

## **Submission in Relation to Petitions No. 009-010 – Oppose Greyhound Racing**

### **1. Background**

Two petitions opposing greyhound racing in Western Australia, containing a total of 10,679 signatures were tabled to WA Parliament by Hon Alison Xamon MLC on 13 May 2021.

The signatures were collected by not-for-profit organisation Free the Hounds, a local greyhound welfare advocacy group whose members are deeply concerned about the welfare of greyhounds in WA.

More than 9,500 signatures of the total 10,679 signatures were collected since June 2020 which is an extraordinary result given the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on the organisation's operations and community outreach activities.

Signatories are all members of the WA community and represent a diverse mix of demographics from both suburban and rural areas. Signatures were mostly collected at farmers' markets and other community events.

### **2. Issues with WA's greyhound racing industry**

#### **2.1 Social licence and public opinion**

A social licence to operate refers to the ongoing acceptance of a company or industry's standard business practices and operating procedures by its employees, stakeholders and the general public. The general public's expectations for animal welfare, particularly dogs, has changed dramatically over the past decade. This has resulted in the greyhound racing industry lagging behind contemporary expectations for greyhound welfare, increased public scrutiny and calls for greyhound racing to be banned. Greyhounds are an increasingly popular companion dog breed in WA and their treatment within the racing industry is no longer widely accepted by the community. Free the Hounds strongly believes WA's greyhound racing industry has lost public confidence and its social licence to operate.

The staggering number of petition signatures collected in a short time, conversations with the wider community about the treatment of racing greyhounds, media coverage of greyhound injuries and deaths, and the declining participation in greyhound racing demonstrate a rise in community awareness surrounding the issues associated with greyhound racing and strong community support for the industry to be banned.

Free the Hounds has also been collecting personal stories from members of the WA community about their personal experiences with greyhound racing, rescued greyhounds and cruelty to greyhounds they have witnessed firsthand. Over six months, Free the Hounds has received more than 60 stories – all supporting an end to greyhound racing in WA. Stories continue to be sent in and all will be published online.

#### **2.2 Self-regulation and poor enforcement**

Greyhound racing in WA is regulated by Racing and Wagering WA (RWWA), a statutory body within the WA Government that is responsible for both the commercial and integrity arms of the business.

Regulatory capture occurs when the same agency is responsible for maximising the profitability of an industry as well as regulatory enforcement and maintaining ethical standards. It commonly occurs within animal industries including the greyhound racing industry in WA. Proper enforcement must be free from conflicts of interest and requires separate commercial and integrity entities to secure public confidence. It is Free the Hounds' position, and that of our supporters, that as a minimum the WA greyhound racing industry requires an independent animal welfare authority to oversee the industry and be responsible for its integrity functions. The general public has lost confidence in self-regulated industries, particularly greyhound racing, after numerous corruption scandals.

The Code of Practice for the Housing and Keeping of Greyhounds is insufficient to ensure the welfare of racing greyhounds. For example it allows greyhounds to be confined to a small 3m x 1.2m kennel for up to 23 ¼ hours per day. Furthermore, responses to Freedom of Information requests by Free the Hounds show the bare minimum standards in the Code are not even adequately enforced and kennel inspections are only conducted once or twice per year.

#### **2.3 Psychological and physical harm to greyhounds**

Greyhounds exiting the industry are often in poor physical and psychological health due to the impacts of housing, rearing and racing. Free the Hounds agrees with the Five Domains model of assessing animal welfare which is supported by the RSPCA: nutrition, environment, health, behaviour and mental state. Greyhound racing is fundamentally incompatible with the model. Contemporary animal welfare expectations go beyond basic survival requirements of food, water and shelter. Acceptable welfare means providing animals with a life worth living by minimising negative experiences and maximising positive experiences. Dogs require adequate socialisation, enrichment, and stimulation, particularly during the critical development period during the first six months of life. Without this, a dog can develop anxiety and behavioural problems and struggle to adapt to the world outside of the racing industry.

