

GREYHOUND RACING (OFFENCES) (SCOTLAND) BILL

POLICY MEMORANDUM

INTRODUCTION

1. As required under Rule 9.3.3A of the Parliament's Standing Orders, this Policy Memorandum is published to accompany the Greyhound Racing (Offences) (Scotland) Bill introduced in the Scottish Parliament on 23 April 2025.
2. The following other accompanying documents are published separately:
 - Explanatory Notes (SP Bill 65–EN);
 - a Financial Memorandum (SP Bill 65–FM);
 - a Delegated Powers Memorandum (SP Bill 65–DPM);
 - statements on legislative competence made by the Presiding Officer and the Member in Charge of the Bill (SP Bill 65–LC).
3. This Policy Memorandum has been prepared by the Parliament's Non-Government Bills Unit (NGBU) on behalf of Mark Ruskell MSP, the Member who introduced the Bill. It does not form part of the Bill and has not been endorsed by the Parliament.

POLICY OBJECTIVES OF THE BILL

4. The Bill aims to improve and protect the welfare of greyhounds in Scotland by making it an offence to race greyhounds on greyhound racetracks in Scotland. Offences in the Bill make it illegal for a person (including racetrack owners/managers) to knowingly use, or permit the use of, greyhounds in racing at racetracks. The offence applies to any racetrack used for the purpose of racing greyhounds that is oval in shape, and therefore applies to greyhound racing at licensed and unlicensed racetracks and covers both commercial and non-commercial activities. The offences cover any racing activity, and as such apply to races, as well as time-trials and sales-trials taking place on racetracks. The racing of one or more greyhounds at a racetrack in Scotland, for whatever purpose, will be an offence.
5. The member-in-charge of the Bill, Mark Ruskell, considers that there is an inherent, evidence-based, risk of injury or fatality of greyhounds involved in racing. He believes that existing animal welfare measures have not sufficiently protected racing greyhounds from harm, and that recent proposals for new measures such as mandatory licensing (see paragraphs 48 to 51

of this Memorandum) would, by enabling racing to continue if certain conditions are met, not prevent continued injury and fatality to racing greyhounds.

6. The Member believes that too many greyhounds are injured and killed as a direct result of racing and that only by prohibiting racing greyhounds at racetracks in Scotland will the health and wellbeing of greyhounds in Scotland be properly protected and secured. He believes that only a ban on greyhound racing on oval tracks in Scotland will end unnecessary cases of injury and fatalities among these dogs and protect them from harm.

BACKGROUND

Extent of greyhound racing in Scotland, the rest of the UK, and Ireland

7. There are currently 21 dog racing tracks in Great Britain, 20 of which are registered and licensed by the Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB). The only independent track operating in Great Britain is in Scotland. There is one GBGB licenced track operating in Wales, and 19 in England.

8. The GBGB is the body with responsibility for the governance, regulation, and management of the sport of licensed greyhound racing in England, Scotland and Wales (note however that there are no GBGB licenced tracks currently operating in Scotland). The GBGB provides rules and regulations on the welfare of greyhounds and facilities at licensed tracks, but GBGB rules do not apply to independent tracks.

9. At present, the only greyhound track currently operating in Scotland is Thornton Greyhounds, an independent track in Fife (thought to be the only independent track operating in the UK). A former GBGB-regulated track at Shawfield Greyhound Stadium, South Lanarkshire, closed in March 2020, following the suspension of racing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There are 20 tracks, all licensed by the GBGB, operating in England and Wales.

10. However, despite there being no GBGB regulated tracks currently operating in Scotland, it is understood that there are 27 GBGB-registered greyhound breeders and trainers in Scotland. The Member understands that these breeders and trainers keep their greyhounds in kennels in Scotland and may race some greyhounds at Thornton, as well as racing their dogs on GBGB-registered tracks elsewhere in the UK, usually in the north of England.

11. There are two greyhound tracks operating in Northern Ireland. Both are understood to be independent tracks. There are understood to be 15 tracks operating in Ireland, all of which are licensed by Greyhound Racing Ireland, although six of those are owned and operated on an independent basis. 95% of the greyhounds racing in the UK are understood to be bred in Ireland.

Global greyhound racing

12. It is understood that, in addition to the UK and Ireland, commercial greyhound racing takes places in one American state (it is understood that greyhound racing is illegal in all but seven US states), Australia and New Zealand. However, in 2024 the Government in New Zealand announced

plans to ban greyhound racing due to what it described as an “unacceptably high”¹ number of injuries. The Government in New Zealand announced that racing would be wound down over a 20-month period. Racing Minister Winston Peters stated:

“Beginning the process today [4 December 2024] we are introducing the Racing Industry (Unlawful Destruction of Specified Greyhounds) Amendment Bill which will be passed under urgency to prevent the unnecessary killing of racing dogs.

Further legislation to enable the end to greyhound racing is required. A bill to make the necessary changes to the Racing Industry Act 2020 will be introduced to Parliament in 2025. There will be a full select committee process so everyone will have a chance to have their say.

A key task will be the rehoming of the estimated 2,900 racing greyhounds in New Zealand. An Advisory Committee has been appointed to help manage the transition process.”²

13. It is understood that commercial greyhound racing is also legal, and has been recently active, in other jurisdictions, including Mexico, Vietnam, and China, although no racing is understood to be currently active in any of those countries.

14. Racing that is classed as “non-commercial” or “amateur” take place in as many as 21 other countries around the world, including many European countries, as well as in the UAE and Uruguay. The racing in these countries is often classified this way because it is on a small scale, conducted amongst friends/hobbyists, and with no organised commercial betting taking place.

15. At least 31 countries around the world allow people to remotely bet on greyhound racing taking place in other countries. This practice is often referred to as “simulcasting” – i.e. allowing bets to be placed via access to a simultaneous broadcast of a race.

Risk of injuries and fatalities

16. The Bill is focused on addressing the primary animal welfare concern of the inherent risks of injury and fatality associated with using greyhounds in racing. It is noted that greyhounds used for racing sustain injuries that are rarely sustained by other dogs, particularly injuries on the left forelimb and right hindlimb^{3 4}. This is due to greyhounds pushing off with the left forelimb and right hindlimb on the first bend causing higher stress on those bones.

