

Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

Petition Number: [PE01758](#)

Main Petitioner: Gill Docherty on behalf of Scotland Against Greyhound Exploitation

Subject:

Calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to put an end to greyhound racing in Scotland.

Background

There is no statutory regulation of greyhound racing in Scotland. There are two greyhound tracks currently operating in Scotland:

- Thornton Greyhounds, Kirkcaldy (independent)
- Shawfield Greyhound Stadium, South Lanarkshire (licensed under the GBGB)

The Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB) is the body with responsibility for the governance, regulation and management of the sport of licensed greyhound racing in England, Scotland and Wales.

The GBGB provides rules and regulation on the welfare of greyhounds and facilities at licenced tracks. These include requirements on inspections, that a veterinary surgeon be present at all races, and detailed rules on racing surfaces, traps, fencing, kennels etc. The GBGB Rules of racing also state:

“Every person subject to the GBGB Rules of Racing shall have full regard to Greyhound welfare and shall accept the provisions of the Animal Welfare Act 2006.”

These requirements do not apply to “Independent” greyhound tracks that are not regulated by the GBGB.

The petitioner is concerned with the welfare of greyhounds at greyhound racing tracks and calls on the Scottish Government to introduce legislation to make greyhound racing illegal in Scotland.

The petitioner suggests that introducing legislation at this time would have a low burden on rescue organisations because racing greyhound numbers are at their lowest in Scotland.

The petitioner cites annual injury and death statistics published by the GBGB stating that *“across the UK just short of 5000 dogs were injured, an increase on the previous year. The figures also state that over 2000 dogs have died or been killed in the racing industry in 2017 and 2018.”*

The petitioner also cites GBGB reports of nine positive drugs tests in dogs at Shawfield Greyhound Stadium in Glasgow in 2018.

In 2018, the GBGB launched its [‘Greyhound Commitment’](#). It states:

“This eight-point plan details a number of initiatives and pledges, some of which GBGB already carries out and some of which are being developed, in order to further improve our sport’s welfare and integrity.

It has been agreed by all trainers, owners and stadia that we regulate because we all know that without happy, healthy hounds, we have no sport.”

Scottish Government Action

The welfare of greyhounds is covered by devolved legislation under the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006. In relation to the 2006 Act, the Scottish Government has stated:

“The Act also has the flexibility to allow a wide range of animal related activities, such as circuses, animal sanctuaries, pet dealing, greyhound racing and livery yards to be regulated”.

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

The provisions of Part 2 of the 2006 Act apply to all people responsible for animals, including breeders, trainers and owners of racing greyhounds and those in charge of animals for rescue or re-homing:

Section 19 of the Act makes it an offence for a person responsible for an animal to cause that animal unnecessary suffering by action or omission, or to permit another person to cause unnecessary suffering to the animal.

Section 24 of the Act places a requirement on all people responsible for animals to take steps to ensure that the needs of these animals are met to the extent required by good practice. These needs include:

- The need for a suitable environment
- The need for a suitable diet

- The need for the animals to exhibit normal behavioural patterns
- Any need for the animals to be housed with, or apart from, other animals
- The need for protection from suffering, injury and disease.

For example, keeping animals in kennels which are unhygienic or failing to provide them with a suitable diet would be an offence under section 24 of the Act and could lead to prosecution.

A person convicted of the offence of causing an animal unnecessary suffering (a section 19 offence) can currently be sentenced for a period of up to 12 months in prison and/or given a fine of up to £20,000. Failure to ensure the welfare of an animal (a section 24 offence) carries a penalty of a 6-month prison sentence and/or a £5,000 fine.

