating to disqualification orders under the Bill, whereas this is required under the 2006 Act,
- there are existing criminal and civil rules pertaining to post-conviction disqualification, seizure or deprivation orders under the 2006 Act, and so application of the provisions of the 2006 Act to the Bill would avoid the need to create new rules.

The Scottish Government is engaging with COSLA and the Scottish SPCA regarding extending responsibility for enforcement and we will update on this when the position is clear.

87. The Committee notes the Scottish Government's intention to amend the Bill's commencement provisions to specify the commencement date by regulations. The Committee is content with this.

88. The Committee asks the Scottish Government for an update on any discussions it has had with Thornton track management regarding a transition to a ban.

89. The Committee notes some animal welfare organisations' request for the Bill to be amended to require a review of the operation of the legislation. The Committee asks the Scottish Government for its response to this suggestion before stage 2.

Response: The Scottish Government notes that the committee is content with our intention to amend the Bill's commencement provisions to specify the commencement of the substantive provisions by regulations.

This means that the provisions of the Bill can be brought into force at a time when all the resources, processes and procedures are in place.

Scottish Government officials have corresponded with Thornton track management throughout the progression of this Bill and an offer was made in December 2025 to the management of Thornton for a meeting with me, in relation to which I await a response.

Thornton is the last remaining greyhound track in Scotland and its economic footprint in recent years has been very limited with small attendance and modest local economic contribution

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due to declining interest in the sport, changes in social attitudes and heightened awareness of animal welfare.

We do, however, recognise the track's social function for a small number of participants and the sense of community this brings and will continue to have discussions regarding a transition to a ban.

The Scottish Government does not consider that a statutory review duty of this legislation is necessary or proportionate but it will monitor for any unintended consequences in this area.

Conclusion

90. Some members felt the member in charge has not made a case for a ban on greyhound racing in Scotland. These members also felt the Bill would not address the welfare concerns raised in relation to greyhound racing. These members do not support the general principles of the Bill.

91. The Committee supports the general principles of the Bill.

Response: I welcome the Committee's report and views on the Bill. I have set out my position above on each of the recommendations and on why the Scottish Government supports the general principles of the Bill. I respectfully acknowledge however that not all members of the committee support the general principles of the Bill.

I look forward to exploring these issues during the Stage 1 debate. I am confident that we will be able to work together with the Member in charge of the Bill, including on suitable amendments at Stage 2.

Finally, I want to thank all the Committee members for their careful and thoughtful deliberations on the Bill and its measures to date and look forward to working with you on the next stages in the parliamentary process.

Yours sincerely,



JIM FAIRLIE

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