



Report of the Petitions Committee

Petition of Aaron Cross for the Greyhound Protection League of New Zealand: Ban commercial greyhound racing in Aotearoa New Zealand

November 2022

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Petition of Aaron Cross for the Greyhound Protection League of New Zealand

Recommendation

The Petitions Committee has considered the petition of Aaron Cross for the Greyhound Protection League of New Zealand—Ban commercial greyhound racing in Aotearoa New Zealand—and recommends that the House take note of its report.

Request to ban greyhound racing

The petition was presented to the House on 5 August 2021. It requests:

That the House of Representatives pass legislation that prohibits commercial greyhound racing in Aotearoa New Zealand and ensures all dogs that have been bred by and used within the greyhound racing industry are rehabilitated and rehomed.

The petitioner wishes to ban the racing of greyhound dogs. He says it is cruel and barbaric and has poor outcomes for dogs.

We received submissions in support of the petition from the petitioner, the Royal New Zealand Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), and Save Animals From Exploitation (SAFE). We also received submissions from the Department of Internal Affairs, the Ministry for Primary Industries, the Racing Integrity Board (RIB), and Greyhound Racing New Zealand (GRNZ).

We explain the structure of the industry in the “background” section below. We then describe the issues raised by the petitioner, the SPCA, and SAFE, also incorporating information from the RIB and GRNZ. Our conclusions are set out in the last section of the report.

Background

The SPCA estimates that approximately 3,000 dogs are currently used in greyhound racing in New Zealand. We learnt that about 800 puppies are born in the industry each year. Also, many greyhounds are imported each year from Australia.¹

The two main industry bodies are Greyhound Racing New Zealand and the Racing Integrity Board. The SPCA and the Ministry for Primary Industries mainly focus on animal welfare. The ministry administers the Animal Welfare Act 1999. The Department of Internal Affairs administers the Racing Industry Act 2020.

Greyhound Racing New Zealand

Greyhound Racing New Zealand (GRNZ) is an incorporated society; its members are the 10 greyhound racing clubs in New Zealand. GRNZ is the governing body for greyhound racing

¹ According to the [GRNZ 2021 annual report](#), 104 greyhounds were imported in the year before the COVID-19 pandemic.

in New Zealand and provides support and assistance to the clubs. It told us it is responsible for racing and breeding support, animal welfare, the promotion of greyhound racing, and racing stakes and schedules.

Racing Integrity Board

Greyhound racing is overseen by the Racing Integrity Board (RIB). The RIB was established on 1 July 2021.² It also oversees the two horse racing codes in New Zealand. The RIB's members are appointed by the Minister for Racing. Under section 43 of the Racing Industry Act, the RIB's objectives are

to promote, and ensure compliance with, high standards of animal welfare, integrity, and professionalism by participants in the racing industry for the benefit of the public, participants, and the racing industry as a whole.

One of the RIB's functions under section 44 of the Act is to support and monitor the operation and effectiveness of each racing code's animal welfare policies and initiatives. The RIB told us that the racing codes develop their policies and initiatives with its guidance and monitoring as appropriate.

SPCA inspectors

SPCA inspectors have a general enforcement role under the Animal Welfare Act. In relation to greyhounds, the SPCA, the RIB, and the Ministry for Primary Industries have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) about each of their roles in investigating cases. Any combination of the three organisations may investigate cases, depending on the circumstances. The MOU seeks to improve parties' sharing of information so that cases are investigated by the appropriate organisation and avoid duplication of effort.

Three reviews into greyhound racing

The last decade has seen three reviews into the greyhound racing industry. All led to recommendations for change. The first, the WHK review, was commissioned by GRNZ in 2013.³ The second, the Hansen review, was commissioned by the New Zealand Racing Board in 2017.⁴

The third review, by Sir Bruce Robertson, was commissioned in 2021 by the Minister for Racing, after ministers determined that GRNZ had not fully implemented recommendations from the Hansen Review. The Robertson report was submitted to the Minister on 30 July 2021.⁵ It said that several issues need to be resolved in order for the greyhound racing industry's social licence to continue. The issues include data recording, transparency of activities, and animal welfare.

² Earlier entities charged with monitoring and enforcing animal welfare and other rules were the Racing Integrity Unit and the Judicial Control Authority.

³ The [WHK report](#) can be found online via an archive website.

⁴ The [Hansen report](#) can be found on the GRNZ website. The New Zealand Racing Board provides betting services in New Zealand through the TAB.

⁵ The [Robertson report](#) can be found on the Beehive website.

