



Petition 2014/94 of Aaron Cross and 129 others

Report of the Primary Production Committee

December 2018

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Hon David Bennett
Chairperson

Petition 2014/94 of Aaron Cross and 129 others Recommendation

The Primary Production Committee has considered Petition 2014/94 of Aaron Cross and 129 others, and recommends that the House take note of its report.

Request for legislation to ban greyhound racing

Aaron Cross and 129 others presented this petition to the House on 7 December 2016. It requests:

That the House note that we have signed this petition seeking that the House pass legislation banning greyhound racing in New Zealand.

Previous petition

Aaron Cross previously petitioned Parliament in 2013, wanting it to consider injuries and outcomes for greyhounds in the New Zealand racing industry. That petition (2011/49) was referred to the Government Administration Committee, which made seven recommendations to the Government.¹

The Government considered and responded to each recommendation. Its response said that steps were being taken to address the matters raised by the committee, with considerable progress being made in many areas. It noted that the industry had taken proactive steps for the welfare of greyhound racing, which would be monitored by the Government.

Industry context

The greyhound racing industry is governed by the New Zealand Racing Board, an independent body corporate established under the Racing Act 2003, which reports to the Minister for Racing.

The New Zealand Greyhound Racing Association (NZGRA) provides governance, support, and assistance to the affiliated clubs in the sport of greyhound racing. It is responsible for the administration of all supporting functions such as racing and breeding support, animal welfare, promotion of greyhound racing, and race schedules and stakes. The New Zealand Racing Board approves the NZGRA's annual statement of intent and business plan.

The New Zealand Racing Integrity Unit (RIU), created in February 2011, is an independent organisation responsible for investigating and prosecuting breaches of the Rules of Racing that apply to the three New Zealand racing codes: harness, thoroughbred, and greyhound.

Concerns raised in this petition

The petitioner suggests that greyhound racing is an unethical practice. He asks that the Government ban greyhound racing or that the Racing Board refuse to approve the NZGRA's statement of intent.

¹ You can read the committee's report and the Government's response here:
https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/sc/reports/document/50DBSCH_SCR6014_1/petition-201149-of-aaron-cross-on-behalf-of-the-greyhound

The petitioner refers back to the Government Administration Committee's report about his previous petition, and the Government's response. He also refers to reports from the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC). The petitioner's main concerns relate to:

- compliance with the Rules of Racing
- the service agreement between the RIU and the NZGRA
- the number of dogs in the industry
- transparency about greyhound injuries and euthanasia
- tracking greyhounds from birth to death.

Compliance with the Rules of Racing

The petitioner notes that the Government Administration Committee recommended that the Government ask the Racing Board to develop a system for monitoring compliance with the greyhound racing industry's Rules of Racing. He considers that compliance ought to apply to all organisations (the Racing Board, the NZGRA, and the RIU) and that public reports should be made on actual results, not efforts. He observes that a key challenge in achieving compliance is ingrained cultural attitudes.

The Government response was that the Board currently reviews and approves all proposed amendments to racing rules. The RIU has a role to monitor compliance with the rules.

Service agreement between the RIU and the Association

The petitioner notes that the Government Administration Committee recommended that the Government ask the Racing Board to review the service agreement between the RIU and the NZGRA. The petitioner is concerned that the RIU faces a conflict of interest as a regulator because the members have an interest in the racing code. The petitioner points to a 2016 example where a member of the RIU pleaded guilty to a charge of corrupt and improper conduct and of obtaining a prohibited substance. (The RIU member had advised his trainer to drug one of his dogs after learning at a meeting with the RIU that it could not test for certain banned substances.)

The intention regarding the number of dogs in the industry

The petitioner notes that the NZGRA told the Government Administration Committee in 2015 that it believes in zero euthanasia. However, he believes the greyhound industry intends to have 20 percent more dogs than are required to keep racing at present levels, which results in large scale "wastage" of greyhounds.

Tracking greyhounds from birth to death

The petitioner notes the Government Administration Committee's recommendation that the Department of Internal Affairs should track greyhounds from birth to death. The petitioner provides statistics on racing greyhound population trends and notes there is no information on how many greyhounds are culled or missing.

Transparency of greyhound injuries and euthanasia

The petitioner wants more transparent reporting of greyhound injuries and euthanasia. He notes that the NZGRA had indicated that, once the database was complete, it would formally report key data in its annual report to provide an accurate measure of the number and status of dogs. The committee expected this information to be available from the 2015/16 annual report. However, the petitioner notes that the information was not in that annual report. The 2016/17 annual report does not have the information either.

Advice from the Department of Internal Affairs

The Government Administration Committee received advice from the Department of Internal Affairs in June 2017 regarding issues raised by Aaron Cross to support his petition. The department's overall conclusion was that greyhound racing is a long-established practice in New Zealand and elsewhere. It notes that, as greyhound racing is a form of entertainment, there is an ethical obligation on society to ensure that the welfare of animals is paramount. The department notes that the Ministry for Primary Industries considers that because of the steps already taken by those involved in greyhound racing to improve the welfare of animals that they use, and protections established by the codes of welfare, there are currently sufficient safeguards to protect the welfare of racing greyhounds.

