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Rural Affairs and Islands Committee

Interim report on petition PE1758: End greyhound racing in Scotland



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Rural Affairs and Islands Committee

To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands, with the exception of matters relating to land reform, natural resources and peatland, Scottish Land Commission, Crown Estate Scotland, and Royal Botanic Garden.



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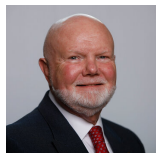
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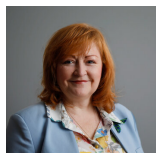
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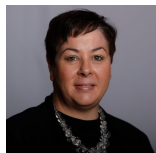
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Introduction


1. [Petition PE1758: End greyhound racing in Scotland](#) was submitted by Gill Docherty on behalf of Scotland Against Greyhound Exploitation on 23 October 2019. The petition “calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to put an end to greyhound racing in Scotland”. As of 14 November 2024, the petition had received 29,211 signatures.
2. The petition was initially considered by the Public Petitions Committee and then the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (ECCLR) Committee in session 5. The ECCLR Committee referred the petition on to its successor committee in its legacy report.

Background

3. There are currently 21 dog racing tracks in Great Britain, 20 of which are registered and licensed by the Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB). At present, the only greyhound track currently operating in Scotland is Thornton Greyhounds, an independent track in Fife. A former GBGB-regulated track at Shawfield Greyhound Stadium, South Lanarkshire, closed in March 2020, following the suspension of racing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is not thought that there are any other independent tracks operating elsewhere in GB.
4. The GBGB is the body with responsibility for the governance, regulation and management of the sport of licensed greyhound racing in England, Scotland and Wales.
5. The GBGB provides rules and regulations on the welfare of greyhounds and facilities at licensed tracks. These include requirements on inspections, that a veterinary surgeon be present at all races, and detailed rules on racing surfaces, traps, fencing, kennels etc. The GBGB rules of racing also state:
 - ” Every person subject to the GBGB Rules of Racing shall have full regard to Greyhound welfare and shall accept the provisions of the Animal Welfare Act 2006.
6. At the time of the Committee's inquiry, there were 27 GBGB-registered greyhound breeders and trainers in Scotland. These breeders and trainers keep their greyhounds in kennels in Scotland and race their dogs on GBGB-registered tracks elsewhere in the UK, usually in the north of England.
7. The GBGB's rules and regulations do not apply to independent greyhound tracks.
8. In England, greyhound racing not regulated by the GBGB must be licensed by the local authority under the [Welfare of Racing Greyhounds Regulations 2010](#), which cover conditions at the racing track only. Via licence conditions, the Regulations introduced minimum standards on vet presence, levels of kennelling at tracks, microchipping and recording of dogs raced and injuries.
9. In Scotland, greyhounds, like all dogs, are covered by the general protections of the [Animal Health and Welfare \(Scotland\) Act 2006](#) (the 2006 Act), but there is no specific legislation governing the use of dogs in racing in Scotland. Thornton is, therefore, the only greyhound racing track in Great Britain not subject to regulation either by a local authority or industry body.
10. Further background information on greyhound racing in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK, and the legislation in place that is relevant to the welfare of greyhounds, is available in [the report of the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission \(SAWC\) to the Committee on the welfare of greyhounds used for racing in Scotland](#).

Consideration by the Committee

11. The Committee began its consideration of the petition by [taking evidence from the petitioner on 20 April 2022](#). In their evidence, the petitioner raised the following concerns about the welfare of greyhounds used for racing in Scotland:
 - the breeding and traceability of greyhounds, particularly those bred in Ireland;
 - the risk of injury and death when racing;
 - a lack of regulation or veterinary care at the independent track at Thornton;
 - the use of performance-enhancing drugs and other banned substances;
 - the overall quality of life of greyhounds; and
 - the ineffectiveness of current legislation, specifically the 2006 Act.
12. The petitioner set out the purpose of their petition:

 We are looking for equality for greyhounds—for them to be treated the same as the other animals that are covered by the current legislation. We argue that the current legislation is not working, given what we see happening on the tracks. If it was working, there would not be injuries and deaths; we think that the injuries and deaths are not acceptable. That is the bottom line.
13. The Committee then wrote to the SAWC for its views on the issues raised by the petitioner and the welfare of greyhounds used for racing in Scotland. On 28 February 2023, the Committee received [the SAWC's report on the welfare of greyhounds used for racing in Scotland](#).
14. The SAWC concluded its report with the following recommendations:

” Although there are some positive welfare aspects of racing for dogs, where gambling and other commercial activities are present, the risks of poor welfare outweigh the likely positive aspects. Thus, on average, a dog bred for racing in Scotland currently has poorer welfare than the average of other dogs in the population.

Independent tracks, although they may provide some social benefit, do impose some specific risks on dog welfare through the lack of immediate veterinary care to injured dogs and general veterinary oversight of dog welfare. We consider that a veterinarian **must** always be present when dogs are racing to minimise unnecessary suffering in the event of an injury and should have the power to prevent a dog racing if deemed unfit. The presence of a veterinarian also ensures that there is independent oversight of dog welfare, and we further recommend that this function includes the collection of independent data on injuries and fatalities at stadia. We suggest reviewing these metrics, and whether racing should continue, within the next 3-5 years, to provide the independent evidence that is currently lacking on the impact of racing on dog welfare.

We recommend that no further new greyhound tracks are permitted in Scotland. We are not convinced that any of the current proposed measures can safeguard greyhound welfare appropriately and believe that this will help to reduce suffering in Scotland.

Even if there were no racing opportunities available in Scotland, it would remain possible to own, breed, train, and kennel racing greyhounds in the country, notwithstanding that the dogs would have to be taken elsewhere to race. As greyhounds may spend a large amount of their racing lives in kennels, and consistent with our view that independent oversight and regulation is required when there is potential commercial gain, we consider that a scheme independent of GBGB is required to ensure the welfare of these animals, possibly through Local Authority regulation or under the auspices of the new Scottish Veterinary Service.