The Scottish Government has consulted on several proposals which would seek to strengthen powers contained within the 2006 Act. The consultation included proposals to increase maximum penalties, speed up process for making permanent arrangements for seized animals and giving power for Fixed Penalty Notices. The consultation closed on 26 April 2019 – consultation responses and an analysis of those responses is available here: <https://consult.gov.scot/animal-welfare/animal-health-welfare-act-amendment-2019/>

The [Scottish Government's 2019-20 Programme for Government](#) includes the Animal Health and Welfare (Amendment) Bill in proposed legislation. It states that the Bill “*will increase the maximum penalties for the most serious animal welfare offences to five years imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine.*”

The Scottish Government has also issued a Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs and much of the advice in this Code is appropriate for racing or retired greyhounds. This Code can be viewed on the Scottish Government’s website via this link:

<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/304660/0095599.pdf>

Scottish Parliament Action

Animals welfare in Greyhound racing has been raised in the following recent parliamentary questions and motions:

Question S5W-23882: Mark Ruskell, Mid Scotland and Fife, Scottish Green Party, Date Lodged: 18/06/2019

To ask the Scottish Government, in light of figures from the Greyhound Board of Great Britain, which record that 932 racing dogs in the UK were killed in the last year and 4,963 were injured, what information it has regarding numbers in Scotland, and whether it will consider intervening if it considers that the figures are unacceptable.

Answered by Mairi Gougeon (26/06/2019):

The figures from the Greyhound Board of Great Britain cover all greyhounds and racetracks licensed by that Board. They are not disaggregated to provide information for Scotland only. The Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 makes the keeper of an animal responsible for its welfare and permits the prosecution of those who do not ensure such welfare.

Question S5W-21421: Mark Ruskell, Mid Scotland and Fife, Scottish Green Party, Date Lodged: 05/02/2019

To ask the Scottish Government whether its proposal to introduce and reform the licensing of animal activities, including their use in public displays or performances, will apply to (a) horse and (b) greyhound racing.

Answered by Mairi Gougeon (06/03/2019):

In the 2018-19 Programme for Government, the Scottish Government committed to continue work to introduce and reform licensing of animal activities including animal sanctuaries, rehoming centres, breeding and the use of animals in public display or performance. There is no specific mention of horse racing or greyhound racing in the Programme for Government, however the scope of reforms to licensing of animal activities, including their use in public displays or performances, will be considered in due course after discussion with stakeholders.

Motion S5M-12971: Alison Johnstone, Lothian, Scottish Green Party, Date Lodged: 26/06/2018

Greyhound Racing in Scotland

That the Parliament understands that, across the UK, approximately 3,500 greyhounds are unaccounted for every year; notes there are two greyhound racing tracks currently active in Scotland, one licensed track at Shawfield in Rutherglen, within the Glasgow Parliamentary Region, and an independent track at Thornton in Fife; notes that two other tracks closed recently, at Armadale in West Lothian and Halcrow in Dumfries and Galloway, but that planning permission has been granted for a new track in Wallyford, East Lothian; is concerned by reports of a dog at Shawfield testing positive for cocaine in recent weeks; notes that legislation in England offers some protection for greyhounds through the Welfare of Racing Greyhounds Regulations 2010, which the Dogs Trust is calling to be extended to also cover the time that greyhounds spend at trainers' kennels, which it understands is approximately 95% of their time, and to require the publication of welfare data relating to injury, euthanasia and rehoming; believes that greyhounds are afforded no equivalent protection in Scotland to that already in existence in England, with the only legislation covering them being the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006, which it considers does not take into account their unique situation, that many are working animals and are not being kept as pets; considers it unacceptable that greyhounds can be exported from Scotland for racing in countries with weaker animal welfare protections, or for their meat to be harvested; believes greyhound racing to be an industry in rapid decline, with venues across England closing down; accepts the need for new Scottish legislation to protect greyhounds, and

supports campaigners calling for an end to proposals for greyhound racing at Wallyford, and a winding down of the industry in Scotland until a full ban on greyhound racing can be achieved.

Supported by: Rona Mackay, Pauline McNeill, Patrick Harvie, John Finnie, Andy Wightman

Damon Davies

Researcher

[09/10/2019]

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