It suggested that a report expected from the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC) should provide guidance about society's current attitude to the use of animals for competitive racing.

2017 Report on welfare issues affecting greyhound racing in New Zealand

In 2017, Hon Rodney Hansen CNZM QC was asked by the Racing Board to inquire into and report on welfare issues affecting greyhound racing in New Zealand. Hansen made 20 recommendations that he suggested would advance the welfare of greyhounds.

He concluded that the NZGRA has made a genuine and determined commitment to improving greyhound welfare. However, he notes that the achievement of accepted welfare outcomes is critically dependent on the ability to track each greyhound from whelping or importation until the NZGRA ceases to be responsible. He states that, while there have been significant improvements in data collection, the database is seriously deficient in some areas, particularly the tracking of greyhounds which do not race or which retire from racing. Hansen suggests that further rule changes and more rigorous enforcement of registration requirements are required.

Hansen refers to a 2013 "WHK report" which highlighted the importance of managing the greyhound population.² Levels of euthanasia were said to be unacceptably high. The report pointed to the need to reduce the numbers of greyhounds bred and imported, to extend the racing careers of greyhounds, and to expand rehoming opportunities, in order to reduce

² Written by Bill Colgan, a racing consultant with a detailed knowledge of the racing industry (Chairman); Craig Neale, an independent consultant and formerly Assistant Auditor-General; and Les Foy, the Managing Principal of the WHK New Zealand Audit and Assurance Practice.

levels of euthanasia to acceptable levels. Hansen believes that the number of greyhounds born and entering the industry has not reduced significantly. There has been a modest increase in the availability of racing opportunities and of levels of rehoming. However, gains have been insufficient to correct the structural imbalance.

Hansen observes that there have been significant advances in track safety, leading to a material reduction in injuries and deaths from injury while racing. However, he suggests that the number of injuries occurring at the first turn remains high, and efforts must continue to find ways of preventing the convergence or “bunching” that is the major cause of serious injury and death.

Evidence from the Racing Board and the NZGRA

On 22 March 2018 we heard from the Racing Board and the New Zealand Greyhound Racing Association. We discussed their progress on the Government Administration Committee’s recommendations and the Hansen report. The Board assured us that it has a plan to address all recommendations.

The Board said that initiatives under way include:

- making the database fit for purpose with a focus on the entire life cycle of the greyhounds
- updating health and welfare guidelines
- releasing a new code of welfare to the industry
- working with KPMG to rehome retired greyhounds
- drafting new Rules of Racing
- improving tools that forecast the expected future greyhound population.

The Racing Board said that the above projects involve a significant investment, but it has the necessary resources.

We asked how the process to deregister a greyhound works. We heard that deregistration is complex and occurs after a greyhound is either: retained as a pet, boarded at a licenced kennel, found a home through the Greyhound as Pets Trust, sold or found a home by the owner, or euthanised in accordance with the rules.

We asked how New Zealand compares with other countries in complying with international welfare standards. The Racing Board said that Australia’s record is patchy, with some states such as Victoria having excellent results for greyhounds and some states being deficient. It estimates that New Zealand would be above average internationally.

We spoke to the Board about ear branding. It agrees this should be phased out but an alternative must be found, as microchipping is not effective if a dog leaves the council area where they were microchipped unless it is registered on the National Dog Database.

We also asked whether the RIU has sufficient ability to bring charges for breaches of the rules. The Board is currently reviewing the service agreement between the RIU and the NZGRA and it is confident that the RIU has sufficient ability to bring penalties against those who do not follow the rules.

Our response to the petition

We acknowledge the work of the industry to date to improve the welfare of greyhounds. However, we believe there is still a lot of work to be done before the industry has met the standards required to improve outcomes for greyhounds.

We encourage the industry to continue to implement the Hansen recommendations and we invite the NZGRA to return to update us on their progress. We appreciate the petitioner's concern for the welfare of these animals, and his efforts in bringing these matters to our attention.

Appendix

Committee procedure

The petition was referred to the Government Administration Committee of the 51st Parliament on 7 December 2016. That committee received advice from the Department of Internal Affairs.

On 8 November 2017, the petition was reinstated with the Primary Production Committee of the 52nd Parliament. We considered the petition between 30 November 2017 and 13 December 2018. We received written submissions from the petitioner and heard oral evidence from the New Zealand Racing Board and the New Zealand Greyhound Racing Association.

Committee members

Hon David Bennett (Chairperson)
Kiritapu Allan
Hon Nathan Guy
Kieran McAnulty
Mark Patterson
Stuart Smith
Rino Tirikatene
Hamish Walker