In September 2021, the Minister for Racing announced that the Government was putting the industry “on notice”.⁶ He asked the RIB to report to him on the industry’s progress in addressing recommendations in the Robertson report. He gave the industry 16 months to address concerns prior to decisions being made regarding the future of the industry. This was shorter than the 18 months recommended in the Robertson report. The RIB’s report is due to the Minister by the end of 2022.

Greyhound Review work programme

In response to the letter from the Minister for Racing, the RIB said that it and GRNZ had agreed on a work programme, the Greyhound Review. The programme is designed to address the recommendations in the Hansen and Robertson reviews. The RIB is leading the work programme. It said the Hansen and Robertson reviews identify 30 recommendations, and the work programme captures them as 15 focus areas. The focus areas fall into three groups:

- promote and protect the welfare of greyhounds
- strengthen greyhound racing governance and engagement
- influence and monitor progress against the work programme.

Animal Welfare legislation

Section 10 of the Animal Welfare Act requires dog owners to ensure that their dog’s physical, health, and behavioural needs are met. This includes protecting them from significant injury. Under section 28A, people may not recklessly ill-treat dogs so that they are seriously injured or impaired, permanently disabled, or they die or need to be put down.

View that greyhound racing’s social licence is declining

Aaron Cross is the spokesperson for the Greyhound Protection League. This is his third petition to Parliament about greyhounds.⁷ He has been campaigning on this issue for over 15 years. He believes that greyhound racing is no longer acceptable in New Zealand because it is unethical.

Although the industry has acknowledged that it has problems, he believes things have not changed much. Mr Cross is concerned that dogs are injured and culled just for the benefit of what he sees as a non-essential industry.

The SPCA and SAFE agree with the petitioner’s call to end greyhound racing. They are not confident that the Robertson report’s recommendations can be completed by December 2022. We heard that there is “no evidence of meaningful improvement” across the key areas of concern. Indeed, SAFE told us that problems in greyhound racing continue to arise.

SAFE said that greyhound racing is becoming less popular in the countries where it is legal (the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Australia, New Zealand, Mexico, and

⁶ Hon Grant Robertson and Hon Meka Whaitiri, *Greyhound racing industry formally on notice*, 2 September 2021.

⁷ Mr Cross’s previous petitions were reported on by the *Government Administration Committee in 2013* and the *Primary Production Committee in 2018*.

Vietnam). It said that greyhound racing is banned in 41 US states. Only three tracks remain in the US, and SAFE submitted that two of them are being phased out. Mexico has only one track left. The UK has 23 tracks remaining, down from 200 in 1946. SAFE said that the social licence to operate is also diminishing in Australia and that greyhound racing is banned in the Australian Capital Territory.

In New Zealand, SAFE said, a number of sponsors have withdrawn their support and funding from GRNZ.

Use of animals for entertainment or profit

Mr Cross doubted that putting dogs in harm's way for money is still socially acceptable. SAFE submitted that greyhounds should not be used in entertainment or for gambling profits. In contrast, the SPCA considers it acceptable to use animals for human purposes "as long as they have a good life, with opportunities for positive welfare". However, the SPCA submitted that the greyhound industry "has a history of being unwilling or unable to address its significant animal welfare problems".

The SPCA said that greyhound racing is primarily a gambling activity, which in itself is harmful. It cited research saying that a fifth of New Zealand adults will be affected at some time in their lives by gambling.⁸

Response from Greyhound Racing NZ

GRNZ told us it is committed to showing the Minister for Racing and the New Zealand public that greyhound racing still has a social licence to operate. GRNZ believes that it has addressed most of the animal welfare concerns raised in the Hansen Report. It said it would be premature to draw conclusions before the presentation of the RIB report in December 2022.

Dog welfare

Deaths

GRNZ and the RIB said that the number of race-day euthanasias has been reducing since 2019. For example, the RIB said, there were six deaths in the first half of the 2021/22 season. They believe the Rehabilitation to Rehoming (RtR) programme (discussed below) has helped in reducing deaths.

The petitioner said that at least 31 dogs died at racetracks in the 2020/21 racing season. He said this was only three fewer than in the previous year. He also said that many other dogs (47 in the previous year) die of unknown causes—without veterinary help—during racing and training.

Mr Cross is concerned that greyhounds with catastrophic injuries that would have been euthanised in the past are being kept alive "solely to improve the public perception of the industry by reducing fatality statistics". Mr Cross also suggested that dogs are taken away from the track and euthanised elsewhere to make the data look better. SAFE also observed

⁸ Thimasarn-Anwar, T, Squire, H, Trowland, H, & Martin, G (2017), *Gambling report—Results from the 2016 Health and Lifestyles Survey*.

that euthanasia might be moving away from the track-side, obscuring the harm to greyhounds.