15. Following consideration of the SAWC's report, the Committee agreed to undertake an inquiry into the welfare of greyhounds used for racing in Scotland, to consider the welfare of greyhounds, the aims of the petition, and the SAWC's recommendations.
16. The Committee ran a call for views between 17 March and 7 April 2023. It received 1,314 responses of which 32 were from organisations and 1,284 from individuals. A [summary of the responses to the call for views](#) is published on the Committee's webpages, and [the responses can be read in full on the Parliament website](#).
17. The Committee then took [evidence from the SAWC on 29 March 2023](#), [evidence from the GBGB and the owner of the independent track at Thornton on 26 April 2023](#), [evidence from animal welfare charities on 3 May 2023](#), [evidence from GBGB-registered breeders and trainers on 20 March 2024](#), and [evidence from the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity on 22 May 2024](#).
18. All information relating to the Committee's evidence taking is available on the [Committee's web pages](#) and the Committee thanks everyone who took the time to

respond to the call for views or to give evidence during the inquiry.

Proposal for a member's bill

19. On 7 February 2024, Mark Ruskell MSP lodged a draft [proposal for a Prohibition of Greyhound Racing \(Scotland\) Bill](#). The proposal states the bill would “promote the welfare of greyhounds by introducing an offence of permitting a greyhound to race at racetracks in Scotland”. Mark Ruskell subsequently secured the right to introduce a member's bill. The Committee expects the bill to be introduced in the first half of 2025 and that it will be referred to the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee as lead committee at stage 1.

20. **In advance of its likely designation as lead committee of Mark Ruskell's member's bill at stage 1, the Committee agrees it would be inappropriate to take a view on the petition. The Committee also agrees, however, to publish this interim report to set out the evidence taken over the course of the Committee's inquiry. This report also sets out the Committee's conclusions and recommendations relating to the other aspects of the petition inquiry which the Committee does not anticipate will be part of the proposed member's bill.**

The Scottish Government's position

21. Following the evidence session with the petitioner, the Committee wrote to the then Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands seeking the Scottish Government's view on whether the existent legislation, in particular the 2006 Act, is effective in protecting the welfare of greyhounds used for racing. [The Cabinet Secretary responded on 16 May 2022](#), stating:

” the Scottish Government considers that the provisions of the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006, as amended, are sufficient to ensure that action can be taken if the welfare of greyhounds, whether still racing or retired, is not being met.

22. In July 2023, the Scottish Government [published a consultation on licensing of activities involving animals](#). The consultation sought views on (amongst other things) proposals to licence greyhound racing in Scotland and to replace existing legislation covering animal boarding (the Animal Boarding Establishments Act 1970) with updated licensing requirements (it is not clear if the intention is for kennels for racing dogs to be separately licensed under these proposals). An [analysis of consultation responses was published on 16 February 2024](#). On 11 September 2024, a Scottish Government official informed the Committee that the Scottish Government is taking a staggered approach to implementing the proposals in the consultation, beginning with the licensing of canine fertility businesses “as the first stage”.

23. In evidence to the Committee, the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity told the Committee that the Scottish Government “is not persuaded of the need to ban greyhound racing in Scotland” on the basis that it is “not convinced that such a ban is a proportionate and fair response to the animal welfare concerns arising from the practice”.

24. The Minister went on to say that the Scottish Government is considering the option of a licensing scheme for greyhound racing. He said such a scheme could provide external oversight of greyhound racing at independent tracks and that it would facilitate the collection of data on the incidence of injuries which, in turn, could inform future decisions on the proportionality of a prohibition:

” What licensing brings is a level of external scrutiny, which will provide data that could potentially lead to what you are looking for, which is a ban, if it were found that the proportionality of those injuries showed that there was an on-going problem. If you take a licence away from somebody and they can no longer race, that is effectively a ban.

The licence would be an additional measure of making sure that every welfare requirement was put in place to make this as safe a sport as possible for the people who are involved in it and for the dogs.

25. At a further evidence session on 11 September 2024, the Minister stated that the Scottish Government is “still looking at all our options” but added that, “I do not think that we will be pursuing a licensing scheme until we see how that [member's] bill progresses through the Parliament”.

26. **The Committee notes the Scottish Government's view that the 2006 Act, as amended, is sufficient to protect the welfare of greyhounds, whether during their racing years or when retired, and that it is not currently convinced a ban on greyhound racing would be proportionate to the concerns raised in the petition.**
27. **The Committee also notes the Scottish Government intends to wait for parliamentary scrutiny of the proposed member's bill to conclude before taking a decision, including on whether to pursue a licensing scheme for greyhound tracks. Noting this, the Committee is content to wait for parliamentary scrutiny of the bill to be concluded before the Scottish Government responds to this report.**

Issues raised during the Committee's inquiry in relation to the petition and greyhound racing

28. The Committee's inquiry considered the welfare of greyhounds bred for racing across their life, from breeding and early life through their racing years and retirement. Accordingly, this report follows this approach.

Breeding and early life

Greyhounds bred for racing

29. Concerns were raised with the Committee by the petitioner and other stakeholders regarding the practices and welfare conditions related to the breeding and traceability of greyhounds.
30. The evidence presented to the Committee, much of which was anecdotal due to a lack of data, indicated that the majority of greyhounds used for racing in Scotland are sourced from the island of Ireland. The SAWC told the Committee that “87 or 88 per cent of greyhounds in the UK are bred in Ireland” and referenced statistics produced by the GBGB and registrations of greyhounds by the Irish Coursing Club. Based on figures produced by the GBGB and the work of some charities, the SAWC stated that imported greyhounds “are bred and live in Ireland until they are six months old”.
31. Regarding the number of greyhounds sourced in Ireland for use in racing in Scotland, the SAWC stated that there is “no data collection specifically for dogs arriving in Scotland”. Specifically in relation to the independent track at Thornton, the SAWC noted that no data is available on the number of dogs sourced in Ireland and being used for racing at that track and neither is there is a requirement for the track to collect or produce such data. However, the SAWC referenced anecdotal evidence collected during its visit to the Thornton track and which indicated that greyhounds used for racing at Thornton were sourced from Ireland: “Everybody we spoke to at the track who had a dog had acquired the dog from Ireland. We did not meet anybody who had a Scotland-bred dog or even a Britain-bred dog.”
32. The experience of the two GBGB-registered greyhound trainers based in Scotland was less clear. One told the Committee that, “Most of my dogs, other than my home-bred ones, are sourced from Ireland” while another stated that four of his 40 greyhounds were purchased from breeders in Ireland.

