



House of Commons

Environment, Food and
Rural Affairs Committee

**Greyhound welfare:
Government response
to the Committee's
Second Report of
Session 2015–16**

**First Special Report of Session
2016–17**

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 15 June 2016*

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Office of the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and associated public bodies.

Current membership

[Neil Parish MP](#) (*Conservative, Tiverton and Honiton*) (Chair)

[Chris Davies MP](#) (*Conservative, Brecon and Radnorshire*)

[Jim Fitzpatrick MP](#) (*Labour, Poplar and Limehouse*)

[Simon Hart MP](#) (*Conservative, Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire*)

[Dr Paul Monaghan MP](#) (*Scottish National Party, Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross*)

[Rebecca Pow MP](#) (*Conservative, Taunton Deane*)

[Ms Margaret Ritchie MP](#) (*Social Democratic and Labour Party, South Down*)

[David Simpson MP](#) (*Democratic Unionist Party, Upper Bann*)

[Angela Smith MP](#) (*Labour, Penistone and Stocksbridge*)

[Rishi Sunak MP](#) (*Conservative, Richmond (Yorks)*)

[Valerie Vaz MP](#) (*Labour, Walsall South*)

Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publication

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at www.parliament.uk/efracom and in print by Order of the House.

Evidence relating to this report is published on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are David Weir (Clerk), Sian Cooke (Second Clerk), Sarah Coe (Senior Committee Specialist), Anwen Rees (Committee Specialist), Ellen Bloss (Senior Committee Assistant), Henry Ayi-Hyde (Committee Support Assistant) and Nick Davies (Media Officer).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 5774; the Committee's email address is efracom@parliament.uk.

First Special Report

Introduction

1. The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee reported to the House on *Greyhound welfare* in its Second Report of Session 2015–16, published on 25 February 2016, as HC 478.
2. The Government's response to the Report was received by the Committee on 18 May 2016, and is attached to this Report as an Appendix.

Comment on the Government's response

3. We welcome the review being undertaken by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) in respect of the welfare of greyhounds and the governing Regulations created in 2010. We note that the Government's response to our Report refers to actions to be taken once that review has been completed, but also that no indication is given of when that will be or when any subsequent actions will occur. ***We seek clarification from the Government of when the outcomes of that review will be published.***

4. Defra notes in its response that it is working closely with the Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB), and this is welcome. However, there is a notable absence in the response of focus on the smaller but no less significant independent greyhound racing sector. ***We urge the Department to consider encompassing the independent sector within the codes of practice being constructed with the GBGB, particularly as regards the publication of injury, retirement and euthanasia data. We also urge the Department to set out clearly what alternative will be considered if voluntary self-regulation and transparency fail to improve welfare standards for racing dogs at tracks operated both within and outside the GBGB system.***

5. We welcome the Department's assurances that pressure has been brought to bear upon the betting industry to make 'appropriate contributions' towards greyhound welfare. ***We seek an assurance from Government that the 'encouraging response' from the bookmaking industry to calls for greater welfare contribution will result in increased payments to support animal welfare in the racing sector. We seek, too, an indication of what further pressure will be brought to bear if this does not transpire within a reasonable time frame.***

Appendix: Government response

The Recommendations contained in the Committee's original report are numbered and highlighted in bold. The plain text is the Government's response on each point.

Introduction

The Government welcomes the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee's report on 'Greyhound welfare'. We are grateful for the Committee's consideration of this matter and its contribution to the Government's own review of the Welfare of Racing Greyhounds Regulations 2010 (the 2010 Regulations). We welcome that the Committee visited tracks in the independent, local authority regulated sector as well as the Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB) regulated sector. One of the key considerations of Defra's review is how the Regulations have impacted on the two different sectors and the Committee's views here are especially welcomed.

We have carefully considered the recommendations made by the Committee. Ahead of the publication of the Government's own review of the Regulations, this document sets out the Government's response.