The SPCA noted the decrease in euthanasias. However, it supported the finding in the Robertson review that the number of deaths is just one metric, and that overall animal welfare standards must be considered when making decisions about euthanasia. The SPCA submitted a copy of a letter from the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC) to the Associate Minister of Agriculture (Animal Welfare), dated 14 June 2022.⁹ Among other things, the letter expressed NAWAC's concern that, while

the incidence of catastrophic track injuries requiring euthanasia at the track has reduced, this is largely due to the introduction of the GRNZ rehabilitation programme. GRNZ funds treatment for dogs injured while racing and they progress into the programme and [are] categorised instead as "serious". We are concerned first that in some instances where the injuries are catastrophic, euthanasia... must remain an option...

We asked whether the RIB was confident that fewer injured greyhounds being put down equates to better animal welfare outcomes overall. The RIB responded that part of its work is to determine whether the RtR programme leads to better animal welfare outcomes. It said those answers are not currently available. However, it added (in May 2022), "this will remain a focus as the year progresses".

"Unnecessary" euthanasia

In the past, said the petitioner, hundreds of greyhounds were put down every year for economic and performance reasons. He submitted that, in the 2020/21 racing season, 165 greyhounds were euthanised for non-injury reasons.

SAFE pointed out that a 2022 GRNZ welfare report stated that "unnecessary" euthanasia may still be occurring under the banner of behavioural issues or euthanasia for illness or injury. It said that a potential causal link between poor racing performance and euthanasia was also found.¹⁰

Euthanasia policy

At the time of his submission in early 2022, Mr Cross commented that GRNZ had not drafted a clear euthanasia policy. The GRNZ euthanasia policy was published in November 2022.¹¹ GRNZ told us that the policy reflects its commitment that every greyhound born in, or imported into, New Zealand deserves to live the rest of its life as a pet dog.

GRNZ said its On-Track Euthanasia Guidelines provide a decision template for when dogs get seriously injured.¹² If the injury does not warrant euthanasia under the guidelines, the dog enters the RtR programme. GRNZ commented that further diagnostic tests (such as X-

⁹ The National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee is established under section 56 of the Animal Welfare Act 1999 and provides independent advice to the Minister responsible for animal welfare.

¹⁰ [Greyhound Racing New Zealand, Report for the Minister for Racing Q2 2022](#), paras 13–14.

¹¹ The GRNZ Greyhound Euthanasia Policy is available on the [GRNZ website](#).

¹² The guidelines are available on the [GRNZ website](#).

rays) can be needed to make a fully informed decision on the likelihood of successfully treating and rehoming the dog.

Veterinarians are present at all races

The RIB told us that it holds contracts for veterinarians to be present at races. It said that veterinarians examine greyhounds before every race. They examine approximately 40,000 greyhound race entrants a year. They also examine dogs “when there has been a racing incident that raises a concern or an injury that needs treatment”. The RIB expressed its confidence in the stewards and veterinarians who are present on race days.¹³

The SPCA submitted that these veterinarians do not have enough time to thoroughly examine each dog before racing. It said they have to “complete a thorough exam on each dog in a matter of seconds”. It said this allows injuries to go undetected. We heard about a dog that had recently been cleared for racing in the before-race check despite being badly injured.

The SPCA also said that it is not clear whether veterinarians are present for training events.

Physical injuries

Physical injuries to racing greyhounds can include broken bones and ruptured muscles. The petitioner submitted that such injuries inherently breach the Animal Welfare Act. He also said that the number of major injuries has not significantly changed in the last six years.

The SPCA calculated that 278 greyhounds were injured in the period between the presentation of this petition to the House (5 August 2021) and the date of the SPCA’s oral submission to us (1 September 2022). This included 92 fractures and 9 deaths. The SPCA pointed out NAWAC’s observation of a “disturbing upwards trend in serious injury rates in recent seasons, quite aside from the impact of reclassification of track euthanasias noted above”.

SAFE also believes the number of injuries is increasing and is very concerned at this trend. It said that there were 66 percent more major injuries in the 2021 racing season than in the 2020 season. It submitted that more than 40 percent of racing greyhounds sustained injuries on the track in the 2021 season, and 13 percent had to stand down from racing for six weeks or more.

The petitioner said that the continuing prevalence of serious injuries indicates that injuries are inherent and permanent risks of greyhound racing. Also, he said, some injuries such as stress fractures are not immediately discoverable and may not present symptoms until later in life.