17. Data available from GBGB operated tracks in England and Wales, and the previously operational track at Shawfield Stadium in Scotland, between 2018 and 2023⁵, shows a consistent rate of injuries of between 1.12% and 1.28% of the total number of races in a year, and the number

¹ [Government announces future of greyhound racing in New Zealand | Beehive.govt.nz.](#)

² [Government announces future of greyhound racing in New Zealand | Beehive.govt.nz.](#)

³ Hayati, H, Eager, D and Walker, P (2019) The effects of surface compliance on greyhound galloping dynamics. Proceedings of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers, Part K: Journal of Multibody Dynamics 233, no. 4: pp. 1033-1043.

⁴ O'Neill, D.G., Rooney, NJ, Brock, C., Church, DB, Brodbelt, DC, Pegram, C. (2019) Greyhounds under general veterinary care in the UK during 2016: demography and common disorders. Canine Genetics and Epidemiology 6, 4.

⁵ [Injury and Retirement Data | Greyhound Board of Great Britain.](#)

of fatalities being between 0.03% and 0.06% of the total number of races run. Between 2018 and 2023 there were 2,241,583 greyhound races at GBGB operated tracks in Great Britain, with 26,522 injuries (this is the number of individual injuries, rather than the number of dogs injured) and 977 fatalities at a track. Note that the number of track deaths peaked at 242 in 2018, then declined each year, until 99 track deaths were recorded in 2022. There was a rise in 2023 with 109 track deaths recorded.

18. The GBGB data also sets out details of wider fatalities across the registered greyhound population. In 2023, in addition to the 109 track deaths, GBGB states that there were a further 318 fatalities, as follows:

- 2 due to treatment costs;
- 6 due to no home being found;
- 49 that were designated unsuitable for rehoming;
- 101 that were put to sleep on vet advice away from a track;
- 92 sudden deaths; and
- 68 greyhounds that died from natural causes/terminal illness.

19. Data specific to the previously operational GBGB licensed track at Shawfield in Scotland⁶ (which closed in March 2020) was made available in 2022 for the years 2018, 2019 and 2020 (noting that the track only operated until March 2020). This data showed that Shawfield had a higher rate of injury in 2019 and 2020 than the average data published by GBGB for those years, and in 2019 had a higher percentage of fatalities per number of races.

20. There is no requirement for unlicensed racetracks to record injuries and fatalities and report these to a licensed authority or governing body, and subsequently there are no available data on the number of injuries and fatalities at the unlicensed Thornton Greyhound Stadium in Fife. However, in its investigative report, the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission (SAWC) concluded that it had “no reason to believe that the risks [of injury and fatality] are any different/lesser [at the unlicensed racetrack] in Scotland from elsewhere in the UK”⁷.

21. The SAWC’s ‘Report on the welfare of greyhounds used for racing in Scotland’ (February 2023) concluded that:

“From the available evidence we consider that the welfare of greyhounds bred for racing is likely to be similar to greyhounds elsewhere in the UK, particularly where greyhounds trained in Scotland actually race in England. The data suggest there are several causes of welfare concern, particularly the risk of injury or death at the track, the oversupply of puppies and the conditions under which they are reared, a significant part of a dog’s life that may be spent in kennels with restricted social contacts, and risks of neglect and poor veterinary care once their racing careers are over. This is

⁶ See Mark Ruskell’s consultation document, page 11. Available at: [Mark Ruskell - Proposed Prohibition of Greyhound Racing \(Scotland\) Bill Consultation Document](#).

⁷ Scottish Animal Welfare Commission (SAWC) (2023) Report on the welfare of greyhounds used for racing in Scotland (2023). Scottish Government. Available at: [Welfare of greyhounds used for racing: report - gov.scot](#).

balanced against the evidence that dogs enjoy the opportunity to run and find the act of chasing a lure rewarding. Although the negative welfare aspects of racing are not insurmountable and could be mitigated through changes in the design of tracks, and greater independent regulation, when dogs are used for commercial gain and gambling, it seems likely that there are some inherent risks where there is the opportunity to make money. We also did not find any evidence that the industry was prepared to make the radical changes that would be required to achieve improved dog welfare ... If Thornton were to close, Scotland would be in the position of having no organised greyhound racing taking place, which on balance we consider desirable. Although we are unclear if this is likely in the near future, should a phased end to greyhound racing be imposed in England and Wales, it has been argued that this might cause an increased interest in developing new racetracks in Scotland. We strongly recommend against any such future development. There is no evidence that there is popular interest in this occurring in Scotland, and any such move would lead to a reduction in the overall quality of life for dogs in Scotland.”

Racetrack design

22. A significant factor which influences the risk of injury to greyhounds while racing is the design of the racetrack. There is widespread evidence⁸ that the bends on oval-shaped tracks (which are the most common tracks used) increases the risk of injury to racing greyhounds and are often responsible for injuries and fatalities resulting from racing. Reasons for this include:

- the dogs usually race in an anti-clockwise direction around bends, which leads to pressures on their left forelimb and right hindlimb. These pressures on the limbs can cause long-term anatomical adaptations, creating imbalance, and weakening of the bone, which ultimately lead to a higher risk of injury^{9 10};
- the centrifugal force of oval-shaped racetracks pulls dogs to the outside of the track, which leads to a risk of collision with the outside fence; and
- dogs slow down when reaching bends on oval-shaped racetracks, which causes congestion and increases the risk of collision with other dogs and fence. At the same time, as sighthounds, greyhounds attempt to keep the lure in view as they reach bends, which increases the risk of collision with other dogs and fences.

23. Given that all tracks in the UK and Ireland are/have been oval tracks, and that there is little precedent globally for straight racing (there is understood to be a straight track in Australia), the Bill prohibits racing on oval tracks. However, in order to future-proof the Bill, and due to welfare concerns of greyhounds racing on tracks of other shapes and designs, including straight tracks, the Bill also gives Scottish Ministers powers to regulate to include other track shapes and types of premises, should that become an issue in future.

