

- [Accessibility](#)
- [Email alerts](#)
- [RSS feeds](#)
- [Contact us](#)



www.parliament.uk

- [Home](#)
- [Parliamentary business](#)
- [MPs, Lords & offices](#)
- [About Parliament](#)
- [Get involved](#)
- [Visiting](#)
- [Education](#)

- [House of Commons](#)
- [House of Lords](#)
- [What's on](#)
- [Bills & legislation](#)
- [Committees](#)
- [Publications & records](#)
- [Parliament TV](#)
- [News](#)
- [Topics](#)

You are here: [Parliament home page](#) > [Parliamentary business](#) > [Publications and Records](#) > [Committee Publications](#) > [All Select Committee Publications](#) > [Commons Select Committees](#) > [Environment, Food and Rural Affairs](#) > Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs [Minutes of Evidence](#)

Memorandum submitted by Lord Lipsy, Chairman, British Greyhound Racing Board

In 2001 I initiated a debate on greyhound welfare in the House. I was critical of industry bodies whom, I felt, were not treating the subject with sufficient drive. I am pleased to say, however, that this has changed—and indeed began to do so before I became BGRB chairman on 1 January this year. Partly this is for commercial reasons: the sport realises that its customers, whether in betting shops or on track, have to be confident that it cares for its canine competitors or they will withdraw their patronage. But partly there has been an entirely welcome change of culture.

This is reflected for example in the huge increase in spending in support of the Retired Greyhound Trust. In 2001 after my debate I helped negotiate with the bookmakers a ring-fenced one-off increase in funding from £250,000 to £500,000. Last year spending rose to £850,000. Big further increases in spending are planned, including a major advertising campaign to find homes for retired greyhounds this autumn. It is worth noting that if each year just one dog-owning household in a thousand switched from their present breed to a greyhound, the retirement problem would be solved.

As the evidence that follows shows, there have been huge advances. For example, we are pioneering improved racing surfaces, which are producing highly encouraging injury reductions. Steps have been taken to secure the independence of track vets. Every track now has a greyhound welfare liaison officer. The detailed work of the BGRB's welfare committee, under the admirable chairmanship of John Haynes, a BGRB director and experienced trainer, has gathered new impetus. We are working on a new scheme to train the industry's workforce, including in welfare. The National Greyhound Racing Club, the industry's rule making and enforcing body, is looking at ways of tightening its administration of its Rule 18, whereby changes of ownership are properly registered.

Very importantly, the industry participates fully in the Greyhound Forum under the Chairmanship of Clarissa Baldwin OBE of Dog's Trust. The Forum's *Charter for the Racing Greyhound* has been widely welcomed, and a timetable for its full implementation is in place. BGRB maintains a constructive dialogue with the animal welfare charities, including the League against Cruel Sports.

All this is encouraging. My main concern—and this was an underlying theme of the recent Westminster Hall debate initiated by Alan Meale MP—surrounds the 20 or so remaining independent tracks, where welfare standards are not always adequate. For example,

they generally operate without a vet present. There can be no justification in our day and age for this, and it is vital that future regulations under the bill make this law.

My own view is that many of these tracks—essentially "man and boy" outfits—will close anyway, and certainly will when they are forced to employ vets. Ideally the best of them will migrate to the NGRC. At the time of writing we are looking at a scheme to provide loans in support of agreed plans to upgrade to NGRC standards, saving we hope tracks and jobs as well as ensuring welfare.

Finally, I would make a plea for the Committee not to be tempted to impose some external system of regulation, for example by local authorities, on the industry. There is a widespread understanding these days that self-regulation, which involves an industry internalising the culture of regulation, is a more effective way of regulating.

Certainly trained and greyhound experienced NGRC stewards are far more likely to spot wrongdoing or malpractice than less specialised local authority neophytes. The NGRC is itself modernising rapidly with the appointment of some outstanding new stewards, and a move to more openness and accountability. Working with them and with all sections of the industry, I am confident we shall deliver.

The British Greyhound Racing Board is the representative governing authority for greyhound racing run under the rules of the National Greyhound Racing Club.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

(a) Welfare spending is a priority for greyhound racing and this has coincided with a significant increase in funding from off-course bookmakers. Due to a new arrangement between the Association of British Bookmakers (ABB) and the BGRB in April 2004 the money coming into the sport via the British Greyhound Racing Fund (BGRF) (6) looks set to increase to some £14 million—approximately double the Fund's yield in 2003. (5)

(b) This deal saw the level of payment to the sport increase from 0.4% of off-course bookmakers' turnover, to 0.6% in 2006 and franked a marked improvement in the relationship between the ABB and the BGRB.

(c) With the support of the Minister for Sport, Richard Caborn, more members of the ABB have also been persuaded that they should make this voluntary payment to the greyhound racing industry and assured that a substantial increase in welfare spending would result from it.