The petitioner questioned the industry’s categorisation as “minor” injuries that require less than three weeks to recover from. He said this shows that the industry is trying to give the impression that levels of harm are not as bad as they actually are.

GRNZ said its focus has moved to reducing injuries, especially serious injuries. It said it is committed to best practice in racing safety. We learnt about GRNZ’s new Serious Injury

¹³ Stewards are officials who oversee races. They produce a Steward’s Report after races, summarising any rule breaches and events that may have affected a dog’s performance.

Review Committee. The committee will analyse risk factors for serious injury and euthanasia and, with the GRNZ Animal Health and Welfare Committee, will make recommendations aimed at reducing racing injuries.

Actions to improve track safety

GRNZ submitted that it is looking at the safety of all its tracks and it expects to implement strategies that will reduce racing injuries. Mr Cross acknowledged that GRNZ is “making efforts” to improve track safety. One of the recommendations in the 2017 Hansen report was to investigate changing from curved to straight tracks, which are considered safer. GRNZ closed Whanganui’s Hatrick Raceway in 2021 because of safety concerns. However, straight tracks have not been introduced.

GRNZ told us that it will start building New Zealand’s first straight track “imminently”.

Many injuries occur on the first turn of the track. To reduce these injuries, GRNZ is trialling a system called preferred box draw (PBD) racing. The system looks at a dog’s running traits. For example, a dog that lets other dogs move into their space at the start of the race might be a “straight railer”, and a dog that runs wide at the start of the race might be a “wide” runner. For PBD races, the starting box draw—the lane a dog starts in—is “strongly influenced” by their early racing traits, with the aim of improving safety at the first turn.

Prohibited substances in greyhounds

Some greyhounds have tested positive for drugs such as methamphetamine. The petitioner believes that, with the large amounts of money involved in greyhound racing, there will always be a temptation to drug dogs (one’s own or opponents’ dogs). SAFE submitted that methamphetamine can have terrible side-effects for greyhounds, ranging from agitation and aggression to death.

SAFE said that the use of banned substances has increased over recent seasons. It added that testing was only carried out at 9 percent of races and that the problem could be wider than expected. The SPCA reported that the RIB says it tests approximately 7 percent of greyhounds.

GRNZ submitted that, in the past three racing seasons, 4 greyhounds out of more than 10,000 had tested positive to having methamphetamine in their systems. It commented that:

with the high percentage of methamphetamine use in communities, there is the potential for accidental drug contamination by persons who are drug users.

Dog health

The petitioner said that parasites such as hookworms are a particular problem in greyhounds because of inappropriate medication. The SPCA has noticed a high incidence of blindness in dogs coming to rehoming centres, which it said could be a sign of poor de-worming treatment.

Dental health is poor, we heard, due to poor diet and biting at kennel wire. The petitioner said the industry takes no action to improve it. GRNZ said that greyhounds are genetically

disposed to dental issues and prevention is important. It has published a fact sheet on greyhound dental care.¹⁴

Barking muzzles

The petitioner and the SPCA submitted that barking muzzles, which should only be used to protect veterinarians attending to dogs, are used inappropriately to suppress barking and preserve dogs' energy for racing. The petitioner said that muzzles restrict breathing and prevent yawning. He said their unsupervised use breaches Regulation 12 of the Animal Welfare (Care and Procedures) Regulations 2018, which sets out the rules for muzzles on dogs.

The SPCA told us that it has noticed a lack of communication about, and enforcement of, the updated regulations about muzzles. It pointed out that an out-of-date GRNZ policy document, stating that certain barking muzzles are permitted, is still available on the GRNZ website.¹⁵

Housing of dogs

Mr Cross told us that some kennels are too cold in winter, some are derelict, and some do not hold the appropriate building consents. The SPCA and SAFE mentioned kennels being too small, a lack of enrichment opportunities in kennels, and a lack of bedding provided to dogs.

Kennel audits

The RIB said that one of the current Greyhound Review focus areas, in which the RIB has "invested heavily", is auditing greyhound kennels against the GRNZ Animal Health and Welfare Standards.¹⁶ Part of the work has been to review the standards and assess them against the Code of Welfare for Dogs and standards in other jurisdictions.¹⁷

GRNZ said that the RIB began the audits at the start of 2022. It said that, previously, audits had only occurred on an ad-hoc basis. The new audit system is more rigorous and regular. At the date of GRNZ's submission in June 2022, 88 kennels had been inspected, while 36 had yet to be inspected. The RIB told us it expected to audit all kennels by the end of 2022.