Effectiveness of the Regulatory Framework

We note the Committee's finding that there is a general acceptance that the 2010 Regulations have 'improved the welfare of greyhounds at racetracks' (paragraph 14) but that the absence of baseline data 'makes it difficult to accurately assess the impact of the 2010 Regulations on key welfare issues' (paragraph 16). The Government agrees that the absence of such data has made assessing the effectiveness of the 2010 Regulations difficult. However, both the Committee's report and Defra's own evidence gathering exercises should provide enough information to enable the Government to make an informed assessment of the effectiveness of the 2010 Regulations.

1. We recommend that the frequency of Local Authority inspections of independent tracks be increased and include random inspections. (Paragraph 20)

We regard the frequency of inspections as a matter for Local Authorities to determine, based on an assessment of the greyhound track they are licensing. Section 26 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 provides local authority inspectors powers to check for compliance with the conditions to which a licence is granted. This means Local Authorities have the power to undertake random inspections if they wish. Further, the 2010 Regulations provide local authorities with the discretion to grant or renew a licence for any period up to 3 years. If a local authority has concerns about the management of a track they can issue a future licence for a shorter period to ensure routine inspections are carried out more frequently.

However, we would not want to stipulate how often a track should be inspected. Each Local Authority will be best placed to determine, based on the track's history of compliance, the appropriate length of a licence to best allow them to inspect when they believe it is necessary. They will also be best placed to determine whether any additional random inspections are required. We would also not want to fetter a Local Authority's ability to award a longer licence, or inspect less often, where they would want to reward a track for demonstrating a history of good compliance with the 2010 Regulations.

Data and transparency

We note the Committee's view that, with regard to injury data, 'some information may need to be published in an anonymised or aggregated format on grounds of commercial sensitivities' (paragraph 31). The Committee's point aligns with the view of the Government, as set out in Defra's 'Consultation on the initial findings of the Review of the Welfare of Racing Greyhounds Regulations 2010' document, that it is not necessary to introduce a requirement on all tracks to publish individually their injury and euthanasia statistics.

We also note the Committee's view that the injury data which is now being collected by the Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB) should be made available for independent research. Again, this is something the Government agrees is important and, as set out in Defra's Consultation document, the GBGB have agreed, at the request of Defra Minister George Eustice, to make anonymised track injury and euthanasia data available to others for bona fide research purposes.

2. We recommend that Defra amend the 2010 Regulations to require the publication of essential welfare data relating to injury, euthanasia and rehoming numbers. (Paragraph 44)

As part of the Government's current review of the effectiveness of the 2010 Regulations, we are considering whether amendments to the Regulations are needed. The recent consultation on the initial findings of the review included asking whether the non-regulatory agreement by the GBGB to publish, from 2018, aggregate injury and euthanasia figures from GBGB tracks will improve transparency in the sport. Defra is considering the evidence gathered as part of its review before finalising proposals on what changes may be needed to the 2010 Regulations. Any amendment to the 2010 Regulations to include, for example, a mandatory requirement to publish injury and euthanasia numbers, would likely have to apply equally to both GBGB and Independent tracks. As the Committee is aware, there is currently no existing organisation in the Independent sector that would be able to aggregate and publish anonymised track injury data as the GBGB have agreed to do for the tracks operating under their control. As mentioned above, some information may need to be published in an anonymised or aggregated format on grounds of commercial sensitivities. However, and without pre-empting our final report on the effectiveness of the 2010 Regulations, should the GBGB not deliver satisfactorily on their agreement to publish, from 2018, aggregate injury and euthanasia figures from GBGB tracks, then the Government would wish to consider alternative approaches, including legislation.

Kennelling

We welcome the Committee's view that the current requirement in the 2010 Regulations, that tracks provide kennelling for at least 20% of greyhounds present at a track for trialling or racing, is sufficient. Defra's consultation on the initial findings of the review of the 2010 Regulations specifically raised the issue of whether this quota was still appropriate.