⁸ Mahdavi, F., Hossain, M. I., Hayati, H., Eager, D. & Kennedy, P. (2018) Track Shape, Resulting Dynamics and Injury Rates of Greyhounds. ASME, International Mechanical Engineering Congress and Exposition.

⁹ Hercock, C. A. (2010) Specialisation for fast locomotion: performance, cost and risk. PhD Thesis, University of Liverpool.

¹⁰ Eager, D., Hayati, H. & Hossain, M. (2017) Identifying optimal greyhound track design for greyhound safety and welfare. University of Technology Sydney (UTS).

Other concerns

24. The Member recognises that there are broader animal welfare concerns relating to the use of greyhounds in racing concerning their whole life cycle, beyond injuries and fatalities at racetracks. This is highlighted by the GBGB published data relating to greyhound fatalities outside of those experienced at tracks which is set out elsewhere in this Memorandum.

25. There are further animal welfare concerns relating specifically to unlicensed racetracks, including the lack of on-site veterinary presence, which puts dogs at risk of unnecessary suffering when injured as prompt veterinary care is not available¹¹.

26. The Member believes that the Bill is likely to have consequential positive effects on associated welfare concerns across the life cycle of greyhounds. Such issues and concerns are set out in paragraphs 27 to 35.

Euthanasia

27. The published data shows that as well as dogs being euthanised (i.e. painlessly killed to end suffering¹²) at tracks, a number of dogs are being euthanised for other reasons, including that treatment costs are prohibitive, that no suitable home could be found, or the dog was not considered suitable for rehoming. Greyhounds are also being euthanised away from tracks, for what the GBGB describes as being on the advice of a vet.

28. In its 2023 report¹³, the GBGB stated:

“Euthanasia may only be carried out following discussions with and on the recommendation of a veterinary surgeon based on the greyhound’s current and potential future quality of life and with the vet abiding by the guidance set out by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. This is the same whether or not the greyhound is put to sleep at or away from the track. Given the number of greyhounds put to sleep on humane grounds away from the track has increased, we are looking into this matter to identify any trends so effective action can be taken.”

Overbreeding

29. The report by the SAWC estimated that more than 85% of greyhounds in the UK are bred in Ireland, with a lack of information regarding the conditions in which puppies are bred, reared, and transported to Great Britain. The registration of greyhound puppies in Ireland is through voluntary self-reporting via the Irish Coursing Club. There is a significant discrepancy between the number of dogs bred and registered in Ireland, and the number of dogs used in racing in Ireland and the UK. In 2021, there were 12,960 Irish-bred puppies registered at the time of birth, yet

¹¹ Scottish Animal Welfare Commission (SAWC) (2023). Report on the welfare of greyhounds used for racing in Scotland (2023). Scottish Government. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/report-welfare-greyhounds-used-racing-scotland-scottish-animal-welfare-commission/>.

¹² Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (2023) Euthanasia of animals. Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. Available at: <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/setting-standards/advice-and-guidance/code-of-professional-conduct-for-veterinary-surgeons/supporting-guidance/euthanasia-of-animals/>.

¹³ GBGB. Independently verified track injury and retirement data for 2023 (26 June 2024). Available at: [GBGB-Track-Injury-and-Retirement-Data-2023-Commentary-FINAL.pdf](https://www.gbgb.org.uk/track-injury-and-retirement-data-2023-commentary-final.pdf).

approximately 10% were not registered at 12 months of age – meaning that over 1,000 puppies were unaccounted for. In Great Britain similar patterns were seen with around 13% fewer dogs being registered to race under GBGB compared with numbers of puppies registered on the Greyhound Stud Book.

Doping

30. There have been reports of performance-enhancing banned substances found in dogs used in racing at racetracks in Scotland and the UK^{14 15}. The GBGB has an anti-doping policy in place and the availability of data relies either on random sampling or on trainers and owners self-reporting¹⁶. The total number of doping samples collected (7,182) as percentage of the total number of races completed (359,083) at GBGB racetracks was only 2% in 2021¹⁷. The testing for substances in greyhounds used in racing only occurs at licensed racetracks, with no requirement for unlicensed racetracks to perform doping tests.

Kennelling

31. Dogs used in racing spend up to 95% of their times in kennels, which impacts on their quality of life¹⁸. While GBGB guidance is in place to ensure that the physical needs of dogs are met, an investigative report into licensed trainers' kennels by the Dogs Trust discovered that in some cases these standards have not sufficiently been met. There is less information available regarding how dogs racing at unlicensed tracks are kept, as some dogs may live with their owners or trainers.

Rehoming

32. The GBGB offers funding to partnered rescue and rehoming centres through its Greyhound Retirement Scheme to support with costs associated with greyhounds used in racing at licensed racetracks in Great Britain¹⁹. The scheme provides £400 to partnered rescue and rehoming centres for each greyhound that finds a home. However, the Dogs Trust highlighted that veterinary costs to treat 14 injured greyhounds between November 2018 and April 2021 shows that veterinary treatment alone ranged between £690 – £4,800²⁰. For injured dogs leaving the industry, the

¹⁴ Scottish SPCA (2022). Scottish SPCA submission relating to petition PE1758: End greyhound racing in Scotland. Scottish Parliament. Available at: <https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/committees/rural-affairs-islands-and-natural-environment-committee/correspondence/2022/petition-pe1758-submission-from-scottish-sPCA-13-april-2022.pdf>.

¹⁵ The Ferret (2019). Dozens of greyhounds racing in Scotland test positive for banned substances such as cocaine. The Ferret. Available at: <https://theferret.scot/greyhounds-racing-shawfield-cocaine/>.

¹⁶ GBGB (2023). Rules of Racing. GBGB. Available at: <https://rules.gbgb.org.uk/section-8-inquiries-tests-samples-disciplinary-powers-consequences/rule-173-examinations-tests-samples-procedure/>.