The RIB said it is confident in the expertise present at kennel audits. It said that its auditors are typically stewards and they are trained in audit practices and in assessing compliance. SPCA auditors are also present. We heard that veterinarians attend every kennel audit; they briefly examine all dogs (which are microchipped), including scoring the dog's dental health and body condition.

The RIB said that, by 6 May 2022, 317 improvement notices had been issued as a result of kennel audits. GRNZ said that the improvement notices have been for "minor" things such as broken or worn fencing, lack of functioning smoke alarms or fire extinguishers, poor records,

¹⁴ The dental fact sheet is available on the GRNZ website.

¹⁵ Barking Muzzles, Greyhound Racing New Zealand Policy.

¹⁶ The Health & Welfare Standards are available on the GRNZ website.

¹⁷ The Code of Welfare for Dogs, made under the Animal Welfare Act 1999, came into effect in 2018. It is available on the Ministry for Primary Industries website.

muddy enclosures, and untidy food preparation areas. It also said that some dental issues have been identified through the audits. GRNZ said that the audits have identified matters that it expects will be updated in a rewrite of its Animal Health and Welfare Standards.

The audits have also identified problems with vaccination records. GRNZ said that it responded by updating software and, since 1 March 2022, not allowing greyhounds to race if their online vaccination record is not up to date. Trainers also get emails to remind them to update vaccinations.

GRNZ said it is working with the RIB to rectify all the identified issues “with an educative compliance approach”. It said that kennels have rectified all problems in improvement notices by the date required. It said the RIB had issued no penalties as a result of an audit.

The RIB said it follows every improvement notice until compliance is reached. If necessary, it said, it would lay charges under the racing rules.

The RIB said that the audits are providing baseline data to inform recommended changes to policies, standards, rules, and measures. It intends to have clear, easily understood, and effectively communicated policies, standards, and rules; it said this would enable a high level of voluntary compliance.

Unsafe transport

Mr Cross said that greyhound transport can be substandard. Problems include vehicles not having registrations or warrants of fitness, and drivers not checking on dogs during long journeys. In some situations, this has led to dogs dying.

Breeding females

The SPCA told us about a rule that only three litters are allowed per breeding female. It is concerned at an exemption to the rule that allows up to five litters. It said the criteria for the exemption are not clear.

Administration concerns

Poor record-keeping

Mr Cross told us that data from various sources does not match up. For example, he pointed out the following euthanasia data:

- The GRNZ annual report for 2020/21 states that 27 dogs were euthanised by a veterinarian on track or had a sudden death.¹⁸
- In recent correspondence, the RIB reported 24 race-day euthanasia incidents for the last season.
- GRNZ website daily reports show a count of 28.

¹⁸ GRNZ, 2021 annual report, p 23.

Mr Cross said that inaccurate data conflicts with a recommendation from the Robertson review that there must be “comprehensive accessible data available on the position of all animals from birth to death”.¹⁹

SAFE is also concerned about the accuracy of records. For example, it compared injury data from GRNZ’s annual and quarterly reports to data from stewards’ reports and from the Greyhound Protection League. SAFE said it found more than 100 injuries requiring stand-downs that did not appear to be in GRNZ’s records.

Data improvements

We asked the RIB what it is doing to ensure the accuracy of data. The RIB said that it had full access to GRNZ’s databases and reports for the purposes of determining their accuracy and identifying new insights. The RIB said that GRNZ agrees with it that data capture and quality could be improved in several areas. It commented that, ideally, the GRNZ database would be restructured or a new one would be created.

One of the focus areas in the Greyhound Review work programme is data. The RIB said that GRNZ had made considerable progress in data improvement and this will help in identifying key performance indicators (KPIs). It noted that developing KPIs is a priority.

The RIB also noted that it was important, for transparency, to publish information even if it might contain discrepancies. That is why GRNZ now puts quarterly reports on its website, reporting progress against the work programme.

GRNZ acknowledged past discrepancies between race-day data from the stewards and data in the GRNZ annual reports. GRNZ said it knows the reasons for the discrepancies and they no longer occur. For example, it said that stewards must now record all injury information when a dog is stood down.

GRNZ also said that data about stand-down times after an injury can cause confusion because of different definitions. Dogs can be stood down for various reasons and for various lengths of time. GRNZ is planning improvements to its injury database to improve reporting.

GRNZ said it has improved its system reports. The changes allow GRNZ to audit data and contact trainers if it notices anything; for example, if a greyhound has not raced for some time but has not been retired.

Awareness of rules and standards

The petitioner brought our attention to a finding from the 2013 WHK review: that industry participants are largely unaware of the animal welfare standards or the rules governing greyhound racing.