3. We advise Defra to encourage Local Authorities to take a more active role in inspecting private commercial kennel conditions away from the track. It seems appropriate to have the same levels of oversight of private kennels across both systems. (Paragraph 50)

4. We recommend that Defra consider extending the 2010 Regulations to cover trainer’s kennels, that common welfare standards be developed for all kennels, and that an independent body verify those standards. (Paragraph 56)

The Government would encourage Local Authorities to make full use of the wide range of investigatory powers available to them under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 to investigate concerns raised about welfare conditions at private commercial kennels. In addition, Defra is also currently reviewing various pieces of animal activity licensing legislation, including the Animal Boarding Establishments Act 1963. As part of that review, Defra will be considering changes to the law on animal boarding, to make sure any diversification within the boarding industry is adequately reflected in any new regulations.

With regard to amending the 2010 Regulations to cover trainer’s kennels, Defra’s recent consultation on the initial findings of the review included several options for addressing welfare conditions at such kennels. This included the development, through the British Standards Institute (BSI) and in consensus with relevant stakeholders, of a Publicly Available Specification (PAS) for trainers’ kennels. This would create one common welfare standard, verified by the BSI, for all trainers’ kennels. The consultation also sought views on how such standards could be best delivered in line with the Government’s Principles of Regulation. As previously mentioned, Defra are currently considering all the evidence gathered as part of its review before considering whether any changes are needed to the 2010 Regulations.

Retirement: traceability and rehoming

The Government notes the Committee’s view that the introduction of the Microchipping of Dogs (England) Regulations 2015 (the 2015 Regulations) should improve the traceability of greyhounds (paragraph 60). Defra’s consultation on the initial findings of the review sought views as to what extent people agreed that the requirement for all dogs to be microchipped from 8 weeks of age would help further improve the traceability of greyhounds, including any greyhound that has left the sport. The Committee’s views on this matter are helpful.

We note that a number of the recommendations made in this section of the report are aimed at the industry. However, the Government understands from the GBGB that they are compliant with the 2015 Regulations.

The Government agrees with the Committee’s recommendations to the industry that healthy dogs should wherever possible be found homes at the end of their racing careers and that the industry should investigate whether poor dental health is prevalent in greyhounds (and assess whether there are any measures that could be introduced to improve dental hygiene). On the latter recommendations, we understand that the GBGB has produced its own guide to dental care and treatment for greyhounds for trainers, and dental care will form part of the kennel standard document and part of any kennel inspection process. Also, vets at GBGB regulated racecourses now carry out an annual full clinical health check for each greyhound, which includes a dental check. We also understand that the RSPCA are funding research which is looking at the prevalence of dental and periodontal disease in racing greyhounds to determine the extent of the problem and how best to reduce it. We understand that the GBGB are assisting with this research, and the findings from this are due to be publically available next year.

The Government would also agree that GBGB should make data on the rehoming of greyhounds available. Again, as set out in Defra's Consultation document on the review of the 2010 Regulations, the GBGB have already agreed, from 2018, at the request of Defra Minister George Eustice, to publish annually summary statistics for the number of dogs that leave the sport each year (whether retired, rehomed, sold or euthanized). The consultation sought views on this non-regulatory agreement and Defra are currently considering the responses received to the consultation. GBGB have informed Defra that it is currently developing an on-line retirement reporting portal and retirement database.

Financing welfare and the role of bookmakers

5. We recommend that changes in the betting consumer market, such as online, mobile and overseas trading, must be better reflected in the regulatory regime. Bookmakers profiting from greyhound racing have a responsibility to support greyhound welfare whether they trade from the High Street or trade online. (Paragraph 81)

The Government acted to ensure that changes in the betting consumer market are reflected in the regulatory regime. The Gambling (Licensing and Advertising) Act 2014 requires all operators based abroad who offer gambling services to people in Britain to hold a license from the Gambling Commission.

This means that all firms offering bets on greyhound racing to customers based in Great Britain are now required to hold a Gambling Commission license. They are required to provide returns on their activities and therefore aggregated figures on betting turnover from remote operators will start to become available via the Gambling Commission. The first batch of these figures were published in November 2015 and provide data up to March 2015 which covers 5 months of activity by remote operators (following the Act coming into force on 1 November 2014). A fuller picture of the data will be available when Gambling Commission figures are published again in June 2016 which will include a full year of remote operator activity.