¹⁷ GBGB (2022). Annual Report & Accounts 2021. GBGB. Available at: https://gbgb-prod-assets.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/20123715/22224_GBGB-2021-Report-web-update.pdf.

¹⁸ Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee (2016). Second Report of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee of Session 2015-16: Greyhound Welfare. House of Commons, London, UK. Available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/commons-committees/environment-food-rural-affairs/2nd-report-greyhound-welfare.pdf>.

¹⁹ GBGB (2023). Greyhound Retirement Scheme. GBGB. Available at: <https://www.gbgb.org.uk/greyhound-retirement-scheme/>.

²⁰ RAIC (2023). Official Report: Wednesday 03 May 2023. Scottish Parliament. Available at: <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=15289>.

“When we receive a complaint under that existing legislation, we need to prove that unnecessary suffering has been caused to the animal involved. Greyhound racing is deemed to be a lawful activity. The court might ask how the animal has suffered because the injury has taken place during a lawful activity during which you would expect the animal to be injured, because that is what the activity is. That is a challenge that we would face. Because greyhound racing is a specific activity with specific risks, you cannot really compare it with the completely different environment of a general companion animal. That is why we say that it warrants having specific legislation attached to it.”²⁵

38. In 2010, the Scottish Government issued a Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs²⁶ which shares best practice guidance focused on Section 24 of the 2006 Act. Other wider legislation that applies to greyhounds used for racing includes: The Welfare of Animals (Transport) (Scotland) Regulations 2006 to ensure the welfare for transported animals, and The Microchipping of Dogs (Scotland) Regulations 2016 to ensure that all dogs in Scotland are microchipped. The Welfare of Dogs (Scotland) Act (which resulted from a Member’s Bill introduced by Christine Grahame MSP), seeks to improve the health and wellbeing of dogs throughout their lives, including by regulating the selling or transferring of puppies from unlicensed litters, and applies to all dogs, including greyhounds.

Rest of the UK

39. The Welfare of Racing Greyhounds Regulations 2010 (“the 2010 Regulations”) apply in England. These require greyhound racetracks to be licensed and impose various licence conditions on the operators of greyhound tracks. The licence conditions require a veterinary surgeon to be present at tracks before and during racing with the responsibility of inspecting all the dogs that are intended to race. The licence conditions also cover the standard of kennel facilities at a track, record keeping, and traceability.

40. Under the 2010 Regulations greyhound tracks can be licensed by the local authorities or by a United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) accredited body. As a UKAS accredited body, the GBGB is responsible for the licensing of greyhound racetracks in England that operate to the standards required under the 2010 Regulations and that meet the higher standards set under the GBGB’s Rules of Racing. Independent tracks that do not meet the standards set by the GBGB are licensed by the local authority (there are not thought to be any such tracks operating currently).

41. In Wales, following a petition which called for an end to greyhound racing in Wales gaining more than 35,000 signatures, the Senedd’s Petitions Committee reached a majority conclusion that greyhound racing should come to an end. In 2023 the Welsh Government asked for views on proposals to license animal welfare establishments, activities and exhibits²⁷. The consultation included the option of a phased greyhound racing ban. Out of 1,031 responses for the greyhound ban question, the Welsh Government said 64.69% (667) of respondents were in favour of it, 25.12% (259) were against a phased ban, with 10.18% (105) undecided.

²⁵ Scottish Parliament Rural Affairs and Islands Committee. Official Report, 3 May 2023. Available at: <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=15289>.

²⁶ [Welfare of dogs: code of practice - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/publications/welfare-of-dogs-code-of-practice/pages/introduction.aspx).

²⁷ [Licensing of animal welfare establishments, activities and exhibits | GOV.WALES](https://gov.wales/topics/animal-welfare/consultations/licensing-of-animal-welfare-establishments-activities-and-exhibits).

42. In February 2025 the Welsh Government announced²⁸ its intention to ban greyhound racing in Wales. The Deputy First Minister with responsibility for Climate Change and Rural Affairs, Huw Irranca-Davies, said he wants the ban to come into force, “as soon as practicably possible”. The statement by the Welsh Government stated:

“The next step will be setting up an Implementation Group. The Group will engage with stakeholders, learn from other countries approaches, such as New Zealand where government are bringing forward a Bill to end greyhound racing, and advise the Government on how a ban will come into force, the legislative approach, and when it will be delivered.”

43. There is no regulation specific to greyhound racing in Northern Ireland. However, the Control of Greyhounds etc. Act (Northern Ireland) 1950²⁹ requires all sighthounds, including greyhounds, whippets and lurchers, to be muzzled and not let off the lead when in public places, and limits walking only two such dogs at any one time. Some consider this Act to be outdated, and there have been various calls, including petitions, seeking a change in the law in Northern Ireland.

Petition PE1758: End Greyhound Racing in Scotland

44. The Member has stated that the proposal for this Bill was inspired by a Petition in the Scottish Parliament - Petition PE1758: End Greyhound Racing in Scotland³⁰. That petition was lodged by Scotland Against Greyhound Exploitation (SAGE) in September 2019 and “calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to put an end to greyhound racing in Scotland”.

45. In session 5 of the Scottish Parliament, the petition was considered by the then Public Petitions Committee and referred to the then Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee. Following the Scottish Parliament elections in 2021, the petition was considered by the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment (RAINE) Committee, which changed its name to the Rural Affairs and Islands (RAI) Committee in February 2023.

46. The RAIN Committee took evidence from the petitioner in 2022³¹, and then sought views from the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission (SAWC). On 28 February 2023, the RAI Committee received the SAWC's report on the welfare of greyhounds used for racing in Scotland³². Following consideration of the SAWC's report, the Committee agreed to undertake an inquiry into the welfare of greyhounds used for racing in Scotland, to consider the welfare of greyhounds, the aims of the petition, and the SAWC's recommendations.

²⁸ [Wales moves to ban greyhound racing | Welsh Government News](#).

²⁹ [Control of Greyhounds etc. Act \(Northern Ireland\) 1950](#).