He also submitted that the penalties for breaches of legislation are inadequate.

SAFE commented that the behaviour of certain trainers should lead to them being stood down by GRNZ. However, said SAFE, GRNZ does not stand them down, and this shows that GRNZ does not prioritise animal welfare.

¹⁹ Robertson report, para 92.

Removal of videos showing dogs getting injured

Another of SAFE's concerns is GRNZ's removal of potentially upsetting footage (of falls) from race videos. It believes the industry tries to sanitise the negative aspects of greyhound racing.

GRNZ said that race footage on its website is from the television service TAB Trackside, which removes falls and injuries from replays. The main reason for this is to reduce distress to viewers who know the animal (or person) involved. GRNZ supports the TAB Trackside policy. TAB Trackside advises that information on outcomes of falls or injuries is available from the RIB's stewards' reports. GRNZ said that it sometimes asks for an incident to be removed from footage if it has not been picked up by the TAB editors.

Exclusion of SPCA from Animal Health and Welfare Committee

The SPCA was a member of the GRNZ Animal Health and Welfare Committee from its formation in 2016. However, GRNZ removed it from the committee. The SPCA said it participated until November 2020, after which followed a period of 14 months with no meetings. After then, the committee resumed without the SPCA.

Mr Cross said that removing the SPCA reduces transparency and is contrary to the recommendation in the Robertson review that there should be "a Health and Welfare Committee with full participation of all relevant stakeholders and the ability to implement and effect change as required".²⁰

SAFE and the SPCA also expressed concern at the removal. SAFE described it as an attempt to minimise criticism of animal welfare concerns.

GRNZ's comments on the SPCA's removal from the committee

GRNZ noted that the original Animal Health and Welfare Committee included a representative from the SPCA. However, it said the committee had been re-formed: it now focuses more on technical veterinary and injury prevention than on policy and standards development. Most members of the new committee are veterinarians experienced with greyhounds.

We gathered that GRNZ did not consider it appropriate for the SPCA to be on the committee. GRNZ's written submission said:

Members of the SPCA management publicly state that they support the closure of the greyhound industry in NZ, a stance that would seem contradictory to its intention to advise on an industry welfare committee. Further, the SPCA's submission to this Petitions Committee is evidence of its inherently biased attitude towards any potential welfare improvements which could be made and its inability to effectively work within a committee to achieve these improvements.

GRNZ pointed out that committee meetings are observed by a representative from the NAWAC. It said that NAWAC can brief the SPCA after meetings. GRNZ also said it

²⁰ [Robertson report](#), para 92.

distributes the meeting minutes (as well as GRNZ's governmental quarterly reports) to the SPCA once they become available for circulation.

SPCA's perspective on its removal from the committee

The SPCA told us that the GRNZ Animal Health and Welfare Committee started well. However, over time, the SPCA came to find that not enough information was provided to the committee to allow it to properly ascertain progress. It said it could not tell whether greyhound trainers were aware of the documents produced by GRNZ and the committee, or whether they led to improvements for greyhounds. It said that—apart from the rehoming initiatives—progress seemed to stall.

The SPCA said that, despite GRNZ's comment that it can be briefed after meetings, this has not occurred. Nor does it receive quarterly reports or meeting minutes from GRNZ. It said that, although GRNZ publishes the documents on its website, it does not notify the SPCA when they are available.

The SPCA also said that, in late 2020, GRNZ stopped reporting to Ministers against the progress of the Hansen recommendations. The SPCA said that GRNZ claimed that all the Hansen recommendations had been implemented but did not provide information to support this.

The SPCA believes the Animal Health and Welfare Committee would be more effective with its voice on it. In response to GRNZ's comment that the SPCA supports the closure of greyhound racing, it said its preferred approach is to work with industries even though it may object to their activities. It said it objects to activities in a number of other sectors, such as rodeos, certain animal research, some winter grazing, and aspects of horse racing. However, it still collaborates with those sectors to support incremental improvements in animal welfare. It said that industry participants value its contribution "as a voice for the animals".

The June 2022 letter from NAWAC to the Associate Minister of Agriculture (Animal Welfare) expressed concern that the SPCA is not represented on the Animal Health and Welfare Committee. The SPCA submitted that

the greyhound racing industry has repeatedly demonstrated that they are unwilling or unable to adequately address their significant animal welfare problems. Their refusal to engage with concerns raised by the committee and NAWAC demonstrated to us a clear lack of commitment to improve animal welfare.