Traceability of greyhounds

33. The SAWC and many animal welfare organisations highlighted concerns over the traceability of dogs in their early life and, in particular, a discrepancy between the number of dogs bred and registered in Ireland and the number that then race in Ireland and the UK. The RSPCA felt that “there are huge issues relating to the

visibility of greyhounds once they have been bred and reared”.

34. The Committee heard about “a gap” between the number of greyhounds bred and registered in Ireland and the number that then race in Ireland and the UK. The SAWC posited that “some of those dogs might simply not have become racing dogs but, from the data, there are concerns about the number of puppies that disappear”. Dogs Trust agreed with this point, stating that:
- ” We know that both Irish and British registers show that at least 10 per cent of greyhounds whelped are unaccounted for after the first year, so we have a huge concern about the wastage in the industry and the number of dogs that are simply unaccounted for.
35. The GBGB told the Committee that the GBGB wishes to promote the breeding of greyhounds within Great Britain so that the GBGB may have greater oversight of the practice, “whereas that is not so much the case when it is in Ireland”, as well as to avoid the transportation of dogs from Ireland. The GBGB told members that, “from a welfare point of view, we would prefer that they were bred and stayed in the same country”. To achieve this, the GBGB explained that it was working alongside the Kennel Club to develop “a bespoke assured breeders programme so that we can concentrate on welfare standards around breeding” and which “will then form the basis for our collaborating with Irish counterparts in making sure that standards are raised internationally”. The suggestion of such an assured breeders’ programme was welcomed by the GBGB-registered trainers who gave evidence to the Committee.
36. However, some animal welfare charities were sceptical about the GBGB's ability to influence the welfare standards around breeding in Ireland. The RSPCA stated that, whereas the GBGB’s welfare strategy sets out its intention to work with Irish authorities on this issue, “there is no guarantee that those bodies will be able to provide that assurance and that the standard of welfare that we want to see in the Republic of Ireland will be achieved”.
37. Dogs Trust suggested that traceability would be improved through a UK-wide and Republic of Ireland-compatible microchip identification system and database. A GBGB-registered trainer told the Committee that, “When we get dogs from Ireland, they are already microchipped” and are then subsequently registered with the GBGB.
38. Noting the significant gaps in the evidence heard about the early life of greyhounds in Ireland and their transport to Scotland, [the Committee wrote to Greyhound Racing Ireland](#) for information on the number of greyhounds bred in Ireland and then exported to Great Britain, the conditions and regulations under which breeding takes place, and whether provisions are in place for the traceability of dogs. Greyhound Racing Ireland responded by way of providing links to the websites of [Greyhound Racing Ireland](#) and the [Irish Retired Greyhound Trust](#).
39. Regarding improving the traceability of greyhounds, the Minister stated that the Scottish Government is developing “a report” on the microchipping of dogs. Officials advised that the Scottish Government was engaged in a GB-wide working group on improving the microchip system in Great Britain and which “is looking in particular at improving traceability by having the breeder's records permanently associated with the dog's microchip and having a single point of access to the microchip

databases.” Officials added that it may be possible in the longer term to align with European Union proposals for compulsory microchipping of dogs. The Minister stated there is no timescale currently for the report on microchipping.

40. **The Committee notes the concerns raised by the petitioner and other stakeholders about the breeding and traceability of racing greyhounds, particularly of those bred in Ireland and for which little data is available. The Committee also notes the GBGB's aim of promoting the breeding of greyhounds in Great Britain and its intention to collaborate with international counterparts to improve welfare standards and traceability.**
41. **The Committee welcomes the Scottish Government's engagement in a working group to improve access to and the interoperability of the microchip databases in Great Britain, and it refers the Scottish Government to its recommendations on this issue in its stage 1 report on the Welfare of Dogs (Scotland) Bill. The Committee recognises a UK-wide microchipping scheme requires the agreement of all UK administrations but urges the Scottish Government to continue to press all UK administrations to progress with the creation of a scheme with compatibility for dogs bred in the Republic of Ireland. The Committee asks the Scottish Government to keep it updated on its ongoing discussions with the other UK administrations on the progress and timescale in improving the microchip databases.**

Transport of greyhounds from Ireland to Scotland

42. The Committee heard evidence about how greyhounds are moved from the island of Ireland to Scotland. GBGB-registered trainers and the RSPCA both told the Committee that greyhounds sourced from Ireland are purchased through a number of different ways, including online auctions or in person, before being transported to Scotland by ferry and road.
43. The SAWC told the Committee that, in relation to the transport of greyhounds as commercial animals for the purpose of racing, it had concerns about potential gaps in the legislation that relates to the movement of animals more generally:
 - ” Most of our legislation thinks about a dog as a companion animal—a pet—in which case one would assume that the owner is motivated to improve or maintain the welfare of the animal. Our concerns relate to the fact that greyhounds are kept more for a commercial purpose. Large sums of money are exchanged. Our concern is that that opens up the opportunity for exploitation of animals in a way that is less likely when they are companion animals. I am not suggesting that there is no trade in companion animals that are also worth a lot of money about which we would also be concerned. The question is whether the regulation is sufficient for the movement of dogs for racing.
44. The SAWC added that there is a lack of scientific research on the impact of transportation on dogs. The SAWC voiced concerns about the potential for ferry crossings to make animals nauseous and the possibility of insufficient food or water

being provided during long journeys.

45. Asking how GBGB-registered trainers transport their greyhounds from Ireland, the Committee heard from one trainer that he used “a licensed transporter” to bring dogs to Scotland.
46. When asked, the Minister stated that no information about the transportation of greyhounds from Ireland is held by the Scottish Government beyond what was included in the SAWC's report to the Committee.