While in the racing industry, greyhounds are housed alone in barren kennels, not socialised with other dog breeds, not exposed to a home environment with human company, and are only stimulated and exercised as part of their preparation for racing or racing itself. Little thought is given to preparing greyhounds for life after racing and this responsibility unfairly falls on rehoming groups. Greyhounds coming out of the racing industry are often covered in a thick, soft fur as a result of living in cold concrete kennels. This extra layer of fur, known as 'kennel coat' permanently sheds once the greyhound has been living inside a home for a few months. Scars, fly-bitten ears and pressure sores from having no access to soft bedding are also common in greyhounds exiting the industry. Furthermore, rehomed greyhounds have far higher incidences of dental disease than dogs raised as pets because they do not receive adequate dental care while racing. This puts further financial and emotional strain on rehoming groups and adopters.

Research, including by the University of Technology Sydney in 2018, and statistics from the industry itself demonstrate racing is fundamentally dangerous and causes significant trauma to greyhounds, resulting in injuries and even death. Factors such as the fragile anatomy of greyhounds, oval shaped track configuration, repeated anti-clockwise running, collisions and falls, extreme rate and change in acceleration, too many greyhounds per race, and greyhounds racing at a young age, all contribute to injuries specific to racing, particularly to the right hock which makes up over 50% of total fractures sustained each year on WA tracks.

RWWA noted in its annual report for 2019-20 that 855 injuries were sustained by greyhounds over the financial year period, a 10% increase from the previous year. The report also showed 101 greyhounds died within the racing industry over the financial year period. RWWA's stewards reports show 96 greyhounds sustained fractures over the 2020 calendar year and 10 dogs died at the track by euthanasia or sudden death as a result of racing. So far in 2021, RWWA's stewards reports show 48 greyhounds have sustained fractures whilst racing and 3 greyhounds have died at the track. Several more greyhounds were medically stabilised and euthanised away from the track.

#### **2.4 Breach of *Animal Welfare Act 2002 (WA)***

Free the Hounds and our supporters consider greyhound racing to be an offence under the *Animal Welfare Act 2002 (WA)* "the Act". Section 1 of the Act that states "a person in charge of an animal is cruel to an animal – (c) is worked, driven, ridden or otherwise used – (i) when it is not fit to be used or has been over used; or (ii) in a manner that causes, or is likely to cause, it unnecessary harm".

#### **2.5 Failure of reform initiatives and injury schemes**

Free the Hounds was involved in a Greyhound Welfare Working Group established by the McGowan Government in 2017. The group met regularly over 12 months and comprised of representatives of WA Government, RWWA, Greyhound Racing WA, RSPCA WA, and greyhound rehoming groups. Through the group, several reforms came into effect with the purpose of improving the welfare of racing greyhounds. However, these were not significant enough to secure public confidence and acceptance of the industry.

The injury schemes that were meant to be a welfare initiative to reduce trackside euthanasia have proven a total failure. Dogs are having major complications with fracture surgery and rehabilitation and long-term health implications. Injury schemes are not sustainable and still cause significant suffering to greyhounds. For example, in January 2021, Wagtail Sage was eventually euthanised after an unsuccessful hock surgery by an industry vet in October 2020 and months of inadequate medical care or supervision while in kennels.

#### **2.6 Community impacts**

Due to overbreeding and mass import of greyhounds from the Eastern States, several hundred greyhounds need to be rehomed each year in WA, placing undue reliance on independent charity groups to rehome the dogs at enormous financial and emotional expense. Industry initiatives to ease some of the financial stress on these groups have achieved very little when a reduction in euthanasia rates has resulted in more dogs needing to be rehomed. Finding foster homes to facilitate the endless supply of greyhounds being surrendered by racing participants is a constant struggle. Even RWWA's own rehoming agency, Greyhounds As Pets, is frequently reported to be at capacity.

The industry's own figures show at least 30% of greyhounds in WA do not go on to race, meaning the oversupply of dogs is necessary to meet racing requirements. The industry is unsustainable and cannot continue like this long term. There are simply not enough homes to continue rehoming these dogs. Australia continuously faces the problem of general oversupply of dogs, with tens of thousands being euthanised every year at the RSPCA, pounds and shelters. The greyhound racing industry contributes to this problem.