(d) Greyhound racing on all levels is committed as never before to welfare and welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the formation of the Animal Welfare Bill. The emphasis on best practice and duty of care is one echoed by the sport itself. With little money to be made from owning or training the dogs greyhound people are invariably in the sport for the love of their greyhounds. They are the first to be incensed by non-typical instances of cruelty involving a greyhound, and increased powers to tackle this will be applauded.

(e) The BGRB is concerned over the lack of any nationally implemented rule regarding the attendance of veterinary surgeons for all trials and races at Independent tracks. The BGRB is committed to assisting any Independent that wants to improve standards/facilities and race under the auspices of the NGRC and the BGRB.

(f) As recognised in the Regulatory Impact Assessment both the BGRB and the NGRC have been rapidly modernising. The BGRB seeks to continue this process and the considerable and specialised welfare work it undertakes without further regulations imposed from local authorities.

1. GREYHOUND RACECOURSES

1.1 As the draft Bill explains in part, there are two types of greyhound racecourse, NGRC and Independent.

1.2 There are 31 greyhound racecourses licensed by the sport's regulatory authority, the National Greyhound Racing Club (NGRC) (See Appendix 1) [Not printed]. This total includes one racecourse in Scotland (Shawfield in Glasgow) and the BGRB has recently submitted a response to the Scottish Executive (Environment and Rural Affairs Department) paper, entitled "Proposals to Revise Existing Animal Welfare Legislation." (Appendix 2) [Not printed]

1.3 There are no NGRC racecourses in Wales but those located in England cover a vast geographical spread from Brough Park (Newcastle) to Brighton & Hove.

They are all licensed by and race under the Rules of Racing of the NGRC (Appendix 3) [Not printed].

1.4 The BGRB represents just those racecourses that race under the Rules of the NGRC. The rules themselves range from the design of the jacket worn by the greyhound in a race to the required presence of a veterinary surgeon trackside for all trials and races—also required to check each dog before and after each race.

1.5 This last rule pertaining to the attendance of vets is seen by many to be the fundamental difference between the NGRC tracks (ie those represented by the BGRB) and the 20 or so racecourses that do not race under the rules of the NGRC, and are called "Independents"—sometimes known colloquially as "flapping tracks".

2. THE WELFARE OF THE RACING GREYHOUND

2.1 BGRB Welfare Committee

2.1.1 The BGRB Welfare Committee brings together owners, trainers, breeders, track management, greyhound veterinary surgeons, representatives of the NGRC and the Retired Greyhound Trust (RGT).

2.1.2 The purpose of the Committee is to examine all aspects of the sport that relate to or affect the welfare of the racing greyhound, and to make recommendations to the BGRB Board or NGRC Stewards when it considers rules should be changed or introduced, policy should be updated or other appropriate action should be taken.

2.1.3 At Poole Greyhound Stadium the Committee has brought together industry experts to try to reduce the occurrence of track-based injuries. It is Committee funded with analysis under the auspices of the Society of Greyhound Veterinarians.

2.1.4 The Committee is also instigating training/education programmes for staff. It has learned from the models already in place in horse racing and has visited the Northern Racing College in Doncaster. Consideration is being given to the recruitment of a dedicated project leader to assist the Board with what will be a major step forward for the sport.

2.2 The Greyhound Forum and The Charter For the Racing Greyhound

2.2.1 The BGRB (and the NGRC) are members of the "Greyhound Forum". This independent body brings together all of the major animal welfare charities.

2.2.2 The Forum produced a Charter for the Racing Greyhound (Appendix 4) [Not printed] listing the basic rights of greyhounds everywhere. Although the charter goes less far in some areas than the actual rules of the NGRC it is a valuable document and

testament to the positive relationship with animal welfare organisations.

2.2.3 Following a recent recommendation from the BGRB Welfare Committee, all NGRC racecourses have appointed a named Welfare Officer. He or she will have the local knowledge necessary to account for all welfare specific issues from the track preparation to area rehoming branches.

2.2.4 Society of Greyhound Veterinarians

2.3.1 This is a specialist division of the British Veterinary Association dedicated to the veterinary care and welfare of the greyhound before, during and after its racing career. The BGRB Welfare Committee recommended that an increased grant was made this year to assist the Society with training and education projects. A training video is being produced to help less experienced track vets gain specialist greyhound knowledge. The SGV is also preparing some major research projects with the financial help of the BGRB next year, including the optimum way of transporting greyhounds.

2.3.2 The BGRB acknowledges it is vital that veterinary expertise accompanies much of the progressive welfare work underway.

2.3.3 Following recent discussions with the SGV and its members, the BGRB recently introduced a new industry-wide policy whereby a track promoter that wishes to continue receiving grants towards the costs of track vets must agree to contact the BGRB before any employment contract with a track vet can be terminated. The SGV was concerned that some vets might feel under pressure from promoters, for example, to avoid recommending a track as unraceable during extreme weather conditions. This change will act as a safeguard and support for the profession. However, the BGRB was of an opinion that it was, in the main, a question of perception rather than reality, with the majority of vets and tracks having a healthy relationship of mutual respect.