47. **The Committee notes the concerns raised by animal welfare charities and the SAWC around the welfare conditions for dogs being transported from Ireland to Scotland. The SAWC report expresses its concern that the current lack of regulation "opens up the opportunity for exploitation" and asks "whether the regulation is sufficient for the movement of dogs for racing".**
48. **The Committee agrees that the regulation of the transportation of dogs from Ireland to Great Britain – and the effective enforcement of such regulation – is essential to protect the welfare of greyhounds bred for racing. The Minister told the Committee that the Scottish Government does not hold any information relating to the transport of greyhounds from Ireland other than what is set out in the SAWC report. The Committee asks the Scottish Government to respond to the question posed in the SAWC report and set out how it will address the concerns around the transportation of greyhounds from Ireland to Scotland within its devolved competence.**

Racing years

49. The Committee took evidence on the impact of racing on the welfare of greyhounds at independent and GBGB-regulated tracks, in particular, the extent of injuries and fatalities and the provisions that are in place to mitigate these risks and provide for animal welfare.

Risk of injury and fatality

50. The Committee heard from a range of stakeholders who gave evidence that the injuries greyhounds sustain through racing tend to involve hock, wrist and foot injuries as well as muscular strains and bone fractures. Stakeholders also told the Committee that catastrophic injuries also occur, particularly through collisions between dogs and with the track infrastructure. Further information about injuries is related in the SAWC report to the Committee.
51. The Scottish SPCA told the Committee that, based on GBGB data, there had been 197 recorded injuries and 15 fatalities at the then GBGB-regulated track at Shawfield in Glasgow between 2017 and 2020. Although no GBGB-regulated tracks currently operate in Scotland, the Committee took evidence on the racing conditions at GBGB tracks elsewhere in the UK in recognition that some greyhounds kept in

Scotland are raced at such tracks. At the GBGB-regulated track in Newcastle for example, where some Scottish-based GBGB-registered trainers race their greyhounds, the Committee heard that each meeting “has 12 races on the card, with six dogs in each”.

52. In its report to the Committee, the SAWC assessed the GBGB data on injuries and fatalities at its tracks. The data quoted in the SAWC report indicated that, during 2021 and within a total number of 359,083 dog runs, there were 4,422 injuries and 120 fatalities.ⁱ The SAWC set out how it estimated the incidence of injuries and fatalities in its analysis of the GBGB data:

” GBGB figures are pooled and do not provide stadia-specific evidence for whether participating in some race meets are more hazardous than others. The data are also presented as a proportion of total dog runs and not as a proportion of dogs racing. We are therefore unable to determine accurately the individual risk to each dog of participating in racing, nor to compare these figures to the risk of injury in the companion greyhound population as there is no sensible denominator to allow comparison. However, based on the data that 18,302 dogs were eligible to race in 2021, we estimate that (with the assumption that all dogs eligible to race did race, that all dogs raced an equivalent amount, that each dog would only sustain one injury per year and all dogs are equally at risk of injury or fatality in any given race) that any greyhound taking part in GBGB-regulated racing in 2021 had a 24.1% risk of incurring an injury that year, and a 0.66% risk of dying at the track.

53. In oral evidence, the SAWC explained that, while “it is not easy to interrogate [the data] in the form in which the GBGB has presented it”, it felt that such figures represent “a significant welfare issue and a matter of great concern”. The SAWC told the Committee that, in its view, “[t]he legislation that protects dogs is clearly not protecting racing greyhounds, given their higher rates of fatalities and injuries, compared with other dogs, from racing on the track”.

54. The petitioner and animal welfare charities had raised concerns about the independent scrutiny of GBGB's statistics on injuries and fatalities. The Scottish SPCA stated that it also “found it difficult to interpret the GBGB statistics” and that it had concerns about the self-regulation of the industry:

” there is no independence and nobody scrutinises the figures in an independent capacity. There is no one from the veterinary profession doing independent verification of the statistics.

55. When asked about its published data on injuries and fatalities, the GBGB responded that it “has only just started collating track injury figures and, within that, the fatality figures”. It set out that, between 2018 and 2021, [t]he number of injuries has pretty much remained the same, in terms of the number of runs versus the number of dogs that are running” but that the number of fatalities at tracks had fallen from 242 to 120 in that period. The GBGB stated it is “working, and have already worked, to improve the granularity of the evidence and data that we collect” and that it is “trying to understand what type of injuries occur and what the predisposing factors are that might result in those injuries”. She went on to state

ⁱ The GBGB has [published more recent statistics on injuries and fatalities](#) since the Committee undertook its inquiry.

that, whereas the GBGB has “an absolute responsibility to do everything we can to mitigate the causes of those injuries, so that we are left with only the unavoidable risk”, she felt that there “is not avoidable risk as long as we are constantly trying to undertake that research and to improve practice and policy”.

56. The Committee asked GBGB-registered trainers their view on the incidence of injuries and fatalities. One stated they “see no injuries at the majority of race meetings” and went on to add:
- ” It is true that there are fatalities, but they are at a minimum. We do not go to the track and see multiple injuries every single day that we are there. It would not be a pleasant place for anybody to go if that was the case.
57. In relation to the independent track at Thornton, its owner told the Committee that the track hosts “approximately 40 meetings per year, when, on average 30 greyhounds will race in five or six races”. He also said that there has been no increased usage of the track since the closure of the GBGB-regulated track at Shawfield in 2020.
58. The SAWC stated in its report that, based on the anecdotal information provided by Thornton on the number of races and of “two serious injuries” and one fatality occurring at the track in the year preceding the report, its analysis “suggests a broadly comparable figure” for the rate of injuries and fatalities at Thornton with GBGB tracks. However, in oral evidence, the SAWC felt that “there was insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion on the independent tracks” on the basis that “[t]hey collect no data, and they are not required to present any data”. The Scottish SPCA concurred that it is difficult to establish the incidence of injuries and fatalities at Thornton “because data has not been collected, so we cannot see how many dogs are running, their average age spans or the injury rates”.
59. An argument put forward by several stakeholders, including the petitioner and animal welfare charities, is that racing poses an “inherent risk” to greyhounds regardless of whether it takes place at a GBGB-regulated track or at an independent track for which little or no data is available. Dogs Trust, for example, argued that “the absence of data in itself does not suggest that the risks would be any different when racing on an independent track compared to racing on a GBGB track”. The Scottish SPCA agreed and stated its view that:
- ” ... whether the activity is regulated or unregulated, you still have dogs racing round an oval track at speed. They are sight hounds, and they will follow that target. They will naturally clump together on the corners, because they are focused on the target, so there is an increased risk of collision. The GBGB has been producing statistics, and it has recognised and acknowledged that dogs are injured during that activity. Therefore, for us, it does not matter whether the activity is regulated or unregulated.
60. The Committee asked the Scottish SPCA whether it had visited the independent track at Thornton to investigate the welfare conditions and injury risks for greyhounds. The Scottish SPCA told the Committee that it had not visited the track as it had not received a complaint regarding animal welfare: “We have not had any complaints that would warrant us to go to the track. As an enforcement body, we need to receive complaints in order to take action, and we have not received specific complaints about Thornton”.

