



27/09/2022

Dear Mr Carson,

As you know, in April 2022 you invited two trustees from Scotland Against Greyhound Exploitation (SAGE) to give evidence before the RAINE committee in respect of our petition PE1758: End Greyhound Racing in Scotland. Following this meeting, you invited responses from Cabinet Secretary Mairi Gougeon, the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission and the owners of the last remaining active greyhound track in the country – the unregulated track at Thornton in Fife. The last of these responses was published in July of this year. We would welcome the opportunity to address some of the key points in these submissions, and also to offer some updated information that we feel is important for the committee to understand before deciding on next steps.

- Mairi Gougeon stated in her letter that in her view the Animal Health and Welfare Act (Scotland) has adequate provision to protect greyhounds used in the racing industry, but acknowledged that there are difficulties in obtaining evidence to enforce the act with respect to greyhound racing. Indeed it is our assertion that the industry deliberately fails to report clear breaches of the Act to the SSPCA when, for example, they find dogs kept in abhorrent conditions when carrying out their (scant) kennel inspections or when they find dogs drugged with illicit drugs in their extremely infrequent drug testing to name just a few of the dozens of scenarios of which there is documented evidence. With no external oversight of the industry and a concerted lack of transparency from within, it is not surprising that it is impossible to enforce the Act in respect of this industry.

Ms Gougeon closes by stating that she will “carefully consider any recommendations from the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission” when considering next steps.

- The Scottish Animal Welfare Commission began with a narrative response on the many concerns regarding the welfare of racing greyhounds. They acknowledged our concerns around the administration of banned substances and the lack of external regulation and transparency which in our view is a purposeful approach by the industry to avoid scrutiny and be held accountable. They also noted the inherent risks of racing where “opportunities to mitigate welfare issues may not be possible” such as lack of breeding regulation, overbreeding and over supply, high risk of injury and death, and euthanasia of dogs considered to be surplus to requirements.

With regards to unlicensed tracks in Scotland – Thornton in Fife being the last remaining of those – the SAWC were clear in their stance stating that they “**do not support the continuation of unlicensed (flapper) tracks in Scotland**”. They go further in stating that if greyhound racing should continue there must be a veterinarian present at the track to



inspect fitness to race, to ensure dogs are not over-raced and to administer prompt veterinary care when required.

Finally, the SAWC advised in their letter that they intended to respond more fully to the issue of greyhound racing once the Dogs Trust report on Greyhound racing had been published. On the 28th September the Dogs Trust, the RSPCA (England and Wales) and the Blue Cross concluded that work and made a joint statement confirming that after failed attempts over many years to work with the greyhound racing industry to improve welfare as part of the Greyhound Forum, **all three parties are now seeking a full ban on Greyhound Racing throughout the UK.**

- The owners of Thornton Greyhound Stadium responded at length to the committee, and in response to your specific questions around welfare measures they have confirmed our assertions to the committee that:
 1. There is no protocol for assessing a dog's fitness to race, rather it is left up to the owner's judgement despite the obvious issue with the person who stands to make a financial gain being charged with the decision on the dog's fitness to race.
 2. There is no veterinarian present at race meets to provide first aid or euthanasia. The owners further asserted that they cannot afford to put this in place.
 3. There is no drug testing carried out on the dogs.

With respect to the unlicensed (flapper) track, it is clear that the owners can offer no reassurances that there are any of the most basic measures in place to protect dogs racing there. It is our assertion that while we work towards a full ban on this industry in Scotland, we need urgent action in the interim to ensure that the last remaining flapper track has its premises licence revoked by Fife Council with urgency, such that these dogs can be protected now as per the recommendations of the SAWC. We have contacted Fife Council and await a response.

With regards to the full ban the petition seeks, you are already aware that the Scottish SPCA have backed our call to end this industry. The RSPCA in England and Wales, the Dog's Trust and the Blue Cross have long held positions as part of the Greyhound Forum, working with the greyhound racing industry to attempt to improve the low welfare standards greyhounds endure. They have seen first-hand that greyhounds continue to suffer before, during and after racing in their tens of thousands. It is extremely significant that they have publicly called for a full ban on Greyhound Racing this week. This committee cannot ignore the views and recommendations of these organisations given their deep understanding of the industry that has underpinned their call for a ban.

Finally, there is one further development the committee were not made aware of in April when we gave evidence. The last remaining licensed track (Shawfield Stadium in Glasgow) has remained



closed since March 2020, and we have now learned that the owners have started proceedings with South Lanarkshire Council Planning Department, seeking permission to demolish the track and repurpose the site for a mixed residential, retail and leisure (hotel) development. A common argument against a ban on this industry is the impact on the local economy and the loss of jobs that may result. The owners of Thornton Greyhounds repeatedly described their operation as “purely a hobby sport” for the owners, indicating that it neither fuels the local economy nor provides people with a livelihood. Any loss of jobs resulting from Shawfield’s closure have already occurred prior to any intervention from this committee or the Scottish Government. It seems to us that now there is no reasonable argument in favour of the industry continuing in Scotland and mounting reasons to make a total ban on greyhound racing a reality.

We are aware that it is the intention of the committee to discuss this further after the October recess at your next meeting. We, along with the rest of the UK, will be watching closely to see what we hope will be both a progressing of the petition, and also strong recommendations on the need to act in the interim to stop unlicensed racing from continuing.

Kind regards,

SAGE Trustees