

Briefing document

Ending greyhound racing in Wales - July 2024

Summary

- The RSPCA has significant welfare concerns for racing greyhounds throughout their lives, including when their racing careers end
- We are working with a number of charities, as part of the Cut the Chase coalition comprising Blue Cross, Dogs Trust, Hope Rescue and Greyhound Rescue Wales, to call for a phased end to greyhound racing as soon as possible in Wales - and across the UK
- As it stands, Wales remains one of only 10 countries in the world where commercial greyhound racing still takes place, along with all other UK nations
- The newest data from the Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB) demonstrates that the number of racing greyhound deaths increased in 2023 for the first time since records began - with the number of fatalities up by 47% in comparison to the previous year
- Regulation is not the solution to greyhound racing. It does not solve the issue at the heart of the industry and cannot protect dogs from the inherent risk of injury and death associated with racing
- With the Welsh Government having included a question around the future of greyhound racing in its recent consultation on the licensing of animal welfare establishments, activities and exhibits, it is hoped that an end to greyhound racing in Wales will be announced later this year
- We are committed to working with decision makers to safeguard the health and welfare of the dogs involved if racing is brought to an end in Wales

Background

The Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB) - the self-regulating organisation responsible for regulating the welfare and care of racing greyhounds - regulates 20 tracks, including the Valley Greyhounds Stadium in Ystrad Mynach.

The RSPCA has long engaged with the industry to try and secure improvements to the welfare of racing greyhounds. While this has led to some changes, we believe there are still significant welfare issues for racing greyhounds which have not been - and cannot be - resolved. The regulated sector's own figures show that between 2018 and 2023, 2,751 greyhounds died or were put to sleep for reasons other than natural causes or illness.

Meanwhile, more than 26,500 injuries were recorded from greyhound racing over the same time period¹.

Blue Cross, Dogs Trust and RSPCA conducted internal policy reviews on the welfare of racing greyhounds in 2022. As a result of these reviews, the three organisations announced new policies calling for a phased end to greyhound racing in Wales to put a stop to the unnecessary and completely preventable deaths of countless dogs every year. With only one remaining track here, we believe that Wales can lead the way on this issue and bring an end to greyhound racing.

Concerns associated with the racing industry

There are significant issues associated with the industry which detrimentally affect welfare including:

- **An inherent risk of injury and death.** Greyhound racing is dangerous for the dogs involved. Running at speed around oval tracks causes significant injury to many dogs, and in some cases the injuries are so severe that euthanasia is necessary. Until 2023, the Valley Greyhound Stadium in Ystrad Mynach was an independent track, not governed by GBGB. Therefore, any dogs that have died or were injured at that track before last summer are not included in previous figures. However, between 2018 and 2021, Hope Rescue's Amazing Greys project helped over 200 racing greyhounds whose owners and/or trainers had links with the Valley racetrack. Of these dogs, 40 endured serious, career-ending injuries such as severe fractures that resulted in significant veterinary treatment, orthopaedic repair and even amputation.
- **A myriad of welfare issues reported to affect greyhounds at every stage of their life cycle.** To give some examples, these include the use of artificial insemination for breeding and the inadequate socialisation and habituation of puppies, along with the tattooing of puppies for identification during rearing. Other issues include poor environments during schooling, trialling and racing, the use of oestrus suppressants to enable racing, inappropriate transportation at all stages, the presence of dental disease and the impacts of extreme weather.
- **No consistent and secure funding source available for racing greyhounds.** Unlike the horse racing industry, there is no statutory levy in place for greyhound racing which means that the industry is in a very precarious situation. The ability for every greyhound to be afforded a good life appears unlikely without the necessary funding provided by a statutory levy. However, not only does the industry need considerable finances to continue as it is, but a complete overhaul is necessary so that the activity is compatible with good welfare. We have long engaged with the industry to try and secure improvements, however, we believe there are still significant welfare issues for racing greyhounds which cannot be resolved.
- **A lack of track specific data.** This includes the track in Wales as even those tracks governed by GBGB do not publicly display or release injury data by racetrack, the outcomes of licensing inspections or residential kennel audits. Additionally, no evidence is provided to demonstrate how such information is collated and informs industry development to ensure meaningful changes are made.

¹ Data taken from GBGB's Injury and Retirement Data: <https://www.gbgb.org.uk/welfare-care/injury-and-retirement-data/>

Further issues include missing puppies, often referred to by the sector as the "wastage" between births and racing registrations, as well as the longevity of dogs involved in the activity. Research undertaken by the RSPCA and Dogs Trust suggests that ninety per cent of greyhounds are no longer racing by five years of age resulting in concerns for the welfare of the dogs once their racing careers come to an end.

Racing greyhounds deaths have increased

The newest data from the Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB)² demonstrates that 359 dogs died for reasons other than terminal illness or natural causes in the UK last year in comparison to 244 in 2022 - marking an increase of 47%. While 109 of these deaths occurred at GBGB race tracks, significantly more dogs were euthanised separately. The number of dogs who were put to sleep on veterinary advice away from the racetrack more than doubled in 2023 - up from 43 in 2022 (0.8% of all runs) to 101 (1.7% against all runs). The number of dogs designated unsuitable for rehoming also doubled from 20 (0.4%) in 2022 to 49 (0.8%) last year, while for the first time since 2018, some dogs (6) were put down because no suitable home could be found for them.