61. Several witnesses felt that track curvature is a contributing factor to the number and type of injuries sustained by greyhounds during racing. The SAWC said that the risk of collision is particularly high at the first bend. The Committee heard that, although straight tracks may decrease the risk of injuries, the site restrictions at Thornton mean it is not a feasible solution.
62. The Minister stated that the statistics published by the GBGB relating to injuries and fatalities are the “central argument for prohibiting greyhound racing in Scotland” and he went on to query the relevance of such statistics to the welfare of greyhounds at Thornton:
- ” The Scottish Government agrees that the statistics presented are unacceptable and that any greyhound injury or death is something that must be addressed. However, it must be recognised that currently we do not have verifiable, comparable data for Thornton stadium. The statistics for greyhound injuries and deaths relate to those incurred as part of the much larger-scale greyhound racing that takes place in England. We must therefore caution against making assumptions about the current situation in Scotland and legislating to ban a sport, however contentious, without a sound evidence base for doing so.
63. Asked whether there was a difference in the risk of injury to a dog between racing at Thornton compared to racing at a GBGB-regulated track, the Minister responded:
- ” My understanding of the difference in risk is the intensity, the professionalism and the requirement for what people are getting out of it. As I stated, there is a high demand for winners. People want to own winners at the GBGB tracks. The racing is highly competitive, there is a lot of money involved and the sport is driven by the financial aspects and prestige. At Thornton, as I understand it, the dogs are largely family-owned pets and the requirement or the determination to win is not as great, nor is it the fundamental reason why they are kept.
64. Witnesses gave mixed views on whether there is a distinction between the racing of greyhounds at Thornton compared with GBGB tracks. The owner of the Thornton track told the Committee that the track surface at Thornton is of a comparable standard to GBGB-regulated tracks, but he stated that it operates as a “hobby track”. The SAWC classed the independent track at Thornton as a “commercial track” on the basis that racing does not take place unless a bookmaker is present. Dogs Trust felt that the bookmakers’ attendance “suggests that it is not purely a hobby activity.” However, the Committee also heard that betting takes place at a much smaller scale at Thornton compared to at GBGB-regulated tracks.
65. When asked whether the scale of betting has a bearing on the welfare of greyhounds used for racing at independent or GBGB tracks, the Minister stated: “It will not make any difference to the dog whatsoever, but it will make a difference to the owner's attitude to the dog”.

66. The Committee notes the concerns raised about the animal welfare implications of greyhound racing, particularly the risk and incidence of injuries and fatalities.

67. In terms of the risks to greyhounds of racing at GBGB-regulated tracks, the Committee agrees with the Minister's view that the statistics relating to

racing at GBGB tracks are “unacceptable” and “must be addressed”. The Committee notes the Scottish Government’s view that the GBGB statistics form the “central argument for prohibiting greyhound racing in Scotland”. The Committee also notes the difficulties experienced by the SAWC and other stakeholders in interpreting the data on injuries and fatalities published by the GBGB and asks the GBGB to consider how it can present this information in a more helpful way.

68. Regarding the risks to greyhounds racing at independent tracks, the Committee notes the Minister's view that there is not sufficient evidence to conclude that the risks are the same as those at GBGB-regulated tracks. The SAWC's view (which the SAWC acknowledges is based on anecdotal evidence) is that the risk of injury and fatality is “broadly comparable” between GBGB tracks and the independent track at Thornton. The view of the petitioner and animal welfare charities is that there is an “inherent risk” associated with greyhound racing and that such risk may be similar regardless of whether the racing takes place at a GBGB-regulated track or at an independent track. The Committee shares the concern about the lack of data for injuries, fatalities- and associated risk at the independent track at Thornton and agrees that relevant data is required to inform policy decision making. The Committee asks the Scottish Government to consider how data on injuries, fatalities and associated risk could be gathered from the Thornton track.
69. The Committee notes the Scottish Government’s consideration of the option of a licensing for greyhound racing. It is unclear to the Committee, however, how a licensing scheme would address the “unacceptable” statistics relating to racing at GBGB-regulated tracks and which form a “central argument for prohibiting greyhound racing in Scotland”. The Committee is mindful there are greyhounds kennelled in Scotland but raced at GBGB tracks elsewhere in the UK, that the possibility exists for a GBGB-regulated track to open in Scotland or for the independent track at Thornton to become associated with the GBGB. The Committee refers the Scottish Government to the SAWC's recommendation that no new greyhound tracks should be permitted to open in Scotland. The Committee asks the Scottish Government to respond to these points in any future consideration of the option of a licensing scheme.

Attendance of a vet at independent tracks

70. The Committee heard evidence about the provision of veterinary care for greyhounds while racing at GBGB-regulated tracks and at Thornton.
71. The SAWC and the GBGB both confirmed that a vet is present at GBGB-regulated tracks to give each dog a veterinary check before allowing them to race. GBGB representatives also explained that the vet provides first aid to injured dogs at the track, and gives instructions for the referral of dogs that need further treatment. The GBGB said it has “a team of regional regulatory vets” who “are there to deal with

the whole regulatory side of it”.