³⁰ Scottish Parliament (2023) PE1758: End Greyhound Racing in Scotland. Scottish Parliament. Available at: <https://www.parliament.scot/get-involved/petitions/view-petitions/pe1758-end-greyhound-racing-in-scotland>.

³¹ Scottish Parliament Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee. Official Report, 20 April 2022. Available at: <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13701>.

³² Scottish Animal Welfare Commission (February 2023). Report on the welfare of greyhounds used for racing in Scotland. Available at: [Report on the welfare of greyhounds used for racing in Scotland by the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission](#).

47. The Committee ran a call for views between 17 March and 7 April 2023. It received 1,314 responses of which 32 were from organisations and 1,284 from individuals³³. A summary of the responses to the call for views is published on the Committee's webpages³⁴, and the responses can be read in full on the Parliament website³⁵. 91.4% of those who responded to the call for views agreed with the petition's call for a ban on greyhound racing. The Committee then took oral evidence over several meetings, ending with evidence from the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity on 22 May 2024 before publishing an interim report on the petition on 27 November 2024³⁶. In explaining why it was publishing an interim report on the petition, the Committee states in its report:

“Since the Committee concluded its evidence taking, Mark Ruskell has secured a right to introduce a member's bill to ban greyhound racing. The Minister has confirmed that the Scottish Government does not intend to consider a licensing scheme until the proposed member's bill has progressed through the Parliament. Members agree it is right that Parliament should have the opportunity to take a view on the general principles before the Scottish Government gives further consideration to a licensing scheme.

The Committee notes it would likely be the lead committee for the member's bill at stage 1 and, that being the case, intends to refer to the issues raised in its consideration of this petition when it undertakes its stage 1 scrutiny.

The Committee will return to this issue when the member's bill has completed its passage through the Parliament and the Committee agrees to keep the petition open until that time.”

Scottish Government position

48. Following the RAINE Committee's engagement with the petition in 2022, it wrote to the then Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands seeking the Scottish Government's view on whether the existent legislation, in particular the 2006 Act, is effective in protecting the welfare of greyhounds used for racing. The Cabinet Secretary responded on 16 May 2022³⁷, stating:

“...the Scottish Government considers that the provisions of the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006, as amended, are sufficient to ensure that action can be taken if the welfare of greyhounds, whether still racing or retired, is not being met.”

49. In July 2023, the Scottish Government published a consultation on licensing of activities involving animals³⁸. The consultation sought views on (amongst other things) proposals to licence

³³ [Petition PE1758: End greyhound racing in Scotland - Scottish Parliament - Citizen Space](#).

³⁴ Scottish Parliament Rural Affairs and Islands Committee. Petition PE1758: End greyhound racing in Scotland Summary of call for views. Available at: [PE1758-CfV-summary](#).

³⁵ Scottish Parliament Rural Affairs and Islands Committee. Petition PE1758: End greyhound racing in Scotland. Call for view response. Available at: [Petition PE1758: End greyhound racing in Scotland - Scottish Parliament - Citizen Space](#).

³⁶ [Interim report on petition PE1758: End greyhound racing in Scotland | Scottish Parliament](#).

³⁷ <https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/committees/rural-affairs-islands-and-natural-environment-committee/correspondence/2022/petition-pe1758-letter-from-the-cabinet-secretary-16-may-2022.pdf>.

³⁸ [Licensing of activities involving animals: consultation - gov.scot](#).

greyhound racing in Scotland. An analysis of consultation responses was published on 16 February 2024³⁹. The analysis reports states:

“Of the 454 responses to the question should greyhound racing be licensed, 46.3% supported the proposal. 46% of respondents answered not sure. Those answering "not sure", however, did so as they don't think licensing will be enough to protect the welfare of racing greyhounds and they want to see greyhound racing phased out in Scotland. In addition, 1180 campaign respondents also called for an end to greyhound racing.”

50. In evidence to the RAI Committee on 22 May 2024⁴⁰, the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity told the Committee that the Scottish Government “is not persuaded of the need to ban greyhound racing in Scotland” on the basis that it is “not convinced that such a ban is a proportionate and fair response to the animal welfare concerns arising from the practice”. The Minister went on to say that the Scottish Government is considering the option of a licensing scheme for greyhound racing.

51. In further evidence to the Committee on 11 September 2024⁴¹, the Minister stated that:

“We are still looking at all our options. As you know, a member’s bill has gathered support in the Parliament, and I do not think that we will be pursuing a licensing scheme until we see how that bill progresses through the Parliament. For a long time now, the committee has been looking at the member’s bill and at greyhound racing, and I would therefore be keen to get the committee’s views and hear your considerations. Mark Ruskell’s bill will go through the process, so we will see how it develops and take it from there.”

Support for banning greyhound racing

52. The SAWC’s report on the welfare of greyhounds used for racing in Scotland stated:⁴²

“A survey commissioned by Grey2K, conducted by an independent polling organisation, PanelBase, surveyed members of the general public in Scotland on their views on greyhound racing. The evidence suggests that 63% of Scots have an unfavourable view of greyhound racing and 58% believe greyhounds bred for racing have a poor quality of life. In addition, more than twice as many people said they would vote in favour of ending greyhound racing than opposed it, if a referendum on the matter were to be held (in favour=53%, against=20%, don’t know=26%). The evidence suggests that, although greyhound racing is highly valued by a small segment of the population (e.g., 7% of respondents were very positive about greyhound racing), there is little wider public appeal.”

53. The outcome of the RAI Committee’s call for views also illustrated widespread public support for an end to greyhound racing in Scotland. The Committee received 1,314 responses in

³⁹ [Licensing of activities involving animals: consultation response analysis - gov.scot](#).

⁴⁰ Rural Affairs and Islands Committee, meeting on 22 May 2024. [Official Report](#).

⁴¹ Rural Affairs and Islands Committee, meeting on 11 September 2024. [Official Report](#).

⁴² [Report on the welfare of greyhounds used for racing in Scotland by the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission](#).

total: 32 from organisations and 1,284 from individuals. A total of 530 responses were from respondents based in Scotland, and 91.7% of those respondents were in favour of a ban on greyhound racing.