New animal welfare team for all three racing codes

At the date of its written submission in April 2022, the RIB was developing a new animal welfare team to work across all three racing codes (greyhounds and the two horse-racing codes). The function of the team is to support and monitor the operation and effectiveness of each code's animal welfare policies and initiatives. It is also expected to promote and ensure compliance with animal welfare standards. The RIB expected the animal welfare team to be in place in time for the new racing year in August 2022. However, three months later, in November 2022, we did not find an online reference to the new team.

Rehoming retired greyhounds

The petitioner said the industry has a disregard for the rehoming of dogs after their racing career ends. He also believes that current greyhound rehoming rates are not sustainable. He mentioned problems in dogs that are rehomed, including poor dental hygiene, mental and physical injuries, and a “prey drive”. We heard that race training aggravates a dog’s prey drive so that they chase their target at top speed. This makes it hard for a greyhound to eventually become a family pet. Mr Cross also said that racing dogs end up competitive in every aspect and this does not make them good pets.

We are aware of concerns that not all dogs get rehomed when it has been decided they will not be used for racing. The petitioner said that some are never rehomed because of behavioural problems. These dogs can spend the rest of their lives in a “red card” or “halfway house” kennel facility. Others, he said, live in a “greyhound bloodbank” where their blood is regularly harvested, to the detriment of their health. Others are rehomed to pig hunters and the petitioner is concerned about their welfare there.

The SPCA supported rehoming but described it as the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff. It also cited information from GRNZ that adoptions are slowing down. The SPCA said that New Zealand’s total dog population (not just greyhounds) is too high.

Great Mates rehoming programme

GRNZ said the view that greyhounds do not make good pets is contradicted by the high number of dogs that have been successfully adopted. It told us that its Great Mates rehoming programme behaviourally assesses, fosters, and finds new homes for retired greyhounds. It also provides veterinary care, training, grooming, mental stimulation, exercise, and socialisation opportunities for the dogs. Great Mates runs from Cambridge, Levin, Rangiora, and Christchurch. All four of the Great Mates kennels have recently increased their capacities. GRNZ told us that about 500 greyhounds were rehomed through Great Mates between August 2021 and mid-June 2022. Some were privately rehomed or kept by the owner as a pet.

As a result of the Hansen report, GRNZ implemented software to support the Great Mates programme. New (2022) updates include seven new reports, including the length of time it takes to get rehomed, the number of dogs on the waiting list, and whether they are an injured dog in the RtR programme (see below).

GRNZ is working with adoption agencies and a media company on a survey for owners of former racing greyhounds. It expects the survey to provide insights into the long-term effects of rehoming and rehabilitation and a clearer picture as to any issues that arise in later life for retired greyhounds. The information could then inform socialisation standards and requirements for young greyhounds. It is also working on educating trainers about best practices to socialise their dogs from an early age.

Rehabilitation to Rehoming

GRNZ told us about its programme to rehabilitate and rehome dogs that have had a career-ending racing injury. Known as the RtR programme, it was introduced in early 2021. GRNZ funds the veterinary treatment and foster care during rehabilitation. We learnt that, between

August 2021 and mid-June 2022, 39 injured dogs were rehabilitated then adopted under the RtR programme.

GRNZ said it is developing software that will report on how long rehabilitation takes and how long adoption takes after rehabilitation is complete.

Other concerns

Dog registration fees

Councils tend to charge lower registration fees for working dogs than non-working dogs. Racing greyhounds are often registered as working dogs. In the petitioner's view, this is inappropriate. He considers that racing dogs are not working dogs. He submitted that racing greyhound owners do not contribute their fair share of money to local councils for animal control. That means families with pet dogs have to pay more. He said the industry should ensure that greyhounds are registered properly.

Tax status of prizes

Mr Cross submitted that the tax-exempt status of racing industry prize money is not socially acceptable. He said that prizes and racing clubs and associations should be subject to tax. He said that, if greyhound racing is not banned, a levy should be imposed to assist with funding the treatment of problem gambling.

Live baiting

It is illegal to use live animals as a lure for racing dogs. Despite this, we were told that it still occurs. The petitioner said that prosecution in New Zealand is difficult and that reports of live baiting have not been properly investigated by authorities.

Export of dogs without control of their welfare

The petitioner is also concerned about dogs being exported to countries that do not have animal welfare protection laws. He has been unable to find out how many greyhounds are exported, and to which countries. He believes the Ministry for Primary Industries should record and publish that information.

Population planning

Mr Cross submitted that excessive numbers of greyhounds are bred and imported. He observed that euthanasia for economic and performance reasons was common in the past but it reduced as community awareness increased. However, he said that the industry is relying on other people to solve the problem it creates. He said that people outside the industry take part in rehoming programmes because of "their desire to... solve a problem, not perpetuate it." If greyhounds stopped being such a "large problem source", he told us, other dog rescue programmes would benefit from the volunteer support.