72. The GBGB also gave evidence on its welfare strategy and injury recovery scheme which provides financial contribution for veterinary treatment when a dog is injured at a track. The Committee was told that this support “is almost a form of insurance” which could provide to up to £5,000 for a long bone injury and that the scheme acts to “assess the scale of the injury and what the forward-thinking prognosis is” in order to reduce the number of dogs put to sleep.
73. The Committee heard that no vet attends the independent track at Thornton to either inspect the dogs before a race or to treat injuries. The owner of Thornton Greyhound stadium said that he was “responsible for making sure that the dog is not lame when it goes on to the track” and that he would “approach the owner and say that they were not looking after the dog properly” if he did not think the greyhound was fit to race. The Committee was told that the dogs raced at Thornton are not covered by insurance and that, when a greyhound is injured, it is considered to be the owner's responsible to arrange for veterinary care. He added that “there are several vet surgeries in the close vicinity of the track” where a dog could be sent if it became injured. Regarding fatalities, he stated that any decision on the euthanising of injured dogs “is, fundamentally, the owner's choice”.
74. The SAWC were concerned about the absence of a vet at Thornton, stating its view that, “If that person has not had veterinary training, they will not have the same level of knowledge and independence as a veterinarian would”. Setting out its recommendation that the attendance of a vet should be a mandatory condition for racing to take place at Thornton, the SAWC stated that “vets would be able to provide an independent assessment of the welfare of the dogs, assess whether they are fit to race and, of course, provide prompt treatment should there be a need for that”. The owner of the Thornton track said he thought the cost of having a vet in attendance would be prohibitive for the track to continue operating, and he gave his view that the attendance of vets at GBGB-regulated tracks is funded through the betting industry.
75. The Minister said that the Scottish Government is considering the option of a licensing scheme for greyhound racing at the unregulated track at Thornton and that “having a vet on site would be part of any licensing scheme.” He felt that the attendance of an independent vet at a race “might help alleviate some of the concerns about what happens at a dog track”.

76. **The Committee notes that a vet must be present to inspect the condition of greyhounds prior to racing and to administer treatment at GBGB-regulated tracks, but that no such requirement is in place for independent tracks. The Committee notes the concerns of the petitioner and animal welfare charities that the absence of a vet at independent tracks could have negative implications for animal welfare.**
77. **The Committee notes the SAWC's recommendation that racing at the independent track at Thornton should continue only if a vet is in attendance. The Committee also notes that the Scottish Government consulted on the attendance of a vet as a condition for a licensing scheme for greyhound racing.**

78. **The Committee notes the comments by the owner of the Thornton track that he personally inspects each dog prior to racing to consider whether they are fit to race and that, while a vet does not attend the track, there is the availability of nearby on-call vet surgeries. The Committee feels that the Scottish Government, in any future consideration of the option for a licensing scheme, should come to a view on whether the arrangements in place for the inspection of dogs and veterinary treatment of injuries at independent tracks are sufficient from an animal welfare perspective or if any additional veterinary presence is required.**

Use of performance-enhancing drugs

79. The issue of giving performance-enhancing drugs to greyhounds used for racing in Scotland was raised with the Committee. The petitioner had told the Committee that they believed the doping of dogs with performance-enhancing substances, including cocaine, had taken place at the former GBGB track at Shawfield, and that they believed doping occurred to a greater extent at Thornton. The Scottish SPCA confirmed that it had undertaken investigations following complaints about the use of drugs at Shawfield and other former greyhound tracks in Scotland in 2016, but it stated that testing was not available at that time to determine whether doping had taken place.
80. The GBGB stated that random and targeted testing for performance-enhancing substances is carried out at GBGB-regulated tracks and that, of 359,000 runs in 2022, “less than 1 per cent came back positive, and the percentage that were positive for class A drugs was even lower”. The GBGB explained that the requirement for greyhounds used for racing at GBGB-regulated tracks to be kept in kennels and not in a domestic environment is in part to prevent a dog coming into contact with performance-enhancing substances. GBGB-registered trainers told the Committee that information on drugs testing by the GBGB is published and that a positive result could result in a fine or suspension.
81. The Committee did not hear evidence that doping occurs at Thornton. The track owner informed the Committee that testing does not take place as the cost would be prohibitive to the track.
82. The Minister said that a requirement for drugs testing by an independent body could be considered as part of the option for any licensing scheme for greyhound racing, but he added that the Scottish Government “has not looked in detail at the banned substance side of this”.
83. **The Committee considers it unacceptable for performance-enhancing drugs or other banned substances to be administered to greyhounds, or any other dog, under any circumstance.**
84. **The Committee notes the petitioner's concerns relating to the potential use of performance-enhancing drugs on dogs racing at the independent track**

at Thornton. However, the Committee also notes that no testing is being conducted by either the owner of the track or by an independent body to provide evidence as to whether this is taking place.

85. The Committee notes the Minister's statement that testing for performance-enhancing drugs by an independent body could be included as a condition for any licensing of a greyhound racing track.
86. The Committee recommends that any licensing scheme for greyhound racing includes regular testing for performance-enhancing drugs and other banned substances. The Committee recommends that any licensing scheme should include appropriate consequences for the licence holder and the dog's owner should a greyhound test positive for performance-enhancing drugs or other banned substances.

Kennelling and ownership

87. The Committee took evidence about the residential accommodation in which greyhounds are kept during their racing years and the impact this may have on their welfare.

Residential kennels

88. Both the SAWC and the GBGB informed the Committee that all dogs raced at GBGB-regulated tracks are required to be kept in kennels. The GBGB explained that a racing licence "now ensures that a dog is kept in kennels for its racing career" in order to provide for greater oversight by the GBGB on the conditions in which greyhounds are kept by their owners. The Committee heard that GBGB-appointed stewards, vets and an independent kennel auditor visit the kennels used by GBGB-licensed owners at least once a year. The GBGB also stated that it has finalised United Kingdom Accreditation Service accreditation for all of its trainers and residential kennels which requires compliance a certain national standard and provides for further annual inspections by an independent body.
89. The Committee took evidence from two GBGB-registered breeders and trainers who keep greyhounds in Scotland about the conditions of their kennels. One explained that staff are present at his kennels throughout the day to provide dogs with care and exercise, and another stated:

☞ My kennels are all 2.4m by 2.4m. Each kennel houses two greyhounds and has a bedding area of 5 feet by 5 feet. The dogs also have 24-hour access. They have a run outside, and they can go into a concrete paddock, which is 3m long by 2.5m wide. Each kennel has that. I have a kitchen area and a workroom in which the dogs get worked on. They get their grooming, their nails clipped and a bath there. I also have two grass paddocks and three sand paddocks at home that the greyhounds can go into to exercise.
90. The GBGB-registered trainers who gave evidence said that they would be open to

the SAWC's recommendation for independent regulation of kennels by local authorities in Scotland:

” We are open to that. We would rather have additional measures in place in Scotland than see the game totally abolished. I think that everybody in greyhound racing would be in the same situation.

