

# The state of greyhound racing in Great Britain

## *A mandate for change*

Almost a decade ago, investigations by national newspapers and animal welfare groups revealed the dreadful lives and premature deaths suffered by racing dogs; their bodies often dumped in mass graves. It was clear that cruelty, drug abuse, injury, neglect and killing were rife in greyhound racing.

In 2007 the Associate Parliamentary Group on Animal Welfare (APGAW) produced a report on the industry and the industry commissioned a report by Lord Donoughue. Those reports made recommendations for improving regulation of the industry and protecting racing dogs.

Government regulations governing the welfare of racing greyhounds were introduced in 2010, but the recommendations made in the 2007 reports were largely ignored. The League spoke out against the regulations when they were published, calling them 'little more than a crook's charter'. We have now produced a report demonstrating that, sadly, we were right.

Our report, *The state of greyhound racing in Great Britain: A mandate for change*, produced in conjunction with GREY2K USA Worldwide, shows that the life of a racing greyhound is still filled with abuse, neglect and early death, including:

- **Racing dogs spend 95% of their time in small, barren kennels with little social contact.** Those that are housed in pairs are kept constantly muzzled which is highly distressing for them.
- **Many suffer with fleas, worms, untreated injuries, malnutrition and dental problems.** Industry sanctions against those who treat dogs in this manner are feeble and ineffectual.
- Poorly maintained tracks and racing frequency cause painful, and often lethal, injuries such as broken backs and shattered limbs. **The industry is allowed to keep injury records secret.**
- **At least 10,000 dogs are deemed surplus to requirements every year.** 8,000 are retired racers, the rest are young dogs that didn't make the grade.
- British charities rehome many surplus dogs, but **many are unaccounted for each year.** Some are abandoned, some killed crudely, others sold for dissection.



The following is a summary of our report

## What is greyhound racing?

Commercial greyhound racing began in Britain in 1926 with the opening of its first dedicated greyhound stadium, Belle Vue, in Greater Manchester.<sup>1</sup> In commercial races greyhounds chase a mechanical lure – normally a stuffed toy or a windsock<sup>2</sup> – around a circular track in a variety of distance categories (e.g. 225m sprint, 1km marathon).<sup>3</sup>

Two different types of commercial racing take place in Britain:

- 1). **Regulated** – tracks are licensed by the industry's governing body, currently the Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB), and races take place under the GBGB's Rules of Racing. This is the predominant form in Britain with 24 tracks currently licensed by the GBGB.<sup>4</sup>
- 2). **Independent** – 'flapping tracks' are not licensed by GBGB and therefore do not need to abide by the same licensing requirements and Rules of Racing. There are currently nine independent tracks operating in Britain.<sup>5</sup>

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## A mandate for change

### Confinement

While many racing greyhounds were once privately owned and enjoyed a personal relationship with their owner, often living as part of the family, this is rarely the case today.<sup>6</sup> Many dogs raced on GBGB tracks are now owned by trainers or syndicates<sup>7</sup> and are confined in kennels with a large number of dogs.<sup>8</sup>

Trainers racing on GBGB tracks must keep their kennels in accordance with GBGB rules outlining the size of each unit as well as details of the cleaning regime and food and water provisions.<sup>9</sup> Since 2011, the GBGB has required all kennels to have an annual veterinary inspection where the accommodations are rated as either acceptable or unacceptable and steps for improvement given.<sup>10</sup> Kennels are also inspected twice every year by GBGB Stewards to ensure they are adhering to the Rules of Racing.<sup>11</sup>

**Most racing greyhounds spend 95% of their time confined in a kennel,**<sup>12</sup> so while these regulations and inspections are welcome, they are not sufficient to ensure that greyhounds' welfare needs are met. The regulations regarding 'adequate' exercise, food and light are meaninglessly vague and subjective. For example, **most greyhounds are let out of their kennels for exercise and daylight only three to four times a day for periods of just 15 to 20 minutes.** Additionally, a study into greyhound welfare conducted by the University of Bristol in 2012 found that more than 95% of greyhounds who are kept in paired housing (two dogs together) are constantly muzzled and that this practice is highly distressing for them,<sup>13</sup> yet this issue is not mentioned in the regulations.