2.4 "Retired" Greyhounds

2.4.1 The RGT is long established (1979) as the only charity which specialises in rehoming ex-racing greyhounds. There are now more than 60 branches around the country. Many are based at or near the 31 racecourses but the geographical spread is far wider than that of the "racing map" alone.

2.4.2 The annual funding to the RGT from the sport has increased significantly (£240,000 in 2000 to £850,000 this year.) Budgets for 2005 have not been decided but an interim substantial increase is being given for this year and the Director of the RGT has been told that he should not regard himself as constrained by budgetary factors this year.

2.4.3 Taking into account the projection of new monies coming into the sport from a new progressive, tiered, funding agreement with bookmakers in April 2004 (Appendix 5) [Not printed] the RGT can expect to be receiving a seven-figure grant from the industry by the end of 2005. In view of this the RGT trustees, chaired independently by Duncan Green, Chief Executive of Battersea, are looking at the structure and organisation of the charity to increase its efficiency and the number of greyhounds rehomed.

2.4.4 In 2003 the RGT rehomed 2,600 greyhounds. This figure is often mis-quoted by the anti-racing lobby as the total number of racing greyhounds rehomed in the UK. Many greyhounds are rehomed privately by their owners and trainers or through other welfare groups, such as Battersea and the Blue Cross and many smaller homes round the country.

2.4.5 Similarly the number of greyhounds retired from racing but still homed at their racing kennels is estimated conservatively at around 5,000 by the NGRC. Changes to the way the greyhounds are monitored on a database should soon mean that greyhounds can be traced much more easily. The NGRC encourages owners to take their responsibilities for their dog seriously and it has recently produced a new owner's pack in conjunction with the Retired Greyhound Trust.

3. BGRB AND INDEPENDENT RACECOURSES

3.1 The BGRB cannot condone not having a vet in attendance for all races and trials. It welcomes the Bill highlighting this gap in the standards at most Independent tracks.

3.2 Providing veterinary cover—the draft Bill estimates this could cost around £245 per race night—will force many Independents out of business. The BGRB is keen to encourage Independent racecourses to raise their standards and gain NGRC status. This will mean fulfilling minimum standards, for example, the provision of proper kennels to house the greyhound during a race night and this will require significant capital outlay for Independent tracks.

3.3 The BGRB is proposing to support them from the NGRC-licensed side of the sport with bridging loans and hopes that some of the more progressive Independent racecourses will take this opportunity to convert. Some racecourses have converted to racing under the NGRC rules with great success—Kinsley Stadium, West Yorkshire, is the most recent example. Previously, money has only been available from the British Greyhound Racing Fund (BGRF) (Appendix 6) [Not printed] once a racecourse has already obtained the required standards/facilities and a licence from the NGRC.

3.4 Welfare standards at Independent racecourses vary because they lack a single code of practice or set of regulations; this is not acceptable. However, some are well run and form an important part of their local community. This new initiative from the BGRB will offer them a helping hand to join the NGRC and continue racing with the funding benefits that step involves, and vitally the improvement to the welfare of greyhounds too.

4. REGULATION OF GREYHOUND RACING THROUGH THE BILL

In the RIA (Bill Annex H, page 92) it is suggested that a code of practice could be enforced by local authorities. It also states that another option would be:

— "Consideration is being given to self-regulation by the NGRC who would also regulate non-NGRC tracks—such regulation would not affect local authority."

4.1 The BGRB welcomes any option that improves the standard of welfare for the greyhound at Independent racecourses and would hope that any code goes as far as the current rules of the NGRC.

4.2 As to the "policing" of this Code, the BGRB is concerned that local authority monitoring may lack the specialised skills and awareness of the NGRC Area Stewards, and may not be far reaching enough.

4.3 The NGRC area or Stipendiary Stewards are all chosen for their experience with greyhounds, sometimes as trainers themselves. Thus self regulation also means that the industry can both respect and identify with the culture rather than regarding it as something undesirable imposed from outside.

4.4 The global trend seems to be towards self-regulation and it is not a new phenomenon. Medieval guilds practised it and in the more modern era there are many other successful models such as the Communications Bill and the establishment of OFCOM.

4.5 The BGRB has recognised and embraced the importance of greater transparency within the sport and to this end has been

developing the use of the Internet to broadcast committee details and industry news, while the NGRC is also working with the RGT on the database of greyhounds to improve the traceability of greyhounds after their racing career is over.

25 August 2004

Previous

Contents

Next

Commons

Parliament

Lords

Search

Enquiries

Index

© [Parliamentary copyright 2004](#)

Prepared 9 December 2004

- [A-Z index](#)
- [Glossary](#)
- [Contact us](#)
- [Freedom of Information](#)
- [Jobs](#)
- [Using this website](#)
- [Copyright](#)