



National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee

18th December 2017

Hon Meka Whaitiri
Associate Minister of Agriculture
Parliament Buildings
Wellington 6140

Dear Minister Whaitiri,

NAWAC advice on the Hon Rod Hansen Report on Greyhound Racing

On the 15th December the New Zealand Racing Board (NZRB) provided the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC) with a copy of an inquiry report undertaken by Hon Rod Hansen CNZM QC on behalf of the NZRB. Report title: Report to New Zealand Racing Board on Welfare Issues affecting Greyhound Racing in New Zealand.

Below I have provided some background on NAWAC's involvement in monitoring the welfare concerns around greyhound racing, in addition to NAWAC's comments on the recommendations within the report.

Background

1. In 2013, following a campaign from the Greyhound Protection League, the New Zealand Greyhound Racing Association (NZGRA) commissioned an independent review into the welfare of racing greyhounds and how the industry could improve its welfare practices. The report was prepared by WHK New Zealand Audit and Assurance and presented 36 recommendations to ensure the welfare of racing greyhounds in New Zealand. These covered issues such as:

- a lack of enforcement and awareness of welfare standards, leading to a culture of noncompliance;
- inadequate tracking and reporting of the lifecycle of greyhounds;

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- the issue of the euthanasia of, and transparency around the euthanasia of, healthy greyhounds; and,
 - track safety and injuries.
2. One outcome of the review was the establishment of an independent animal welfare committee, integrated within the industry's governance structure to guide and maintain independent oversight of NZGRA's animal welfare obligations.
 3. Since the review, the NZRB have released two reports (2014 and 2016), reviewing progress against the 36 recommendations. Minister Guy asked NAWAC to review the findings of the reports both times and provide subsequent advice.
 4. In their second, most recent, report to the Minister, NAWAC concluded that industry have made a strong commitment to resolving welfare issues and a large amount of progress has been made. However, it was imperative that NZGRA continues to develop and adequately resource and support their animal welfare capabilities. As noted in previous NAWAC advice, over population and euthanasia rates were indicated as the greatest remaining concerns. Five recommendations were put forward by NAWAC and one of these recommendations also requested that a NAWAC representative sit on the welfare committee as an observer in order to follow developments. This was agreed and a representative has attended NZGRA welfare committee meetings as an observer since October 2016.
 5. On the 22 November 2016, the NZRB announced a new inquiry to review the systems and processes relating to the breeding, racing and life cycle tracking of Greyhounds bred in New Zealand and imported into New Zealand, as well as best practice to be followed in the management of the retirement of Greyhounds. The inquiry has been undertaken by retired High Court Judge Rod Hansen QC. NAWAC's comments on the recommendations of this report follow.

Comment on Report Recommendations

1. NAWAC is supportive of all of the recommendations and agrees that they would further advance the welfare of greyhounds. The points below are made to highlight those areas where NAWAC has identified specific areas of emphasis.
2. In its last letter to Minister Guy, NAWAC outlined a concern around the number of dogs that are disposed of from the greyhound racing industry. In addition to continued work on tracking greyhounds, modelling population dynamics, and increasing racing opportunities, NAWAC considers that it is imperative that initiatives to improve the

chances of dogs being successfully re-homed following their racing careers commence as soon as possible.

3. Through its role as an observer on the greyhound welfare committee, NAWAC is aware of the efforts of the committee to finalise the industry's health and welfare standards, and is supportive of these endeavours. NAWAC considers it critical that the standards around socialisation and habituation of greyhounds are both included and that sufficient time is taken to ensure that these are correct. The way in which greyhounds are raised, socialised and used will impact upon their suitability for rehoming after their racing careers have ended. However, standards alone are insufficient. Alongside standards, the industry must implement educational approaches and materials to ensure that everyone involved understands their obligations, standards are met, and the intended outcomes are achieved. NAWAC would encourage this work to be given priority action in early 2018.
4. NAWAC remains aware of the risk of saturation in the demand for rehoming greyhounds. A number of initiatives have commenced with the aim of decreasing the number of excess dogs within the industry, including: the use of population modelling to predict numbers of dogs; increasing racing opportunities for all dogs; and, expanding rehoming options. NAWAC considers it imperative that a balanced population is achieved; with the number of dogs bred, or imported, not exceeding the requirements of the industry. Current rehoming options are likely to be insufficient and a greater focus on this area as a whole is needed.
5. The Hansen report noted gaps in knowledge of where dogs are located throughout their lifecycles. Within previous advice to the Minister, NAWAC stressed the importance of tracking all greyhounds from birth until point of de-registration. NAWAC supports all initiatives needed to ensure this is carried out, including as examples: the use of a separate register of breeding bitches; audits of greyhounds registered as privately rehomed to verify their whereabouts; a census and annual inspection of all kennels used for breeding, rearing and training greyhounds for racing; and, tighter controls around deregistration and euthanasia as indicated in the recommendations. Notwithstanding that NAWAC appreciates that NZGRA obligations are to animals that are racing or intended to race, NAWAC would like a compulsory death certification process for all greyhounds that have been in the registration system so that post-career information can also be gathered accurately and transparently.
6. NAWAC supports the recommendation that a rule change is undertaken to require approval from NZGRA before a dog is euthanised, including an assessment of whether the animal is suitable for rehoming. However, NAWAC would like it noted that this should not be pursued to the detriment of the dogs welfare, including where an animal needs to be euthanised in an emergency.

7. NAWAC has previously raised concerns over transparency of, and clarity within, data reporting. In its current form the NZGRA database is inadequate and NAWAC considers that improvements must be made. On this matter NAWAC is supportive of all recommendations in the report and will continue to monitor progress.
8. NZGRA have made steps to improve track safety. However, injury rate at the first turn remains an issue. The recommendation to continue to focus on a reduction in this area remains pertinent and a programme of work and efforts to improve safety and lower injury rate must be continued. NAWAC notes that whilst a record of injuries to greyhounds that occur or are detected outside the racetrack is important, it will always be based on self-report and so should be interpreted in this light.
9. NAWAC also notes their support for specific initiatives recommended in the report, including:
 - a. A ban of ear branding for identification purposes. NAWAC is unclear as to if the application of local anaesthetic would be an appropriate alternative that would improve welfare of the dogs during identification. NAWAC would need to look into the practicalities around this if this course of action were to be pursued.
 - b. Requiring the desexing of greyhounds as a condition of deregistration.
 - c. Evidence of the dogs having being vaccinated upon registration, and evidence of annual vaccinations thereafter.

Should you wish to discuss this or any other issue you can reach me by phone on s 9(2)(a)

Sincerely



Gwyneth Verkerk
Chair, National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee