



Ban Greyhound Racing

The Animal Justice Party Aotearoa NZ (AJP) is opposed to greyhound racing and is committed to an immediate and complete ban on greyhound racing, reflecting our commitment to eliminate the use of animals in “sport and entertainment”.



Greyhound racing involves greyhounds chasing a motorised lure around or along a specialised track while spectators place bets on particular dogs to win. The inherently risky nature of racing, coupled with the industry’s dependency on over-breeding and gambling revenue, has led to a situation where the welfare of racing greyhounds is compromised. This has been recognised across the world as greyhound racing remains legal in only a small number of countries.

We do not believe that the greyhound racing industry can be safely regulated for the animals. We also acknowledge the negative impacts of gambling on human mental health, domestic relationships, and financial stability. Over the past decade, three reviews have shed light on concerning practices within the greyhound racing industry in New Zealand, following which the industry has lost its social licence.

AJP advocates for non-violent, community-friendly entertainment that aligns with society’s concerns and ethical and moral principles and does not exploit and undermine animals’ well being.

Key Objectives

- 1 Ban all forms of Greyhound racing in Aotearoa NZ.

Interim measures, while we work towards the ban, include:

- 2 Promote transparency and accountability in relation to deaths and injuries of all racing greyhounds both on and off the track.
- 3 Recommend immediate restrictions to curb the breeding of greyhounds.
- 4 Call for a reduction on the number of greyhounds one racing kennel is permitted to own.
- 5 Support the SPCA’s ‘Good Life’ Recommendation¹
- 6 Reallocate government funding and subsidies to transition those employed by the industry into nonexploitative jobs and careers.

Background

In 1868, the first hares were brought to New Zealand and released around the country as hunting quarry. Their prolific breeding led them to be viewed as a “pest” by farmers who began importing British greyhounds to help control them. Coursing, or the pursuit of “game” by dogs, became competitive between farms and over time developed into the greyhound racing we know today.

Animal Welfare Act

Section 10 of the Animal Welfare Act² requires dog owners to ensure that their dog's physical health, and behavioural needs are met. Section 28A of the Act³ includes protecting animals from significant injury, prohibiting the reckless ill-treatment of dogs so that they are seriously injured or impaired, permanently disabled, or they die or need to be put down. However, with 40% of greyhounds raced in the 2022/23 season suffering one or more injuries on the track,⁴ it is clear that greyhound racing is not compatible with Section 10 or 28A of the Animal Welfare Act.

Three Investigations into the Industry since 2013

The Greyhound Protection League⁵ began campaigning against greyhound racing around 2010. In particular they were concerned by the number of dogs which were euthanised and injured, or who 'went missing', as well as general welfare concerns and poor record keeping. As a result, Greyhound Racing New Zealand (GRNZ) commissioned a review from WHK New Zealand Audit and Assurance in 2013 (known as the WHK Report).⁶

This was followed by the Hansen Review,⁷ commissioned by the New Zealand Racing Board in 2017, which identified a number of the WHK recommendations had not been implemented, and made 20 recommendations.

In 2021, the Minister for Racing commissioned a further review after it was determined that GRNZ had not fully implemented recommendations from the two previous reviews. Grant Robertson stated: "I have informed Greyhound Racing NZ that I am not satisfied the recommendations are being implemented in a way that is improving animal welfare, and with their failure to provide sufficient information on changes they are making."⁸ As a result of this review,⁹ known as the Robertson Review, the industry was 'put on notice'.¹⁰

Each review has concluded that improvements needed to be made. The Robertson Review stated that a number of issues needed to be resolved for the greyhound racing industry's social licence to continue.¹¹ The Racing Minister requested further information which was received in March 2023.¹² As of mid-2024 the issues outlined in the Robertson Review have not been resolved, and the industry remains on notice.

It should be acknowledged that GRNZ has made improvements, including the implementation of its Rehabilitation to Rehoming Policy,¹³ But this is the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff; the sheer amount of ongoing injuries, as evidenced in the online Steward's Reports published after every race, example,¹⁴ and the online tally by SAFE,¹⁵ are proof that this Industry cannot be made safe for dogs. With the building of the new Whanganui Straight Track, that has not at the time of writing been officially opened, it is hoped that the number of injuries will decrease. However, the nature of greyhound racing ensures that injuries will continue to occur, and that is unacceptable. There is no safe way to conduct greyhound racing for dogs.

Breeding of Greyhounds

Greyhounds are bred specifically to race. The Robertson Review¹⁶ includes a recommendation to avoid over breeding. The report states: "It is clear there are a handful of owners and trainers who dominate the greyhound racing scene. A brief look at race results prove the scale at which a single kennel can produce racing greyhounds, often having multiple dogs bred and trained by the same person in one race. Serious disquiet has been raised as to the extent to which animal welfare can be fully appreciated and applied on a large-scale operation."

Wastage

The greyhound industry depends on "wastage", the deliberate over-breeding of dogs to ensure that a proportion will run fast enough to be commercially successful.¹⁷ Many more greyhound puppies are bred every year than will ever race; many do not even get to the point of being given a name¹⁸ and a number will die before¹⁹ they make it to the track.

Housing for Greyhounds

In his Submission to the Greyhound Racing Select Committee, Aaron Cross of The Greyhound Protection League of New Zealand (GPLNZ) stated that some kennels are too cold in winter, some are derelict, and do not hold the appropriate building consents.²⁰ Equally, the Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) and Save Animals from Exploitation (SAFE) advise that kennels are too small, with a lack of appropriate bedding and enrichment opportunities.^{21, 22}

Harm On Track

Greyhound racing is a high speed, full body contact "sport". The tight turns and 60 kph speeds make dog crashes inevitable.²³ The results are a range of lacerations, joint, bone and muscle injuries, most commonly hock (or ankle) injuries, and these can lead to euthanasia.^{24, 25}

In 2020-2021 five greyhounds were euthanised in just three weeks at Hatrick Racing Track (Whanganui).²⁶ In March 2024 three dogs were euthanised in just one week, followed eight weeks later by another death when a dog collapsed and died after his race at Whanganui.²⁷ Many more dogs had T1 (most serious) and T2 (less serious) injuries.²⁸ The continuing prevalence of serious injuries indicates that they are inherent to, and permanent risks of, greyhound racing.

The total euthanasia and injury rates are also probably much higher than available statistics show, as dogs with serious injuries can be euthanised later on if necessary or to make the statistics look better.²⁹ Injuries such as stress fractures may make the dog vulnerable to further injuries later in life.

Euthanasia

Euthanasia is a term that is often mis-used to legitimise killing,³⁰ meaning that “unnecessary” euthanasia may occur under the banner of behavioural issues or for treatable illness or injury.³¹ Additionally, a potential causal link between poor racing performance and euthanasia has also been identified.³²

The 2021 Robertson Review recommended changes to euthanasia practice and highlighted the frequent use of the ‘no reason given’ justification for euthanasia.³³ Between the 2017/18 birth season to 2022/23 425 dogs were euthanised with further euthanasias under investigation.³⁴

Banned Substances

Recent cases^{35,36} show that there is ongoing use of banned substances, in particular methamphetamine. GRNZ maintain they are introduced accidentally, but accidental or intentionally, they demonstrate that the welfare of dogs in the Industry is not being adequately protected.

Health and Behavioural Problems in Rehomed Greyhounds

Dogs that are rehomed often have poor dental hygiene, in part due to having a genetic predisposition to periodontitis,³⁷ along with poor diet and biting at kennel wire, they also have mental and physical injuries, and a high “prey drive”.³⁸ Some may also suffer from blindness due to poor de-worming treatment.³⁹ Race training causes a number of behavioural issues for rehomed greyhounds⁴⁰ that will have to be overcome if they are going to become a family pet.⁴¹

Gambling

Greyhound racing also adds to the many opportunities already available for problem gambling to increase in this country. About one in five people in New Zealand experiences harm in their lifetime due to their own or someone else’s gambling.⁴² From a public health perspective, gambling is a social, economic and health issue. Looking at greyhound racing solely through this lens, it’s clear it’s a bad bet.⁴³

Non-Governmental Organisations agree Greyhound Racing should be banned

Animal Welfare Organisations have made repeated calls for an end to greyhound racing in New Zealand, most recently in March 2024, after there were three greyhound racing deaths in just one week.⁴⁴ They are not confident that there is evidence of meaningful improvement across the key areas highlighted by the various reviews.

The SPCA is also calling for an end to greyhound racing in New Zealand,⁴⁵ one of only six countries in the world which still allow it. (The others being United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, United States of America and Mexico). The SPCA acknowledges that while euthanasia numbers have come down in recent years,

serious injury rates have actually increased, and there are many heartbreaking stories of dogs suffering with injuries.⁴⁶

Prior to being elected in 2023, Prime Minister Christopher Luxon stated he believed greyhound racing should be banned.⁴⁷ In March 2024, Labour’s Animal Welfare spokesperson Rachel Boyack called for him to follow through on this and offered bipartisan support to enact it.⁴⁸

The Industry has lost its social licence

While the AJPNZ acknowledges the continued efforts of Greyhound Racing to improve dogs’ welfare⁴⁹ the key issues of repeated injuries, many serious, to dogs on the track cannot be sufficiently fixed. With 60% of New Zealanders wanting commercial greyhound racing banned⁵⁰ and the Labour opposition calling for it to end⁵¹ it is clear that greyhound racing has lost its social licence.⁵² As the SPCA state: “... this industry cannot meet its animal welfare obligations and is no longer acceptable to New Zealand society”.⁵³

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