Although the number of dogs being handed over to rescues at the end of their racing careers declined in 2023, GBGB's new data demonstrates that more than half of retired racers (55.6 percent) are handed over to charities upon retirement, with this equating to thousands of dogs. This year's data also shows a significant increase in the number of greyhounds that remained with their owner or trainer following retirement, with this relevant to 1,499 dogs. With the number of such cases having doubled in the last year, we are highly concerned that this may result in dogs being kept or kennelled in unsuitable conditions for the rest of their non-racing lives. GBGB states that a 'retained' racing greyhound remains with their trainer or owner and are looked after by them until a "forever home can be found or a place in a homing centre becomes available."³ However, these greyhounds are no longer registered with GBGB, therefore lack the traceability of registered dogs. Full transparency is essential to ensure oversight of the fate of every greyhound retiring from the sport.

GBGB's newest statistics are particularly noteworthy as it marks the first publication of its kind since the Valley Greyhound Stadium in Ystrad Mynach came under the regulation of GBGB last summer. Unfortunately, the data relevant to individual tracks is not routinely published, thus preventing us from gaining a full insight into the current situation in Wales.

Problems with regulation

The licensing of greyhound racing - by GBGB or otherwise - is not the answer as it does not solve the issue at the heart of the industry and cannot protect dogs from the inherent risk of racing. Concurrently, the regulated sector's own figures show that 2,751 greyhounds died or were put to sleep and more than 26,500 injuries were recorded from greyhound racing between 2018 and 2023⁴. The regulated sector usually offers £400 to meet the costs of retired greyhounds but in many cases, this is inadequate to cover the real cost of rehabilitating and rehoming a racing greyhound. For example, Dogs Trust data relevant to the

² GBGB, Independently verified track injury and retirement data for 2023, 26th June 2024, [link](#)

³ GBGB, Independently verified track injury and retirement data for 2023, 26th June 2024, [link](#)

⁴ Data taken from GBGB's Injury and Retirement Data: <https://www.gbgb.org.uk/welfare-care/injury-and-retirement-data/>

veterinary costs to treat 14 injured greyhounds between November 2018 and April 2021 shows that veterinary treatment alone ranged from £690 to £4,800 for each dog.

Within the regulated sector, there is a lack of transparency and traceability relating to the number of dogs being born in or imported to the UK, registered, and entering the racing industry each year. Without this information it is challenging to understand the passage of individual greyhounds and their welfare experience. With most dogs bred, reared and educated on private properties outside of the UK, there is little or no visibility of the whole life experience of greyhounds in the UK racing on GBGB tracks. Concerns around traceability and transparency also extend to industry practices, and the enforcement of regulatory standards including the recording of racetrack injuries and checks for banned substances.

Even if each and every racing greyhound in Wales could be assured a good life, there will be many many dogs within the industry for whom this isn't possible. The industry crosses five different nations each with different regulatory provisions and 85% of greyhounds that race in the UK are bred in the Republic of Ireland, therefore the ability to protect dogs from cradle to grave is exceptionally limited.

Bringing forth a phased end to greyhound racing

We have been working for a number of years to improve the welfare of racing greyhounds in Wales. In 2003, a report was produced detailing the issues affecting racing greyhounds⁵ with a further report published in 2007 proposing regulation and a code of practice as solutions⁶. In 2019, the Animal Welfare Network Wales developed a voluntary code of practice⁷ for the industry with the purpose of setting out the minimum standard of care the law requires as well as encouraging the adoption of higher standards. This code has not been adopted by the industry although it has previously been used by animal welfare officers to audit the Valley race track's compliance with statutory legislation.

We strongly believe that it is time to bring forth an end to greyhound racing. The RSPCA wants to see an end to greyhound racing announced as soon as possible in Wales and across the UK. We are confident that phasing out greyhound racing in the UK is feasible within five years to allow the racing industry and animal welfare organisations to carefully plan and coordinate the care of the many dogs affected. As Wales currently only has one track, it is expected that the phase-out period needed could be significantly shorter.

Concerns have been raised about the impact of an end to racing on the charity sector. However, the racing industry is already heavily reliant on the rehoming sector to rehome the vast majority of their dogs, as demonstrated by GBGB's most recent data. As such, we have committed to working with other animal welfare organisations to safeguard the health and welfare of the dogs involved if racing is brought to an end in Wales and look forward to working with decision makers of all levels to make this a reality.

⁵ [The fate of racing greyhounds and lurchers in Wales](#). All Party Group for Animal Welfare. National Assembly for Wales. 2003.

⁶ [A Better Bet for Greyhounds. A submission to the Welsh Assembly Government in view of proposals to introduce Regulations and a Code of Practice for greyhounds racing in Wales](#). The Greyhound Forum for Wales. November 2007.

⁷ [Voluntary Code of Practice: The Welfare of Racing Greyhounds \(Wales\)](#). 2019.