



28<sup>th</sup> February 2022

Dear Petitions Committee,

**Ban Greyhound Racing in Wales Petition: Ref P-06-1253**

Thank you so much for sending on the petition response from the Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales. We are pleased to see that animal welfare is a priority for the Welsh Government and were encouraged by the commitments in the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales 2021-26.

We note the reference to greyhound racing in the wider U.K., and the recent petition to the U.K. Government. The situation in the rest of the U.K. is distinct from Wales, in that there are 19 licensed tracks so an immediate ban wouldn't be feasible due to the infrastructure and the significant number of greyhounds that would be displaced. A phased ban with interim welfare improvements would be needed. It is important to consider the situation in Wales independently, and with just one unlicensed track a ban is easily workable as the economic impact would be minimal and welfare organisations would collaborate to ensure the safety of the displaced greyhounds.

It should be noted that the sale of Valleys track to Dave Barclay, a Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB) promoter, has now been completed. Whilst Hope Rescue worked with Valleys track through its Amazing Greys project, we took in around 200 greyhounds surrendered due to their racing owners having links with Valleys track (although not all would have raced there) over a 3 year period. In addition, we took in over 40 dogs that suffered serious injuries racing at Valleys track, mainly fractured legs. Sadly, five of those died from their injuries. Data is available as evidence.

If the stated intention to licence the track as a GBGB track proceeds, then we will see a significant expansion in the number of races and greyhounds needed at Valleys to fulfil the proposed contracts for live-streamed racing. The contracts involve live-streaming races to betting offices across the world and is the main source of income for GBGB licensed greyhound racing stadia. Based on track averages from GBGB's own published statistics for 2020 and uplifted by 20% to reflect track closures during Covid, we are likely to see around 225 serious

injuries and 25 deaths every year – a significant leap from the current figures at Valleys. We would also see around 345 surplus greyhounds needing rescue spaces every year, at a time our sector is under immense pressure due to the huge surge in pet ownership during the pandemic and rescue spaces are at a premium.

Whilst we are pleased that Welsh Government has greyhound welfare firmly on its radar and intends to consider greyhound racing in Wales as part of a future licensing scheme, we would urge them to consider a ban as the ultimate goal. We strongly believe that regulation of greyhound racing in the rest of the U.K. has not sufficiently improved greyhound welfare, and that regulation will never be able to truly protect greyhounds racing in Wales from injury and death. Key welfare members of the U.K. Greyhound Forum including Greyhound Rescue Wales, Dogs Trust, RSPCA and Blue Cross are all currently reviewing their positions on greyhound racing, and we await the outcome of their reviews with interest.

Key welfare concerns around regulated/licensed racing include:

- Injury and deaths – 3,575 serious injuries and 401 deaths reported by GBGB in 2020 (during Covid). This excludes injuries and deaths on the 3 independent tracks including Valleys.
- Number of surplus dogs the animal welfare sector is expected to find homes for – 5,484 in 2020 and again excluding those from independent tracks.
- Lack of traceability – we found discrepancies with the tracking of greyhounds throughout their racing career, including dogs racing at Valleys that were recorded as being retired and given to rescue centres for rehoming.
- Doping – there are many published reports of doping incidents in greyhound racing. A trainer convicted of doping at Swindon track, then suspended from Perry Barr track was still able to race at Valleys track where 3 of his dogs broke their legs and sadly one died. Doping offences are dealt with in-house by GBGB despite being an offence under the Animal Welfare Act 2006.
- Health and behavioural issues seen in dogs surrendered from GBGB tracks. A VetCompass report in 2019 recognised that racing greyhounds carry health legacies from inherent breed predispositions as well as impacts from their prior racing careers.

These include dental issues, skin complaints, undiagnosed injuries and lameness, fleas, worms, fear and anxiety

- Configuration of tracks and sharp bends that increase injury risks. Valleys track proudly describe their “eye-wateringly sharp first bend”. Professor Andrew Knight revealed the unavoidable injuries to greyhounds racing on dangerously configured oval tracks in his “Injuries in Racing Greyhounds” 2018 report.

- Overbreeding and fate of surplus greyhounds. 83% of greyhounds racing in the U.K. are bred in Ireland. RTE Investigates revealed in 2019 that 6,500 were exported from Ireland and 6,000 were killed for not making the grade, with 1000% more pups bred than needed. It also included distressing footage of surplus greyhounds being killed at a slaughterhouse.

Whilst we recognise GBGB has introduced some recent financial schemes including the injury recovery scheme which provides a 50% grant for certain injuries up to £2,000, and a £400 retirement bond, these financial incentives only cover a proportion of the true costs and resources needed to rehome surplus and injured greyhounds. The fact we need injury recovery and rehoming schemes speaks volumes about the welfare issues caused by continuing to race greyhounds.

We note the funding provided by Welsh Government to undertake welfare inspections at Valleys track. This is particularly welcome, especially since the Amazing Greys project was stopped in April 2021 from taking both injured and surplus dogs following the sharing of a U.K. wide petition to ban greyhound racing. Due to a lack of transparency, we do not know what is currently happening with these dogs which is extremely concerning given the numbers we were taking from the track previously. We would hope that as a very minimum the track is complying with the Voluntary Code of Practice for The Welfare of Racing Greyhounds (Wales) and trust that the inspections will ensure compliance, particularly with regards to a vet presence at race meetings. Previously there was not vet at the track, and it was left to our Amazing Greys volunteers to ensure injured dogs were taken straight to the vets for emergency treatment, although it should be noted not all trainers were willing to give us their injured dogs and we could not ascertain what their fate was.

In conclusion, the proposed licensing of Valleys track as a GBGB track and planned expansion of greyhound racing in Wales is extremely concerning. Whilst regulation is an option and will marginally increase the welfare of greyhounds whilst they are racing, the net result for Wales will be a significant increase in the number of injuries, deaths and surplus dogs needing rescue spaces.

The foundation of any animal welfare strategy, including Welsh Government's Animal Welfare Plan for Wales 2021 to 2026, is that prevention is better than cure. There are not any other cohorts of dogs we can stop coming in to rescue centres in Wales. Providing funding to repair or amputate the broken legs of injured dogs, contributing towards the rehoming costs of surplus dogs and putting government resources in to enforcing regulations is not a viable long-term solution. We need a more strategic and sustainable



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solution to the welfare problems created by the racing industry, and we strongly feel that a ban is the only solution and with just one unlicensed track currently in Wales, is a feasible solution.

We would welcome the opportunity for Welsh Government to undertake an inquiry into greyhound racing in Wales, covering both existing and proposed practices, ahead of a wider debate in the Senedd to evidence and inform its position on greyhound racing going forward.

Yours sincerely,

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Vanessa Waddon

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