Comments from the Department of Internal Affairs and the Ministry for Primary Industries

Both the Department of Internal Affairs and the Ministry for Primary Industries submitted that whether to ban commercial greyhound racing should be considered after the RIB has reported back to the Government in late 2022.

The ministry said it supports the recommendations in the Robertson review. It said it is working with the RIB in support of the Greyhound Review work programme. It supports NAWAC in its engagement with the RIB and its representation as an observer on the GRNZ Animal Health and Welfare Committee.

After the RIB has made its report, the department will be involved in advising the Minister about the RIB's recommendations. Then, Cabinet is expected to decide the next steps.

Our response to the petition

One of our principal concerns about this petition is that the industry's responses to problems have been slow and do not show that the welfare of dogs is the industry's main consideration. For example, despite the Hansen recommendation in 2017 regarding straight racetracks, there are still no straight tracks.

We have heard that the industry has focused more on reducing greyhound deaths than on reducing injuries and improving the quality of care. This can result in ill or traumatised dogs that are not suitable for rehoming as pets. We are also concerned for other dogs that do not get into the rehoming programme.

We note that the industry does not have a long-term plan for dealing with the large number of dogs that need rehoming each year. Further, we are concerned at the lack of a plan to track and manage the overall population of racing greyhounds in New Zealand and at the possibility that the industry may be breeding and importing too many dogs. Population management was raised as an issue in the WHK report, the Hansen report, and the Robertson report. We think a carefully considered population plan is long overdue.

We were interested to hear about the RIB's attention to kennel audits and we hope that they lead to improvements in dogs' care. We urge the RIB and GRNZ to also look at changes that will reduce injuries.

We are disappointed by the lack of consistent information and we note that this issue has been identified as a focus area in the Greyhound Review. We are keen to hear whether the quality and consistency of data has improved between the time that we received submissions (autumn and winter 2022) and the RIB's report due next month (December 2022).

The industry's lack of good systems and data, and the absence of transparency, have been flagged many times in the past but we have seen minimal improvement. This reduces confidence in the industry's social licence. We believe that investment in systems to provide high quality data is urgent, as one of the requirements for the industry to retain its social licence to operate.

We also urge the industry to ensure that all its people are aware of, and comply with, animal health and welfare requirements.

In our view, the removal of the SPCA from the health and welfare committee shows poor judgement of what is needed for the industry to keep its licence to operate. Shutting out an organisation that, while it opposes GRNZ's work, is prepared to help it improve its practices, has worked against the industry.

Similarly, we consider the GRNZ comment that methamphetamine may have accidentally contaminated dogs to be disingenuous at best. It indicated a disregard for a real health and welfare problem. A more appropriate response would have been to immediately acknowledge and investigate the problem.

We note that the RIB said it was developing a new animal welfare team to support and monitor each racing code's animal welfare policies and initiatives and to promote and ensure compliance with animal welfare standards. We would like to know what (if anything) delayed this initiative, and whether (and how) it improves the lives of greyhounds.

We have doubts about whether the greyhound racing industry still has a social licence to operate in its current form. We have serious concerns about the way the industry is operating at present. We urge the Government to be mindful of our comments when it considers the future of the greyhound racing industry following the RIB's report in December 2022.

Appendix

Committee procedure

The petition was referred to us on 5 August 2021. We met between 23 September 2021 and 24 November 2022 to consider it. We received written submissions from the petitioner, the Department of Internal Affairs, the Ministry for Primary Industries, the Racing Integrity Board, Greyhound Racing New Zealand, SAFE, and the SPCA. We heard oral evidence from the petitioner, the Department of Internal Affairs, the Racing Integrity Board, SAFE, the SPCA, and Greyhound Racing New Zealand.

Committee members

Hon Jacqui Dean (Chairperson)
Rachel Boyack
Steph Lewis
Nicole McKee
Sarah Pallett
Teanau Tuiono

Chlöe Swarbrick participated in much of our consideration of this petition.

Evidence received

Written submissions that we received in relation to this petition are [available on the Parliament website](#).

Recordings of oral submissions may be viewed at the following links:

- 17 March 2022—[Aaron Cross followed by the Department of Internal Affairs](#)
- 7 April 2022—[Racing Integrity Board](#)
- 30 June 2022—[SAFE](#)
- 1 September 2022—[SPCA followed by Greyhound Racing New Zealand](#).