The Society of Greyhound Veterinarians – a branch of the British Veterinary Association specialising in greyhounds – has expressed its concern with kennel inspection policies, particularly the GBGB's lack of 'desire to introduce minimum standards for the selection and training of inspecting vets' and that the inspection form does not include any mention of the Animal Welfare Act 2006.<sup>14</sup> The fact that veterinary inspectors are paid by the trainer also leaves the system open to corruption.

### Injuries

Concerns over track safety led the APGAW to call for injury statistics to be published for named tracks. They were not alone. During the consultation on the Welfare of Racing Greyhounds Regulations, 23 organisations and 1,671 individuals called for injury rates to be published.<sup>15</sup>

*"The Society is also concerned that currently, the injury data will not be published and made publicly available. The Society believes that this important [sic], as it would put pressure on tracks with high injury incidence to make prompt improvements. Furthermore, if the public is to regain faith in the greyhound industry, it must be seen to be measurable, open and accountable."*

RSPCA response to the Defra consultation<sup>16</sup>

Despite such overwhelming demand for the publication of injury statistics, **the 2010 Regulations do not require it.** Even some in the industry are unhappy about the secrecy surrounding greyhound injuries. The Greyhound Trainers Association stated in May 2014 that trainers and owners have been asking for track safety and injury statistics from the GBGB for some time, yet no information has been published on the subject.<sup>17</sup>

A 2012 study into greyhound welfare by the University of Bristol identified racing injuries as a key cause of severe suffering for racing dogs.<sup>18</sup>

### Drugs

In 2010 the Independent Anti-Doping and Medication Control Review published a review of licensed greyhound racing, showing:

- Only one in 60 dogs starting in a race or trial underwent drug testing.
- There was **huge ignorance within the industry on the current anti-doping and medication policy** and uncertainty among some officials and regulators.
- The panel recommended a **considerable increase in the number of dogs tested** stating: *'we believe this is an important area where integrity and welfare may currently be compromised.'*
- **It also expressed concern over the widespread practice of giving female dogs testosterone to suppress oestrus\***, stating: *'it is not possible to justify the administration of androgenic (masculinising) agents to racing bitches and we recommend that testosterone should be prohibited.'*

As the GBGB does not publish the number of dogs tested per race, it is unclear whether the panel's recommendation for more testing has been implemented. It is clear that the recommendation to ban testosterone as an oestrus suppressant has been ignored as the hormone is still named as a licensed product (under the brand name Durateston) for this purpose on the GBGB anti-doping website.<sup>19</sup>

## Surplus dogs

In 2007 the APGAW reported that a minimum annual **surplus of 13,478 greyhounds** was produced by the regulated racing industry in England and Wales. This was based on industry estimates of 11,000 dogs retiring from racing plus approximately 2,478 young dogs who never made it to the track. Using the most recent retirement figure available, 8,000 dogs per year,<sup>20</sup> **the number of surplus dogs produced in Britain every year still sits above 10,000.** As most dogs raced in Britain today originate from Ireland (83%), the surplus of young greyhounds is likely to occur there.

The primary adoption agency for retired racers is the Retired Greyhound Trust (RGT) which is funded largely by the racing industry.<sup>21</sup> In 2012 RGT found 3,910 homes for greyhounds.<sup>22</sup> Independent greyhound charities, along with other dog rehoming centres, find homes for approximately 1,500 retired greyhounds every year<sup>23</sup> and do so without financial aid from the industry. The GBGB believes that a further 1,500 are rehomed directly by owners and trainers,<sup>24</sup> leaving a minimum of 1,000 retired greyhounds unaccounted for every year.

## Dissection

A 2008 investigation by The Sunday Times exposed a licensed greyhound breeder selling unwanted dogs to Liverpool University to be killed and used for teaching and research.<sup>25</sup> Charles Pickering, then the largest greyhound breeder in Britain, offered the dogs to the undercover reporter for £30 each, claiming that he sold 30 a year at this price to the University, but could easily provide more. All of the dogs were young and healthy but unsuitable for racing because they did not chase the lure or were too slow. Pickering also supplied young greyhounds to trainer Richard Fielding who gave his older unwanted dogs to the University for free. Fielding told the reporter: *"I got shot of 10 old ones last year. Liverpool is a godsend in that respect because they are used for a good purpose."*