54. Many animal welfare organisations, in Scotland, the rest of the UK, and internationally, have expressed concerns about greyhound racing. For example, see responses by organisations to: the previously mentioned RAI Committee’s call for views⁴³; the previously mentioned Scottish Government’s consultation⁴⁴; and Mark Ruskell’s consultation⁴⁵ on a draft proposal for this Bill (see paragraphs 68 to 75).

Industry view

55. The GBGB believes that “through the Greyhound Commitment, significant improvements have been achieved in recent years” and that its long-term strategy, A Good Life for Every Greyhound would “drive welfare standards forward and safeguard the health and wellbeing of greyhounds at every stage of their lives”⁴⁶. In written correspondence⁴⁷ to RAIC, the GBGB shared that “the highest welfare standards underpin our sport [greyhound racing] and independently verified data shows transformative improvements over the past few years” and it responded to animal welfare concerns raised by SAWC in its report. The GBGB also responded⁴⁸ to Mark Ruskell’s consultation on his draft proposal, stating:

“As the regulator for British licensed greyhound racing, the Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB) firmly believes in the importance and benefit of having rigorous, appropriate regulation in place for the sport in Scotland. Shawfield Stadium, the last GBGB-licensed track in Scotland, closed during COVID-19 and has not re-opened. There is currently one greyhound racing track, Thornton Greyhound Stadium in Fife, operating in Scotland – which is not regulated. As such, we have been committed – and remain so – to engaging with the Scottish Government and, where appropriate, other key stakeholders to set out what could be offered through GBGB regulation in Scotland. In all our engagements, we have been clear that we do not believe a ban – phased or not – would support greyhound welfare. Rather, it would put at risk greyhound welfare and run the risk of driving the sport underground where it cannot be appropriately monitored and controlled.”

56. Mr Paul Brignal, the owner and director of Thornton Greyhound Track in Fife, the only greyhound track currently operating in Scotland, has submitted written evidence, and given oral evidence, to the RAI Committee, as part of the Committee’s inquiry into Petition PE1758, to end

⁴³ Scottish Parliament Rural Affairs and Islands Committee. Petition PE1758: End greyhound racing in Scotland. Call for view responses. Available at: [Petition PE1758: End greyhound racing in Scotland - Scottish Parliament - Citizen Space](#).

⁴⁴ [Licensing of activities involving animals: consultation response analysis - gov.scot](#).

⁴⁵ Proposed Prohibition of Greyhound Racing (Scotland) Bill. Consultation responses. Available at: [End Greyhound Racing](#).

⁴⁶ [A Good Life for Every Greyhound: GBGB Launches New Long-term Welfare Strategy | Greyhound Board of Great Britain](#).

⁴⁷ [petition-greyhound-racing-in-scotland-3-november-2022.pdf](#).

⁴⁸ GBGB response to Mark Ruskell’s consultation. Available at: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1aRNWI5h61ZVfUj_ga4cnKCF16wEYUN_d.

greyhound racing in Scotland. In his written evidence⁴⁹ he stated that “Thornton Greyhound Track races about 40 meetings a year where approximately 30 greyhounds will take part in each meeting.” In his written submission, Mr Brignal stated that he believed it was unfair to compare greyhound racing in Scotland to the commercial racing which takes place in other countries, stating, “In Scotland the primary carers of the greyhounds are their owners, and in the same way that whippet racing, sled dog racing, flyball and dog agility, it is the dog owners who are responsible for the dogs welfare ... It is fundamentally unsound to regard greyhound racing in Scotland as any different from any other hobby that involves animals competing, in which they may receive an injury or could be subject to any other welfare issues, and if you wish to legislate, this should be applied to all animal activities in Scotland and not just greyhound racing.” Mr Brignal also noted in evidence that the welfare of greyhounds is protected by the Scottish Animal Welfare Act 2006.

DETAIL OF THE BILL

57. The Bill creates two primary offences in order to protect greyhounds from harm. The Bill makes it an offence for a person who owns or is responsible for a greyhound to race it on a racetrack in Scotland, and also for the owner or manager of a racetrack to knowingly permit greyhounds to race on that track (a racetrack is defined in the Bill as being premises provided for the purpose of racing greyhounds that is oval track). The practical effect of these offences is that greyhound racing, on racetracks, in Scotland will be prohibited.

58. Anyone found guilty of these offences faces maximum penalties as set out in the Bill⁵⁰, relating to fines and custodial sentences. In addition, the Bill allows for the courts to make deprivation, disqualification and seizure orders in relation to the offences. These powers will ensure that the courts have sufficient power and flexibility to impose appropriate sanctions on anyone found guilty of the Bill’s two primary offences – including taking greyhounds present when the offence was committed away from the convicted person; ensuring that a convicted person is prevented from owning a greyhound, or using a greyhound for related activities (such as transporting a greyhound, and working with, using, or providing services for a greyhound); and seizing greyhounds from a person who breaches a disqualification order (the Bill also makes it an offence to breach a disqualification order).

59. In circumstances where a deprivation or seizure order is made, the order will require the greyhound to be put to sleep, sold or for other arrangements to be made for the dog’s welfare. The Member in charge wishes to ensure that the welfare and wellbeing of greyhounds are prioritised in any circumstances where such orders are made, and that a greyhound’s life would only be ended if in the greyhound’s best interests. The Bill therefore requires that a destruction or seizure order can only be made where a vet has advised that it would be in the best interest of the greyhound, and the court is satisfied with the evidence provided by the vet. The Bill also requires a court to consider the welfare of a greyhound before making a deprivation or seizure order requiring the sale or other disposal of the greyhound.

⁴⁹ [Response 549673200 to Petition PE1758: End greyhound racing in Scotland - Scottish Parliament - Citizen Space.](#)

⁵⁰ On summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or a fine not exceeding £20,000 (or both). On conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 5 years or a fine (or both).

60. The Bill allows for a person subject to a disqualification order to make a request to the court to vary or terminate the order and for appeals to be made against any of the orders made under the Bill.

