The Welfare of Racing Greyhounds

Background

- The Welfare of Racing Greyhound Regulations (2010) were brought in after huge pressure from charities, MPs, media and the public to ensure that the welfare of the dogs was better protected.
- Disappointingly, however, the legislation only focused on welfare measures at the track, failing to provide any legislative protection for greyhounds during breeding, kenneling and retirement. This is despite greyhounds spending approximately 95% of their time in trainers’ kennels.
- In 2015 research commissioned by Defra identified concerns with the effectiveness of the current legislation.
- However, in September 2016 Defra published the Post Implementation Review of the 2010 Greyhounds Regulations, which fails to address any of the recommendations made in the EFRA Committee’s report, nor the concerns identified in Defra’s research.
- Dogs Trust is dismayed that only minimal changes are being considered by Defra to improve the regulations - with these unlikely to come into place until 2018 at the earliest.

Current situation in England

Under the Welfare of Racing Greyhound Regulations 2010 greyhound racing tracks must be licensed by a local authority unless the operator is accredited by the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS). As the Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB) has UKAS accreditation, the majority of tracks in England are GBGB managed.

There are currently 24 greyhound racecourses managed by the GBGB and 4 independent greyhound racing tracks, which are licensed by local authorities.

Our concerns

1. Kennelling

The EFRA Committee’s report on greyhound welfare recommended that the 2010 regulations should be extended to cover trainers’ kennels, where greyhounds spend approximately 95% of their time. Dogs Trust strongly agrees with this recommendation.

In June 2015, Dogs Trust published the findings of an in-depth three month investigation into the conditions of greyhound training kennels. The report can be read here. The investigation provided stark evidence that the existing 2010 regulations do not go far enough to address welfare concerns.

Of nine trainers visited, three kept greyhounds in extremely poor conditions, needing further investigation – two of these urgently. The remainder all had areas needing to be improved upon but it is important to note that the standards they were being evaluated against were GBGB’s own rules and the Animal Boarding...
Establishments Act 1963 – both of which we consider to be outdated and only covering very basic welfare standards. We suggest that trainers’ kennels need to provide for all five of a greyhound’s welfare needs:

1. need for a suitable environment
2. need for a suitable diet
3. need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
4. need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals
5. need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease

As Britain’s fifth most popular sport, with an industry which has a £1.3 billion off-course betting turnover, with £237 million gross win for bookmakers and core industry income of £119 million (Deloitte Report: Economic Impact of British Greyhound Racing Industry 2014), it seems inconceivable that racing greyhounds are often kept in such dire conditions. In order to bring many kenneling facilities up to standard, more money needs to be invested.

We urge the Government to implement the EFRA Committee’s recommendations to extend the 2010 regulations to protect the welfare of racing greyhounds whilst they are in trainers’ kennels.

2. Data relating to injury, euthanasia and rehoming

Dogs Trust, along with the EFRA Committee hoped that the 2010 regulations would be amended to require the publication of essential welfare data relating to injury, euthanasia and rehoming.

- Currently around 8,000 greyhounds are retired each year from GBGB tracks and we believe approximately 1,000 are retired from independent tracks
- The Retired Greyhound Trust rehomes around 4,000 greyhounds a year and approximately 1,500 are rehomed by independent rescue and rehoming organisations
- This leaves approximately 3,500 greyhounds which are unaccounted for each year in the UK
- However, as statistics are not currently published by the industry the true scale of the problem is difficult to assess
- Although the 2010 regulations require tracks to keep injury records, there is no requirement for these to be published

We strongly believe that the regulations should be amended to include a mandatory requirement for injury, euthanasia and retirement figures to be published by both GBGB and Independent tracks, and for this data to be independently analysed in real time in order for remedial action to be taken as appropriate. Only then will it be possible to monitor and address the huge concern surrounding injuries as well as the number of greyhounds that seemingly disappear.

We call on the Government to amend the Welfare of Racing Greyhounds Regulations (2010) to require the publication of essential welfare data relating to injury, euthanasia and rehoming.

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