91. The Committee heard from the SAWC that there is a mix of residential accommodation for greyhounds that are raced at the independent track at Thornton. In its report to the Committee, the SAWC had stated that anecdotal evidence indicated that some dogs raced at Thornton were kept as pets, “serving an apparently dual function of companion animal and racing greyhound”, but it noted that it also saw evidence of greyhounds kept in kennels. The owner of the track believed that the dogs’ owners tend to have one or two greyhounds each. He went on to say that such dogs are kept in a domestic environment rather than kennels, that they “probably have the run of the house and the garden” and are “treated as a family pet”. The SAWC felt that such greyhounds that are kept in a domestic environment “probably have a reasonable quality of life”.
92. However, the SAWC expressed a concern about how the keeping of greyhounds in kennels during their racing years could impact on the dogs’ welfare. The SAWC’s stated that greyhounds used for racing “spend up to 95 per cent of their lives in kennels” which, in its view, “certainly do not provide a good life for the animals from the point of view of social interactions and environmental complexity” and “leads to a poorer quality of life than the average dog experiences”. Another concern voiced by the SAWC and animal welfare charities was in relation to the condition of the kennels in which greyhounds are kept. The Scottish SPCA told the Committee that it had responded to 21 complaints relating to an address where greyhounds raced at Thornton were kept in kennels, but it had found that “[t]he kennelling of the dogs at that address met the basic standards that are required by legislation”. When asked whether it thought the required standards were sufficient for the welfare of dogs kept in kennels, the Scottish SPCA gave its view that:
- ” You would question overall welfare. If you have a dog that is spending most of its time being kennelled, but the animal is being given what it needs according to the legislative requirements—it is getting food and water, it has somewhere to sleep, it has shelter and so on—the requirements are being met. However, in our opinion, it would be better for them not to be kennelled all the time.
93. The Minister stated it was his understanding that the vast majority of greyhounds used for racing in Scotland “are as much part of the family and family pets as they are for racing”. He then went on to state that “[t]he welfare conditions of the dogs at Thornton is an entirely different thing from what we are talking about in relation to the professional tracks down south”. Asked about the welfare of greyhounds kept in kennels in Scotland but raced at GBGB-regulated tracks elsewhere in the UK, the Minister maintained that he thought “we have a different situation for the people who are keeping and racing greyhounds in Scotland as opposed to what happens in England”. However, the Minister added that the Scottish Government may consider kennelling “potentially as part of our whole approach to licensing” and that any such licensing scheme would require the involvement of local authorities.

94. **The Committee notes that greyhounds kept by GBGB-registered trainers in Scotland are required to be kept in kennels during their racing years for the purposes of animal welfare and that the welfare conditions in these kennels are subject to a level of regulation and inspection. Accepting that their views cannot be taken as representative of all GBGB-registered trainers in Scotland, the Committee notes the two trainers who gave evidence said they would be open to additional independent inspection of kennels.**
95. **At the same time, however, the Committee heard concerns raised by the SAWC and animal welfare charities about whether the regulations currently in place for kennel accommodation are sufficient to provide for a dog's overall welfare. Based on the evidence taken in this inquiry, the Committee is not able to take a view on the adequacy of the GBGB-regulated kennels.**
96. **Regarding greyhounds raced at the independent track at Thornton, the Committee notes the SAWC's view, generally accepted by other stakeholders, that most greyhounds are kept as a family pet. However, the Committee understands that some are kept in kennels which fall outwith regulation and inspection. The Committee asks the Scottish Government how it will ensure the kennelling and accommodation of greyhounds used for racing is subject to robust inspection.**

Retirement and rehoming

97. To complete its inquiry on the welfare of greyhounds used for racing in Scotland, the Committee heard evidence of what happens to greyhounds when they reach the end of their racing years. The Committee sought information about the current practice and provision within the industry for rehoming greyhounds and about the concerns of some stakeholders about the welfare of greyhounds when they retire.
98. For dogs raced at Thornton, the owner of the track believed that “in many of the cases, when the greyhound retires, the people keep the dog as a pet for the rest of its life”.
99. In the case of greyhounds raced at GBGB-regulated tracks, the GBGB told the Committee that, when a greyhound is retired from racing, it is placed in the care of a vet; “It then falls under their care and under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, and, at that stage, it is looked after as any other animal would be”. The GBGB also explained that a “retirement bond” worth £400 is set up for each greyhound to assist in its post-racing care and homing. The bond comprises £200 from the dog's owner and £200 from the GBGB. One GBGB-registered trainer set out that he sends his retired dogs to “an approved homing centre—personally, I will only use those centres—which will get a £400 payment for taking the dog in, and we get the dog spayed or castrated before it goes there”. The GBGB emphasised that it “no longer finds it an acceptable outcome” for its retired greyhounds to be raced at independent tracks.
100. Animal welfare charities believed that the GBGB's retirement bond is inadequate for providing for the care and homing of retired greyhounds, especially those which are

injured. Dogs Trust argued that “the £400 bond does not go anywhere near the amount that it would cost us to care for and rehome a greyhound”, citing its veterinary and treatment expenses for injured greyhounds “ranged from £690 to £4,800”.