A separate Sunday Times investigation revealed an Essex veterinary clinic was putting down healthy greyhounds and selling body parts to the Royal Veterinary College (RVC). An undercover reporter found that staff at the Greyhound Clinic agreed to kill greyhounds for £30 each, even though he told them the dogs had 'nothing wrong with them'. The RVC then bought dead greyhounds from the clinic, but insisted the dogs be healthy before they were euthanised.<sup>26</sup>

Further newspaper reports and public information requests reveal that more than 550 unwanted or injured greyhounds have been killed and used by British Universities since 2006. Most were used in veterinary anatomy classes; however Liverpool University used greyhound body parts in research aimed at improving the racing industry as recently as 2010.<sup>27</sup> Although all of these institutions claim the dogs were not euthanised specifically for their purposes, they do provide tracks, trainers and owners with convenient disposal of unwanted dogs – as evidenced by Richard Fielding's comment above.<sup>28</sup>

## Failure of self-regulation

Our report makes clear that self-regulation has not and is not working to protect greyhound welfare. Further evidence is provided by the GBGB's 2012 annual report which shows that although greyhound welfare was the most common category of complaint received that year, less than 25% of complaints were acted upon.<sup>29</sup>

Lord Donoughue's report highlighted the importance of transparency and accountability for protecting greyhound welfare, stating:

*'Good welfare is derived from good regulation and good regulation is derived from having the correct governance structures in place... the whole proposition is dependent on robust, adequate and transparent funding.'*



The Greyhound Board of Great Britain was established to address Lord Donoghue's concerns on this issue. Yet, since its inception in 2009, the GBGB has not published a strategic plan outlining specific measures it will take, or has taken, to safeguard greyhound welfare nor any figures on greyhound injury and retirement. This stonewalling has left some in the industry, as well as greyhound welfare organisations, deeply suspicious of the GBGB and its commitment to greyhound welfare.

*'There is a view being widely expressed that earmarked funds currently being generated within the industry are not sufficiently finding their way to caring for greyhounds.'*

Greyhound Trainers Association, Statement of Case, 9th May 2014<sup>30</sup>

*'We are simply not getting the information and statistics that we keep requesting, Barry (Faulkner) Chief Executive of GBGB ignores our requests or sends us round the houses to his Chairman (Maurice Watkins) or to other officials. It's no longer working. We want to know what's happening to all the greyhounds that retire each year... no matter how we ask the question, Mr Faulkner won't answer it and I have had enough... I'm tired of being patted on the head.'*

Clarissa Baldwin OBE, Chief Executive of Dogs Trust and chair of the Greyhound Forum<sup>31</sup> Racing Post, February 2014

## Conclusion

We believe the government has allowed racing industry demands to take precedence over greyhound welfare for too long. New legislation mandating fundamental changes to industry practice must be enacted – and enforced. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has already committed itself to a review of the Welfare of Racing Greyhounds Regulations in 2015 and we believe that genuine improvements in greyhound welfare will only be achieved if our greyhound manifesto is implemented in full.

## Our Greyhound Manifesto

- ✓ **Five year review by Parliament in public**  
The five year review of the Statutory Instrument should be open to the public with the power of Parliament to direct organisations to disclose information. A Select Committee review of the effectiveness of the current governance arrangements could call witnesses from greyhound racing and animal welfare organisations.
- ✓ **Independent greyhound welfare regulation**  
An independent welfare regulatory body that oversees all greyhound racing (both licenced and independent) and includes representatives from animal welfare organisations.
- ✓ **Welfare transparency**  
The industry should be required by law to disclose information on greyhound welfare, at national and track level, to the public and an independent regulator on a quarterly basis. It should as a minimum include breeding, import/export of dogs, transport, kennelling, racing, injuries, retirement, rehoming and euthanasia. There should be full public disclosure of all regulatory and enforcement activity within the industry.
- ✓ **Drugs controls**  
The use of testosterone to suppress oestrus, and anabolic steroids, should be prohibited.
- ✓ **Track curbs**  
A moratorium on new tracks opening, or old tracks reopening, so the decline of the industry can be managed in such a way that greyhound welfare is not compromised.
- ✓ **Greyhound passports**  
A system that allows the tracking of every dog from birth so that the enigma of the thousands of missing dogs can be ended.
- ✓ **Rehoming requirements**  
A statutory requirement for tracks, trainers and owners to rehome all greyhounds.
- ✓ **Breeding controls**  
The introduction of a licensing regime for British breeders together with joint initiatives between Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and the devolved nations of the United Kingdom and Irish government to tackle issues of over breeding and the trade in greyhounds.

