1st Meeting of the Greyhound Welfare Working Group
Monday 6 June 2:30pm. Nobel House, London

Those present:

Henry Hoppe (Chair) (HH) Defra	Sally Case (SC) RSPCA
Will Fry (Secretary) (WF) Defra	Tim Miles (TM) RSPCA
Graham Thurlow (GT) Defra	Dave Dennett (DD) Askern Greyhound Stadium.
Laura John (LJ) Defra	Mr Russell (RR) Highgate Stadium
Hazel Bentall (HB) NGRC	Michael Zivcovic (MZ) Askern Greyhound Stadium
Alistair Mclean (AM) NGRC	Chris Laurence (CL) Dogs Trust
John Petrie (JP) BGRB	Raymond Gee (RG) Society of Greyhound Vets
Emma Johns (EJ) BGRB	Ivor Stocker (IS) Retired Greyhounds Trust
Doreen Graham (DG) SSPCA	Mike Hobday (MH) LACS
	Heather Holmes (Hhol) Scottish Executive

Introduction

1. HH noted that the Animal Welfare Bill was included in the Queen's Speech, and so should be introduced into Parliament during the first session. He explained that when the Bill is introduced the working group would probably be put on hold while it went through Parliament. Otherwise, he hoped the group would be able to make recommendations to go the minister in the Autumn.

2. LJ explained that it was very likely that Defra would receive Freedom of Information requests relating to the group. As such, the members of the group should be aware that the minutes of the meeting, or any evidence which they send to Defra may be released to the public in the future. Anyone concerned about this should contact Defra.

3. HH also outlined the government's better regulation policy. Important points to note include the publication of the Hampton Review on effective inspections and enforcement with an emphasis on focussed, risk-based inspections where possible. The Better Regulation Task Force report focuses on reducing burdens on business, the Government is committed to this and the Working Group should bear it in mind. Along these lines, ministers have previously stated a preference for self-regulation of greyhound racing if possible.

4. He also particularly welcomed the representatives from the independent greyhound tracks, acknowledging the difficulties there have been in the past in engaging with that group.

The work of the group

5. HH then detailed the structure of two sub-groups which he envisaged taking on separate strands of work. The first on which aspects of racing should be regulated, whether by license or registration, and what a Code of Practice should contain. The second to examine enforcement issues. He reiterated the Government's desire for self-regulation but only if the NGRC could win the trust of all and there was proper audit and accountability.

6. SC sought clarification that the groups would be a mix of different interest groups – they would be. JP suggested that on the industry side the 'how' to

enforce sat best with the NGRC and the 'what' to enforce with the BGRB. SC pointed out that the second group could not reasonably look at how to enforce something until the first had agree what to enforce.

The remit of the group – whole life or racing life?

7. HB sought clarification of whether the group was looking into the welfare of greyhounds throughout their life or simply while they raced. HH agreed that the "Greyhound Charter" is 'cradle to grave' and this should form a central element of the thinking of the first sub-group. Sanctuaries and breeding will be considered elsewhere and are not considered part of the group's remit. The Bill's proposals for a duty of care would also, of course, apply to greyhounds at all stages of their life.

8. It was broadly agreed that there should be a duty for owners to make 'responsible arrangements' for a greyhound when it finishes racing. However, once those arrangements have been made it is unreasonable to expect the original owner to be continually responsible for the later care of a greyhound. Similarly the racing owner will have no control over the dog before it comes into racing so it is unreasonable to hold someone responsible for its treatment then. Someone can only be responsible for something they have control over.

9. According to MH thousands of dogs disappear each year and the current systems are not working. He cautioned that the group should not rush to set a specific cut-off date. While agreeing with the scope of responsibility for welfare in the individual case it is important that the industry as a whole shows general responsibility for dogs from cradle to grave and that should be part of the group's remit.

10. RR suggested that since the stadiums make the most money out of the dogs (up to £10-15,000 on an individual dog in a year) they should be responsible for looking after retired greyhounds. Many individual owners would not have the facilities or knowledge to look after their racing dogs in their home and some dogs are incapable of being kept as pets.

11. TM suggested that an owner cannot abrogate his responsibilities for a dog just because it cannot race any more. If someone is unable to make provisions for a dog after racing they should not buy it in the first place. The group should consider a trainer's duty to make a prospective owner aware of his responsibilities.

Self-regulation and other schemes

12. MH suggested that there are two issues to consider when deciding for or against self regulation: (i) What the NGRC would need to do to be able to self-regulate, what standards would it have to apply? and (ii) What level of support would local authorities need if they were to do it?

13. SC proposed a hybrid option. A national standard in legislation, the local authority with ultimate responsibility for enforcing it but with the NGRC taking day-to-day responsibility. This could be done initially on a trial basis. JP suggested that this could blur who was accountable and responsible. He also did

not think local authorities had the time and expertise and was cautious of the national variations in standards it might introduce.

14. HH outlined a proposal for licensing riding schools which may be of interest to the group. It would involve schools requiring a licence from a local authority but with the inspection for that licence being carried out by either the authority itself or by the British Horse Society (BHS). This might work in riding schools because the BHS is well respected by all concerned. A similar system could work for greyhounds, if the NGRC could demonstrate that it has the capacity, transparency and auditability to gain the confidence of all necessary groups.

15. DG explained the 'Quality Meat Scotland' scheme whereby farmers who meet a set standard can display a quality mark. This gives consumers the opportunity to make more informed decisions. It is supported by all groups including the NFU Scotland and the SSPCA.

16. DD raised concerns that if the NGRC regulated the whole industry then the independents would have to meet all of the NGRC's rules even if not directly related to welfare. For example the NGRC does not race sprinters (<300m). CL suggested that the rules for the NGRC to enforce should not need to be so prescriptive and should be more 'outcome based'.

Auditing the enforcement

17. JP and MH suggested that the questions to address are (i) what is the standard required? (ii) who is responsible for running the industry at that standard? (iii) who is responsible for checking the industry is at that standard? And (iv) what are the sanctions if things go wrong?

18. AM suggested that while the standards within the NGRC tracks are high they could and should improve. For example, the results of the work of stipendiary stewards could be made more open.

19. HB suggested that the cost of any auditing body to oversee the regulators could be very high. If it covered not just the tracks but the thousands of trainers it could become a large, expensive bureaucracy.

The work of the group

20. HH proposed a steering group to set the direction for the work of the group. The steering group will work up a paper on "What needs to be regulated and what should be in a Code of Practice". This will be circulated to all and the group will then reconvene to agree it. There will then be a (differently composed) steering group to do the same for the question of "Who should enforce the standards?".

21. The initial steering group will comprise Alistair Mclean/Hazel Bentall, Mr Russell, Chris Laurence and Will Fry.

Next Meeting

22. The next meeting to agree the work of the steering group will be at 2:30pm on Monday 8 August in room LG04 of 1a Page Street, London.