61. As the Bill is motivated by the Member wishing to prevent harm to greyhounds that he believes is a direct result of greyhound racing on curved tracks, the Bill only prohibits racing on such oval tracks. The Member is also aware that the only current greyhound racing track operating in Scotland is of a traditional oval shape, and that all tracks previously operating in Scotland are understood to have been oval tracks. However, the Member is keen to ensure that the Bill allows Scottish Ministers to extend the offences to cover the racing of greyhounds on tracks of other, non-oval, design, as well as to other types of premises, should evidence show that such racing can be harmful to greyhounds (for example, should racing on circular or straight tracks develop, and prove to be harmful to greyhounds, or should racing develop on other types of premises). The Bill therefore includes a regulation making power which allows Scottish Ministers to amend the definition of a racetrack.

62. The Bill does not create any new powers for the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SSPCA). The member believes that the SSPCA's existing powers, as inspectors authorised under Part 2 of the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006, are sufficient for dealing with matters relating to the welfare of greyhounds, and that the offences created by the Bill, and the aim of the Bill at prohibiting greyhound racing on oval tracks in Scotland, will be appropriately investigated by the police.

63. The member is mindful of the fact that there is one greyhound racetrack operating in Scotland, and that the Bill would require that racetrack to cease racing greyhounds. To allow time for the racetrack in question to make appropriate preparations (for example, relating to the premises, staff and to ensure the welfare of any greyhounds which race at the track, including potential rehoming) the Bill does not come into force until a year after it receives Royal Assent.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

64. Prior to introducing the Bill, the Member considered the work undertaken on PE1758, a petition to end greyhound racing in Scotland by the Scottish Parliament's Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee, Environment Climate Change and Land Reform Committee, and the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee/Rural Affairs and Islands Committee. The Member also considered the Scottish Government's 2023 consultation on the proposed licensing of greyhound racing, as well as the evidence given by the Scottish Government to the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee as part of its consideration of PE1758.

65. The Member was not persuaded that introducing a licensing regime for greyhound racing in Scotland would address his concerns regarding the harm that can be caused to greyhounds when being raced at racetracks. Neither was the Member persuaded that his concerns could be adequately addressed by enhanced and improved self-regulation within the racing sector. The Member believes that only a ban on racing will remove the inherent risks he believes are associated with racing and therefore introduced a Bill to prohibit racing in Scotland, making it an offence to race a greyhound at a racetrack in Scotland.

66. Whilst at the proposal stage of his member's bill, the Member considered various policy options within his broader policy of prohibiting racing, including applying the offence to other breeds of dog than greyhounds, and related issues such as rehoming and other welfare issues.

67. However, the Member was reassured by the limited extent of racing in Scotland at the present time (with only one racetrack known to be operating) and that issues relating to animal welfare, including rehoming, were already sufficiently addressed, either in legislation or in practice.

CONSULTATION

68. Mark Ruskell consulted on a draft proposal⁵¹ lodged on 7 February 2024. The consultation⁵² ran from 8 February 2024 until 1 May 2024. There were 789 responses⁵³ and a summary⁵⁴ of those responses was published along with a final proposal⁵⁵ on 26 June 2024.

69. There were 21 responses attributed to organisations, all but one of which identified as third sector (charitable, campaigning, social enterprise, voluntary, non-profit) organisations. 768 responses were made by individuals. They identified as follows: 28 (4%) from professionals with experience in a relevant subject; 10 (1%) from academics with expertise in a relevant subject; and 730 (95%) from members of the public. 566 (72%) respondents were content for their submission to be published and attributed to them. 170 (21.5%) respondents requested that their response be published anonymously, and 53 (6.5%) respondents asked for their response to be considered, but not published.

70. A significant majority of respondents, 680 - just over 86% - were fully supportive of the proposal to prohibit greyhound racing in Scotland. A further 6 respondents (0.8%) were partially supportive. A small minority, 94 respondents, just under 12%, were fully opposed to the proposal. Four respondents (0.5%) were partially opposed. One respondent was neutral, and four respondents did not wish to express a view.

71. In general, the responses were polarised, with strong views given both in support and in opposition, with little middle ground. A very small number of respondents were supportive of legislating to impose further regulation and/or a licensing scheme on those wishing to race greyhounds in Scotland.

72. The main reason given for fully supporting the proposed ban on greyhound racing in Scotland was the view that racing at speed on oval tracks is inherently dangerous for greyhounds, often leading to significant injury, psychological trauma, and death. Many accounts were given by

⁵¹ Proposed Prohibition of Greyhound Racing (Scotland) Bill. Draft proposal, available at: [Proposed Prohibition of Greyhound Racing Scotland Bill | Scottish Parliament Website](#).

⁵² Proposed Prohibition of Greyhound Racing (Scotland) Bill. Consultation document, available at: [Mark Ruskell - Proposed Prohibition of Greyhound Racing \(Scotland\) Bill Consultation Document](#).

⁵³ Proposed Prohibition of Greyhound Racing (Scotland) Bill. Consultation responses, available at: [End Greyhound Racing](#).

⁵⁴ Proposed Prohibition of Greyhound Racing (Scotland) Bill. Consultation summary, available at: [Greyhounds draft consultation summary](#).

⁵⁵ Proposed Prohibition of Greyhound Racing (Scotland) Bill. Details available at: [Proposed Prohibition of Greyhound Racing Scotland Bill | Scottish Parliament Website](#).

organisations and individuals involved in the rehoming of former racing greyhounds of significant difficulties respondents believed greyhounds had experienced as a direct consequence of racing. Relating to this, many respondents highlighted the short racing life of greyhounds and the high level of wastage in the industry. Wastage describes the process by which animals are bred for racing but may be discarded before or after a period of racing. Respondents in support of the proposal also highlighted the resulting burden they believed racing placed on third sector organisations to care for and rehome greyhounds, many of which have complex issues and needs, after they had finished racing.