<sup>1</sup> Donoghue (2007). Independent Review of the Greyhound Industry in Great Britain.

<sup>2</sup> Greyhound Board of Great Britain. Frequently Asked Questions. <http://tinyurl.com/no5cxtv>

<sup>3</sup> Greyhound Predictor. British Greyhound Track Race Lengths. <http://tinyurl.com/pr9g3yb>

<sup>4</sup> Greyhound Board of Great Britain. Track search. <http://tinyurl.com/pyonkfg>

<sup>5</sup> Greyhound Predictor. British Greyhound Track Race Lengths. <http://tinyurl.com/pr9g3yb>

<sup>6</sup> Donoghue (2007). Independent Review of the Greyhound Industry in Great Britain.

<sup>7</sup> Greyhound Board of Great Britain (2014). Economic impact of the British greyhound racing industry.

<sup>8</sup> Donoghue (2007). Independent Review of the Greyhound Industry in Great Britain.

<sup>9</sup> Greyhound Board of Great Britain (2013). Rules of Racing. <http://tinyurl.com/oqu3fsm>

<sup>10</sup> Greyhound Board of Great Britain. Veterinary Kennel Inspections <http://tinyurl.com/pakdajj>

<sup>11</sup> Greyhound Board of Great Britain (2012). Annual report.

<sup>12</sup> Pitt, C. (2013). Old graders don't just fade away. BOS Magazine, June 4th.

<sup>13</sup> Rooney, N.J. (2012). Welfare of racing greyhounds – prioritisation of issues. Poster presented at Universities Federation for Animal Welfare conference.

<sup>14</sup> Society of Greyhound Veterinarians (2011). Newsletter: Summer Edition. <http://tinyurl.com/pcnu38f>

<sup>15</sup> Defra (2009). Summary of responses to the consultation on the Welfare of Racing Greyhounds Regulations 2010 from 30 April 2009 to 22 July 2009. <http://tinyurl.com/nf9hgaq>

<sup>16</sup> Robinson, C. (2009). RSPCA Response to Defra consultation on proposals for welfare of racing greyhounds.

<sup>17</sup> Greyhound Trainers Association (2014). Statement of Case. May 13th. <http://tinyurl.com/193lrbm>

<sup>18</sup> Rooney, N.J. (2012). Welfare of racing greyhounds – prioritisation of issues. Poster presented at Universities Federation for Animal Welfare conference.

<sup>19</sup> Greyhound Board of Great Britain. Norethisterone. <http://tinyurl.com/ot8el2q>

<sup>20</sup> Ainsworth, A. (2013). Amanda's Diary. Greyhound Star, October 2013.

<sup>21</sup> Retired Greyhound Trust (2012). Trustees report and accounts. <http://tinyurl.com/qeu3aw9>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> The Associated Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare (2007). The Welfare of Greyhounds: Report of the APGAW inquiry into the welfare issues surrounding racing greyhounds in England. <http://tinyurl.com/cz4xphr>

<sup>24</sup> Defra (2010). Explanatory Memorandum to the Welfare of Racing Greyhounds Regulations.

<sup>25</sup> Foggo, D. (2008). Greyhound breeder offers slow dogs to be killed for research. The Sunday Times, May 11th.

<sup>26</sup> Foggo, D. (2008). Vets' secret trade in dog body parts. The Sunday Times, March 2nd.

<sup>27</sup> Qureshi, Y. (2010). 30 injured greyhounds put down at dog track. Manchester Evening News, 27th April.

<sup>28</sup> Foggo, D. (2008). Greyhound breeder offers slow dogs to be killed for research. The Sunday Times, May 11th.

<sup>29</sup> Greyhound Board of Great Britain (2012). Annual report.

<sup>30</sup> Greyhound Trainers Association (2014). Statement of Case. May 13th. <http://tinyurl.com/193lrbm>

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> Greyhound Board of Great Britain (2013). Disciplinary Committee Inquiries, November 5th.