



National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee

14 June 2022

Hon Meka Whaitiri
Associate Minister of Agriculture (Animal Welfare)
Parliament Buildings
Wellington 6160

Tēnā koe Minister Whaitiri,

Greyhound Update

I am writing to you on behalf of the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC) regarding the greyhound racing review work program. NAWAC's 3Es subcommittee has reviewed the recent reports from the Racing Integrity Board (RIB) and Greyhound Racing New Zealand (GRNZ). NAWAC would ask that you note the following points:

- We commend the RIB for their work with GRNZ to resolve the many issues that have been previously outlined. This affirms the need for and benefits of the recent changes to bring the welfare of sporting animals in the racing codes under the scrutiny of the RIB.
- We are concerned that, at a time when the industry should be working to rebuild its social license, the reports from kennel inspections confirm poor maintenance of standards. We note the rapid response by licensees to clear improvement notices and commend the way that this process is being used as an educative action. We understand that notices relating to kennel facilities will take longer to address but consider that these must be progressed urgently to improve the welfare of many greyhounds.
- We welcome the news that veterinary inspections have found few instances where dogs needed further veterinary examination attention, noting however that health inspections have mainly focused on teeth and body condition.
- We note that the timeline for the industry to demonstrate a strong resolve to progress on a pathway of continuous welfare improvement is short. This path must take them beyond meeting minimum standards, striving for best practice and the greater provision for positive welfare experiences. GRNZ should develop a welfare strategy that can bring the industry forward and give a strong and enduring foundation for social license to be built. In this regard, NAWAC remains resolute in its advice that the industry must, as part of its overall welfare assurance programme, set clear key performance indicators (KPIs) against which the direction of its performance can be readily assessed.

- We are concerned that the plans of the current CEO to retire from GRNZ could delay the improvement programme which needs to be developed into a comprehensive continuing education process for their licensees that extends into future years.
- We recognise that GRNZ have acted swiftly to deal with some issues, such as the low rates of vaccinations. More recently there has been consultation with experts on track design, monitoring and curation, improved policies for euthanasia decision-making, expansion of the rehoming programme, and development of pathways to treat and rehabilitate injured dogs. We applaud these efforts but propose that a greater commitment to continuous improvement in animal welfare standards from both industry governance and grassroots is needed, to rebuild social license.

We also provide an update on the following points:

1) **Animal Health and Welfare Committee (AHWC):**

I have attended recent meetings as an observer. The group was recently reconfigured and is progressing policy and standards development led by the GRNZ welfare manager. Discussion has been wide-ranging and generally constructive. Liaison between this committee and the RIB is developing but its workplan could be better aligned with that of the RIB so that matters can be addressed collaboratively.

The governance relationship between the AHWC and the GRNZ board remains unclear in terms of this committee's direct relationship with the Board. The immediate governance pathway is the CEO who attends the meetings and reports to the Board. This works well at an operational level, but NAWAC suggests that the AHWC should make regular and direct representations to the Board, to protect their voice for positive welfare change.

We remain concerned that the RNZSPCA is not represented on the AHWC. Their membership was revoked by Board decision, apparently due to the RNZSPCA policy which, in principle, is opposed to greyhound racing. That same policy is however clear that, despite this opposition, as long as the activity is permitted, they will support efforts to improve the welfare of the dogs. The RNZSPCA is recognised and supported by mainstream New Zealand as their principal companion animal advocacy organisation. We respectfully suggest that not having them at the advisory table is a serious omission and lost opportunity in terms of skills and knowledge that would be brought to the discussion, as well as generating a perception that degrades the industry's social license.

2) **Injury management and euthanasia policies:**

While a cursory examination of industry statistics suggests that the incidence of catastrophic track injuries requiring euthanasia at the track has reduced, this is largely due to the introduction of the GRNZ rehabilitation programme. GRNZ funds treatment for dogs injured while racing and they progress into the programme and categorised instead as 'serious'. We are concerned first that in some instances where the injuries are catastrophic, euthanasia at the track must remain an option for the attending veterinarian. It must also remain an option following clinical assessment if, the prognosis on the dog's remaining life-time welfare suggests significant compromise or ongoing suffering. This has been discussed with the AHWC as the GRNZ euthanasia policy is refined to provide guidance for track-day and attending veterinarians when considering such decisions. Aside from this, we applaud the provisions in the programme

for post-operative nursing, physiotherapy and rehabilitation - critical components of successful recovery.

The serious injury data reveals a disturbing upwards trend in serious injury rates in recent seasons, quite aside from the impact of reclassification of track euthanasias noted above. We are disappointed that work to improve track design and maintenance have been slow although we accept that some delay was associated with pandemic restrictions. This is a critical step to injury reduction and requires urgent action. It is a concern that there is not yet any clear plan regarding future racetrack improvements, or discussion on KPIs from such work in regard to injury rates and consequent welfare outcomes for dogs.

We commend GRNZ for their trial of preferred starting boxes that gives the dogs better opportunity to choose their own running paths. We also welcome the implementation of the Serious Injury Committee. While the exact relationship and reporting mechanisms between this new group, the AHC and the board of GRNZ remain to be clarified, NAWAC is optimistic that a higher level of scrutiny of track accidents and better understanding of the factors that contribute to them will support injury reduction.

3) **Policy for zero euthanasia at retirement:**

We endorse the principles of this policy and congratulate GRNZ for their work to expand their rehoming programme. While we have some concerns about length of stays in transitional facilities before final placement, we await further analysis of this from within the project that is developing the population model. We also note the expansion of the behaviour rehabilitation programme, but continue to seek more information about the lifetime outcomes of rehomed dogs.

In closing, we note our concern at the lack of discussion of a backup plan to manage the dogs should the industry be shut down. Any sudden shut-down would have serious welfare implications for thousands of dogs that would then need to be managed. NAWAC noted that during recent planning consultations by Auckland City Council, support for the the continuance of the greyhound track at Manakau as a public amenity was very low. While welfare concerns contribute to the loss of social license, other aspects of this activity raise societal concerns, and even high and consistent achievement of a good life for greyhounds is unlikely on its own to restore social confidence and trust.

Despite our outstanding concerns noted above, it is our overall view that the industry is making a reasonable effort, with the assistance of the RIB, to resolve its problems. We will continue to monitor progress to improve greyhound welfare.

Should you wish to discuss this letter, or any other issue, you can reach me by phone on s9(2)(a).

Ngā mihi,



Dr Gwyneth Verkerk
Chair, National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee