ANIMAL WELFARE ACT 2006

GREYHOUND WELFARE WORKING GROUP

Minutes Of The Meeting held on

Monday 29 January 2007 11:00 am

Conference Rooms LG05-06 Page Street

Those present:

Henry Hoppe – Chair	Animal Welfare - Defra
Graham Thurlow	Animal Welfare - Defra
Peter Hall - Secretary	Animal Welfare - Defra
Ian Strachan	Scottish Executive
Abigail Mahoney	LACoRs
Sue Herne	LACoRs
Lord Lipsey	BGRB
John Haynes	BGRB
Peter Laurie	BGRB
Hazel Bentall	NGRC
Alistair McLean	NGRC
John Curran	Greyhound Promoters/Greyhound Forum
Clarissa Baldwin	Dogs Trust
Chris Laurence	Dogs Trust
Mike Hobday	League Against Cruel Sports
Richard Lockyer	Society of Greyhound Vets
Becky Blackmore	RSPCA
Rod Eccles	Westhoughton Greyhound Stadium
Louise Eccles	Westhoughton Greyhound Stadium

Apologies – Alun Streeter (National Assembly for Wales), Ivor Stocker (Retired Greyhounds Trust)

Item 1: Minutes of last meeting and matters arising

1. **Henry Hoppe** explained that if anyone had any questions on the EU Transport Regulations they could be emailed to either him or the Secretary, Peter Hall. **Mike Hobday** pointed out that they had not received the information promised from Defra's Better Regulation Unit on the research used to measure animal welfare. Henry agreed that Defra would follow this up.

Action: Defra

Item 2: Update on the Donoughue Enquiry

2. **Lord Lipsey** explained that Ben Bradshaw had written to the industry making it clear that substantial and radical change was needed for them to prove they could self-regulate. The BGRB had met with other groups to

discuss how this could be achieved. As part of this process, Lord Donoughue had agreed to chair an enquiry to look into the regulation of greyhound racing. The enquiry would look at how a NGRC licensing scheme would work. It would also look at the relationship between the licensing scheme and Independent tracks. It was anticipated that Lord Donoughue would publish his report by April (although it could be the summer). Everyone was welcome to submit evidence to the enquiry. The work of Lord Donoughue and the APGAW were bound to have an impact on the work of the Greyhound Welfare Working Group. **Alistair McLean** said that the NGRC welcomed Lord Donoughue's enquiry.

Item 3: Update on Animal Welfare Act 2006

3. Henry reminded the group that Ministers had made a commitment to introduce regulations for greyhound racing by 2009. Therefore draft regulations would have to be ready by next year. Ministers had also made a number of demands on the industry before they could be considered fit to self regulate. These demands included a substantial increase in funding for greyhound welfare. Ben Bradshaw would be giving evidence to APGAW's enquiry on 22 February and Defra looked forward to APGAW's findings.

4. Lord Lipsey informed the group that the industry had increased the amount of funding available for welfare by 29%. This money had been found out of prize money and money for capital grants. **Mike Hobday** said that some argued that prize money was going towards welfare as an element of the prize would be used by trainers on the welfare of the greyhounds. Lord Lipsey said that hard choices had to be made and it was felt it would be better for the money to be concentrated more directly on welfare. **John Curran** agreed that prize money tended to trickle down in welfare terms but it was felt, and the trainers had agreed, that more money needed to go directly into welfare. **Clarissa Baldwin** asked that now the levy board in horse racing was no longer to be abolished whether anything similar could be introduced for greyhounds. Lord Lipsey said that they had lobbied DCMS for a levy but there was little chance of it happening in the near future.

5. Mike Hobday asked if anyone could put forward alternative options to self regulation to Ministers? Did the Lord Donoughue enquiry have a remit to recommend options for regulation other than self-regulation? Lord Lipsey confirmed that Lord Donoughue could recommend statutory regulation if he thought it appropriate. John Curran said that the industry did not fear regulation but it believed that it could be best delivered by self regulation. It was unlikely that an outside organisation would have the competence or expertise to regulate greyhound racing. Henry said that Defra would need to see what came out of the APGAW and Donoughue enquiries. Ministers are keen for self-regulation but they first wanted to see whether the NGRC could prove itself to be open and accountable as a regulator.

Item 4: Independent Racing Tracks

6. Henry said that the Government expected that there should be equal welfare standards for both NGRC affiliated tracks and independent tracks. This may mean that there could be a regulation in place requiring a veterinary presence at all race meetings as well as kennelling before and after racing being available. These were seen as musts. The regulations would be backed up by a code probably, but not necessarily, approved by parliament. The code would be important from an evidential point of view in setting out the standards that need to be complied with. It would be based on the Greyhound Charter. The NGRC would have the responsibility for seeing that tracks racing under their aegis met these standards. There remained the question of whether independent tracks would be regulated by local authorities, through a body representative of the independents or through the NGRC.

7. **Rod Eccles** reported that independent racing was on the decline – although this was due to the tracks being sold rather than a fall-off in racing. The NGRC had been putting up a smokescreen, blaming independent tracks for the problems of greyhound racing, while it got its own house in order. At Westhoughton, there was already a veterinary presence (with a mobile surgery) at all race meetings. However, most of their members ran their dogs as part of a hobby sport rather than a business. He fully supported the need for proper welfare standards but was against the compulsory kennelling of dogs. It wasn't good welfare to kennel dogs, especially as most of the dogs were not 'kennel' dogs but family pets.

8. Clarissa Baldwin asked how many independent tracks had the same welfare standards as Westhoughton and whether there was any one body capable of speaking on behalf of all the independent tracks. Rod Eccles replied that independents had begun the process of coming together to form a body. Of the other tracks, he knew that Highgate and Askern also had a veterinary presence at race meetings.

9. John Curran said that he believed that 8 out of the 15 independent tracks had vets. He also said that his track had been an independent track but had changed over to a NGRC track. They had recognised the need for change and – although they had not always agreed with the NGRC – the need for one level welfare standard for greyhound racing. He recognised that some independent tracks did not want to race under the NGRC rules but he felt that independent tracks had to meet the same welfare standards. While NGRC inspectors could be used to inspect independent tracks this did not mean they had to race by NGRC rules. However, he did feel that kennelling was a welfare matter. Dogs suffered the risk of heat stroke or exhaustion – before and after racing – if they were not kennelled but merely left in the car for example. He did disagree with the NGRC though on the length of time a dog should be kennelled before and after a race. The NGRC were concerned with the integrity of the dogs being raced as well as animal welfare. As independent tracks did not have the same degree of betting the same degree of integrity was not required.

10. Rod Eccles agreed that the independent tracks needed to speak more with the NGRC. He supported the need for regulation and inspection but wished to see a more two tiered framework to take account of the high standard tracks such as Belle Vue as well as the remaining independent tracks.

11. **Abigail Mahoney** said that local authorities had no particular wish to take on responsibility for greyhound racing. There were relatively few tracks so it was not a big issue for most authorities. However, she wished to know whether any organisation would be able to run a greyhound licensing scheme and what involvement local authorities would have in a self regulated scheme? Henry said that the regulations would set down absolute minimum standards. There would have to be a statutory framework for self regulation. This could entail licensing but NGRC tracks would be exempted from the licensing regime. This would result in independent tracks having to be licensed by the local authority. The Animal Welfare Act provided the police and local authorities with powers of entry to search where there were allegations of cruelty or poor welfare. These powers could be exercised in almost all animal related businesses, including all greyhound tracks.

12. Lord Lipsey said that he believed that independent tracks would struggle to meet the new demands of any new regulations and that most would not survive. There was also no chance of them getting any funds from the bookmakers as there were no betting opportunities at independent tracks.

13. Mike Hobday felt that independent tracks did provide a service for greyhound racing, especially in prolonging the use of those dogs which had retired from NGRC racing. That needed to be taken into account. He also asked whether regulations could stipulate that only a vet belonging to the NGRC could be allowed to inspect tracks. Would this be within competition legislation? The example of the vets used for licensing riding establishments was different as those vets were governed by a regulatory body – the RCVS rather than a private club – the NGRC. John Curran wanted to see vets independent from the NGRC and he believed that the Society of Greyhound Veterinarians (SGV) did not achieve this. **Richard Lockyer** pointed out that all SGV vets were RCVS vets. **Hazel Bentall** said that there were currently no courses for greyhounds but this was changing.

14. Rod Eccles said that more English puppies were also learning to race on independent tracks before progressing to NGRC tracks. Lord Lipsey said that the benefits to NGRC tracks from independent tracks were minimal and that schooling tracks were already in place to help puppies learn to race.

15. Henry said that the Government would need to consider the role of bodies such as the SGV. In addition if local authorities found themselves in the position of having to licence greyhound tracks they would need to bring in outside expertise. It might be a vet or it could, for example, be an NGRC steward with the necessary experience to offer advice on the kennels and track.

16. Mike Hobday wondered whether there was a moral obligation on bookmakers to make funds available for independent tracks. John Curran said he would be horrified to loose independent racing and said they provided a vital role. However, funding was a separate issue. Bookmakers paid a voluntary levy and were not convinced there was sufficient betting opportunities to justify providing funds to independent tracks. Bookmakers believed that the racing at independent tracks did not have the same integrity as at NGRC tracks but having the same welfare standards may change their view.

17. Henry said that Ministers did wish to renew the pressure on bookmakers to provide extra funding for greyhound welfare. Rod Eccles said that the independents were not looking for more money. Some of the tracks would be able to survive new welfare regulations although others may not. Alistair McLean said that the NGRC would be happy to engage with those independent tracks who aspired to achieve the same levels of welfare and integrity. John Curran said he would be happy to assist in the process.

18. Clarissa Baldwin said that independent trainers should also be regulated.

19. Henry concluded by saying that it was important that this dialogue was kept going. Defra would look at setting up a sub-group just on independent racing. The sub-group would probably consist of independents, the NGRC, the Dogs Trust and the Greyhound Promoters. Defra would draw up the remit for the sub-group. The group agreed that such a sub-group would be useful.

Action: Defra

Item 5: Any other business

20. Hazel Bentall asked whether the Greyhound Charter would still form the basis for a racing greyhound code of practice? Henry said Defra still expected that it would. Clarissa Baldwin pointed out that the charter only covered racing greyhounds not greyhounds before and after their racing lifes.

21. Henry said that the group needed to begin looking at record keeping for greyhounds to ensure that they can be traced from ‘cradle to grave’. Defra lawyers would need to consider whether an obligation on the tracks, whether independent or NGRC, to share data for a greyhound database could be enshrined in the regulations. **Ian Strachan** said that the Scottish Executive would be keen for there to be a GB register to keep track of greyhounds. **Chris Laurence** said that the Greyhound Forum could begin to consider what requirements were needed in the regulations and which needed to be in the code of practice. Rod Eccles said that the codes needed to resolve the problem of those dogs who are raced at both NGRC and Independent tracks – but under different names. John Curran said that the problem of dogs being raced under different names needed to be resolved otherwise tracing all dogs

would be impossible. The problem could be solved if all dogs could only run under their stud book names.

Item 6: Date of the next meeting

22. It was agreed that the next meeting should be deferred pending the outcome of the APGAW and Lord Donoughue enquiries. In the meantime, work would be progressed through the sub group considering independents and the Greyhound Forum review of the relationship between the code and the charter.

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