73. Other reasons given for supporting a ban included that using and monetising animals for entertainment was an archaic practice which should have no place in a modern, compassionate Scotland that values animal welfare; that it is a good time to bring in a ban, as there is only one, independent, track currently operating in Scotland; and that banning greyhound racing would remove an avenue of gambling, an activity which some of those supportive of a ban believed can have very serious negative impacts on communities and individuals.

74. The main reasons given for opposing the proposal to ban greyhound racing in Scotland was the belief that greyhounds enjoy racing, and often need to race, and the belief that organised racing provides a safe and controlled opportunity for them to do so. Many felt that racing was currently appropriately managed and operated with good levels of welfare for greyhounds, which are loved and well cared for.

75. Many of those opposed noted that there is only one greyhound racing track operating in Scotland, on a small, hobbyist, scale, and that legislating for a ban on greyhound racing was therefore disproportionate and unnecessary. It was also noted by some of those opposed to the proposal that greyhound racing has long standing historic links in some communities, and is of historic, cultural and social importance to those communities. Concern was expressed that if racing was banned, that illegal racing may take place which could prove a greater threat to greyhound welfare, and that a ban may see the decline, or possible extinction, of the breed in Scotland. Another theme amongst those opposed or partially opposed to the proposal was that greater regulation/licensing may represent a proportionate alternative to a ban on racing.

EFFECTS ON EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES, HUMAN RIGHTS, ISLAND COMMUNITIES, LOCAL GOVERNMENT, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ETC.

Equal opportunities

76. An Equalities Impact Assessment will be completed after the Bill's introduction and sent to the lead Committee designated by the Parliamentary Bureau to consider the Bill at stage 1.

77. No significant potential impacts of the Bill, positive or negative, were identified in relation to characteristics protected by the Equality Act 2010.

Human rights

78. The Member considers that the Bill is compliant with the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

79. It may be considered that the primary offences in the Bill relating to owning/being responsible for a greyhound and/or greyhound racetrack and knowingly using/permitting a greyhound to race on the track may fall within the ambit of Article 1 Protocol 1 (A1P1) to the ECHR (right to peaceful enjoyment of possessions) as regards property rights of greyhound and/or racetrack owners. The protection of property rights under A1P1 is not absolute, and restrictions on these rights may be permitted provided they have a legitimate aim and are proportionate to that aim. The Member believes that the provisions of the Bill respect these principles in view of the aims of furthering greyhound welfare and prevention of cruelty to greyhounds.

80. The Bill includes powers of entry, search and seizure for constables where there are reasonable grounds for believing that an offence has been or is being committed. The powers relate to the investigation and prosecution of an offence with the legitimate aim of the prevention of disorder or crime. The powers are subject to a number of safeguards, including provision for warrants to be granted and that private dwellings cannot be entered without either permission or a warrant. Other safeguards include that a constable must, if required, produce evidence of their authority to exercise a relevant power and that a warrant granted under the Bill expires one month after it is granted. It is considered that these safeguards are sufficient to ensure compatibility with Article 8.

81. The provisions in relation to deprivation, disqualification and seizure orders may come within the ambit of Article 1 Protocol 1 (A1P1) to the ECHR (right to peaceful enjoyment of possessions) as an interference of property rights of those against whom the orders are made. The orders are considered justifiable for the purpose of A1P1 compliance as the deprivation and disqualification orders can only be granted when a person is convicted of the offences in relation to racing greyhounds on an oval racetrack in Scotland. Seizure orders can only be granted upon the breach of a disqualification order. These orders can be appealed to the Sheriff Appeal Court. Disqualification orders can be the subject of a review by the Court which granted them after a minimum period of 1 year has elapsed.

Statement of compatibility under section 23(1) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024

82. Mark Ruskell MSP has made a statement that, in his view, the provisions of the Bill have a neutral impact on compatibility with the UNCRC requirements.

83. The Bill would make it a criminal offence, as the owner or responsible person, to race a greyhound and it would also make it an offence to operate a racetrack. Such offences would therefore be committed outside of family homes. However, the enforcement powers in Schedule 1 provide that a police officer could enter a family home if they were seeking evidence of such an offence but only with a warrant where admission was refused. Therefore, the family home is given higher protection than other premises and article 16 (no child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence) is respected. There is the possibility that a greyhound that is being raced is also a family pet and therefore if a deprivation order (section 5) were imposed it could potentially interfere with that child's right to play (article 31) as well as amounting to an interference with the child's family as the greyhound would in effect be taken away from the family home. However, a deprivation order can only be made by a court where it is in the interests of the greyhound or necessary to ensure the welfare of the greyhound.

Island communities

84. The Bill is not anticipated to have any particular effect on Scotland's island communities. The prohibition on greyhound racing, and the offences created by the bill to give effect to that, will apply equally to all parts of Scotland. There are currently no known greyhound racetracks on any of Scotland's islands.

Local government

85. The Bill is not expected to have any impacts on Local Government.

Sustainable development

86. The member believes the Bill will contribute towards ensuring Scotland has a strong, healthy and just society. Greyhound racing has been in decline across Scotland for some time, and the Member believes that the Bill, which is underpinned by extensive research referred to in this Memorandum demonstrating the risk posed to greyhounds by racing, reflects the views of many in Scottish society. It is the Member's view that the Bill presents an opportunity for further advancement in Scotland's treatment of animals, and to demonstrate that practices that were once deemed acceptable can be reviewed and changed in light of evidence, more progressive thinking, and societal change.

87. The Member believes that Scottish society will be improved by banning greyhound racing. However, he accepts that there are a small number of people currently engaged in greyhound racing, either as owners/trainers or as spectators, who will not be supportive of a ban. The Member also accepts that there will be welfare considerations required as a result of the effect of a ban, such as ensuring the greyhounds currently being raced in Scotland are suitably rehomed.

This document relates to the Greyhound Racing (Offences) (Scotland) Bill (SP Bill 65) as introduced in the Scottish Parliament on 23 April 2025

GREYHOUND RACING (OFFENCES) (SCOTLAND) BILL

POLICY MEMORANDUM

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website -
www.parliament.scot

Produced and published in Scotland by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body.

All documents are available on the Scottish Parliament website at:
www.parliament.scot/documents