Separately, in December 2014 the Finance Act resulted in betting duty also moving to a 'point of consumption' basis. This means that operators pay betting taxes on their betting activities in Britain, regardless of where they are based.

The government believes that the betting and greyhound industry should work together and that contributions from the betting industry should reflect the total income generated by the sport.

6. We believe government should apply greater pressure to bookmakers to pay a fair reflection of all the profits they make. If a voluntary agreement cannot be struck we recommend that government introduce a statutory levy of 1% gross turnover. This will ensure the welfare of greyhounds is adequately funded in future. (Paragraph 88)

The Minister for Sport and Tourism wrote to the betting industry in September 2015 to encourage all bookmakers to make an appropriate contribution to the British Greyhound Racing Fund. We received an encouraging response and this has resulted in discussions between the betting and greyhound racing industries. In light of the EFRA Committee report the Minister for Sport and Tourism sent a further letter to the industry in March

2016 to reiterate concerns that the value of contributions made to the British Greyhound Racing fund (the voluntary levy) do not adequately reflect the profits generated by bookmakers from the sport. The Minister also expressed a desire for both industries to agree a mutually-beneficial voluntary arrangement which demonstrates a fair and just return to the sport.

The Government understands that two firms, representing around 70 betting shops, have recently agreed to contribute to the fund. We are encouraged that commercial discussions regarding bookmaker contributions to the voluntary levy are ongoing, including in relation to bookmakers' online operations, and remain optimistic that a fair settlement can be agreed. However the Government will continue to closely monitor developments in this area.

The British Greyhound Racing Fund recently announced a new £0.5 million Welfare Initiatives Fund, made possible by better than expected Fund income and underspend over the last year. It is also worth highlighting that the remote betting industry have informed us that new streaming deals were agreed last autumn which will enable live greyhound racing to be shown on online betting sites. The remote betting industry estimates that this will add about £2m to the overall transfer of value from the online betting industry to the greyhound industry. It is encouraging to see the sport maximising commercial opportunities to boost its income.

Self-regulation: a success?

The Government agrees with the Committee's conclusion that the industry could and should have done more since the introduction of the 2010 Regulations to demonstrate its commitment to being an open and transparent self-regulator of the sport (paragraph 92). The Government also welcomes the Committee's conclusion that they have not seen enough evidence of critical failings that would warrant the creation of an independent regulator at this point (paragraph 94). The Committee's view here align with the Government's, as stated in Defra's 'Consultation on the initial findings of the Review of the Welfare of Racing Greyhounds Regulations 2010' document, that "Due to the relatively small number of tracks and the steps that have already been, and are being, taken by the industry we do not believe that it would be proportionate to introduce a new statutory body".

7. We recommend a probationary period of two years continued self-regulation to allow the industry to respond to our proposals. It is vital the industry demonstrates capacity to initiate welfare reform without legislative compulsion if it wants to stay self-regulated. (Paragraph 95)

This recommendation aligns closely with the timescales for the non-regulatory agreements set out in Defra's recent consultation on the initial findings of the review of the 2010 Regulations. As set out in the consultation document, the GBGB have agreed with Defra Minister George Eustice to:

- Develop through the British Standards Institution (BSI), in cooperation with relevant stakeholders, a Publically Available Specification (PAS) for trainer's kennels. Once developed GBGB would get UKAS accreditation, by the end of 2017, as a certification body of those standards.

- Publish annually summary figures for greyhounds injured or euthanized at GBGB tracks. We expect this to begin in 2018—for figures from 2017—presenting the figures as a percentage of the greyhounds run each year. The GBGB have also agreed to make anonymised track injury and euthanasia data available to others for bona fide research purposes.
- Publish annually summary statistics for the number of dogs that leave GBGB racing each year (and by what method). Again, we expect this to begin in 2018.

Defra is considering all the evidence gathered as part of its review before finalising any proposals and will take into account the Committee's recommendation that the GBGB should be allowed up until 2018 to deliver on these commitments, as well respond to the Committee's other proposals.