101. The Committee also heard concerns expressed by some stakeholders about high rates of retirement and turnover of racing greyhounds. The SAWC told the Committee that racing greyhounds are “quite disposable” within the industry and can often be retired early “If the animal is not running fast enough or has some injury, even a very expensive dog is relinquished to a charity and replaced with another one”. The Dogs Trust said that the number of greyhounds retired from racing at GBGB-regulated tracks across the UK annually “can be between 6,000 and 7,000” and that over 5,000 are homed each year by rehoming organisations. One GBGB-registered trainer based in Scotland said that he retires 10 to 12 greyhounds each year and these “are replaced by pups coming through that we have bred”.
102. Referring to the number and turnover of greyhounds within the racing industry, the SAWC said there were concerns that rehoming charities may become overwhelmed should an immediate ban on greyhound racing be introduced. The SAWC stated that some of the rehoming charities it gathered evidence from “are already close to, if not beyond, capacity, so that is not really a place for the dogs to go if they are to be rehomed.” It felt that such a situation could be detrimental to the welfare of racing greyhounds, telling the Committee that “it seems unrealistic to expect all of them to become the pets of the current owners and trainers; indeed, our evidence gathering suggested that it often leads to worse welfare if the animals are not rehomed”. The Dogs Trust, which has two rehoming centres in Scotland, reported it had coped with “a spike” in the number of greyhounds that needed rehomed in 2020 (which it said coincided with the closure of the GBGB track at Shawfield). Dogs Trust and the Scottish SPCA were confident they could deal with a large number of greyhounds needing rehomed, with Dogs Trust stating it “would not anticipate any challenges in rehoming dogs from the industry, and we would be committed to doing so”.
103. The Committee considered the health of greyhounds on retirement. Based on the evidence gathered for its report, the SAWC told the Committee that “reasonable numbers” of racing greyhounds are passed on by trainers to rehoming charities with injuries “sometimes with injuries that the trainer is aware of, but often – as suggested by some of the evidence that we took – with injuries that are not disclosed”. One rehoming centre had informed the SAWC that some retired greyhounds were brought in with untreated injuries, poor dentition and “were thinner than would have been expected”. The SAWC stated that “it felt as though the dogs had experienced poorer quality of care than we would expect from an average animal in the general population”. However, the Committee heard from GBGB-registered trainers that they “would not send a dog that was injured and still limping to a rehoming centre” and that their dogs must be checked over by a vet before being deemed fit for rehoming.
104. The Committee also considered the behavioural issues sometimes displayed by greyhounds on retirement, most commonly related to poor socialisation, such as being withdrawn or occasionally aggressive. Animal welfare charities attributed these issues to greyhounds being kept in kennels continuously during their racing years and that experience of a domestic environment prior to a dog's retirement is

more beneficial for its rehoming prospects. The Committee heard from Dogs Trust that, whereas the average lifespan of a greyhound is between 10 and 14 years, 90 per cent of racing greyhounds are retired by five years of age which meant that the dogs were unprepared for a domestic environment where they would spend most of their lifespan. The Dogs Trust explained that “our concerns when greyhounds are kennelled for large parts of their lives are to do with the socialisation, habituation and enrichment that they receive during that kennel time and their ability to adapt to a home environment if they have not experienced one until they are rehomed”. The Scottish SPCA said that “the rehabilitation process” for some of the greyhounds in its care had been “more challenging” because the dogs had not had “crucial early-life exposure” to the sights and sounds of a home environment.

105. The GBGB said it was aware of behavioural problems among retired greyhounds due to a lack of socialisation and that it was addressing this issue through its welfare strategy, behavioural assessments and through collaboration with trainers, rehoming charities, and animal behaviourists. The GBGB told the Committee that, between 2018 and 2021, the number of greyhounds put to sleep on account of being deemed unfit for rehoming had declined from 190 to 13 which, it felt, was an outcome of “changing the culture” of how greyhounds are valued by trainers within the industry. Several GBGB-registered trainers set out the ways that their dogs are socialised, including through human contact and toys and in the use of radios and vacuum cleaners within kennels so that “the dog is used to such noises and different things that, maybe years ago, it was not used to”.

106. **The Committee notes the evidence provided by animal welfare and rehoming charities about the health and behavioural problems presented by many greyhounds when they are rehomed at the end of their racing career. The Committee recognises the work the GBGB is doing to address these problems and the £400 retirement bond, although the Committee also recognises animal welfare and rehoming charities’ experience that the £400 often does not fully cover the expense of veterinary treatment and rehabilitation.**

107. **The Committee asks the Scottish Government to work with rehoming charities to collate data over a five-year period to record any health and behavioural problems presented by greyhounds when they are rehomed at the end of their racing career. The Committee recommends that this data should be used to inform the Scottish Government’s future policy decisions about greyhound racing.**

Conclusions

108. **The Committee notes that many individuals and organisations hold strong views about the welfare of greyhounds used for racing in Scotland. The petitioner and other stakeholders raised animal welfare concerns relating to all aspects of a racing greyhound's life, from breeding and traceability during its early years, through the risk of injury and fatality while racing and on to issues arising at retirement and rehoming.**
109. **The Committee explored these concerns but found its inquiry challenging due to the lack of independent evidence on the animal welfare implications of greyhound racing and associated breeding, kennelling, and retirement of greyhounds.**
110. **The petition urges the Parliament to call on the Scottish Government to end greyhound racing in Scotland. The Committee notes the Minister's view that – on the basis of the evidence provided to the Committee – the case hasn't been sufficiently made for a wholesale ban on greyhound racing in Scotland.**
111. **On the basis of the evidence the Committee has taken, however, it believes that its recommendations in relation to the animal welfare conditions associated with breeding and the transport of greyhounds from Ireland, improvements to microchip databases for the traceability of greyhounds, a provision for the inspection of kennels, and the collection of data on the health and behavioural problems of greyhounds that are retired and rehomed, would lead to a positive change to the quality of life of greyhounds used for racing in Scotland.**
112. **Since the Committee concluded its evidence taking, Mark Ruskell has secured a right to introduce a member's bill to ban greyhound racing. The Minister has confirmed that the Scottish Government does not intend to consider a licensing scheme until the proposed member's bill has progressed through the Parliament. Members agree it is right that Parliament should have the opportunity to take a view on the general principles before the Scottish Government gives further consideration to a licensing scheme.**
113. **The Committee notes it would likely be the lead committee for the member's bill at stage 1 and, that being the case, intends to refer to the issues raised in its consideration of this petition when it undertakes its stage 1 scrutiny.**
114. **The Committee will return to this issue when the member's bill has completed its passage through the Parliament and the Committee agrees to keep the petition open until that time.**

