

Written Response by the Welsh Government to the report of the Petitions Committee entitled The Final Bend? P-06-1253 Ban greyhound racing in Wales.

The Welsh Government is committed to ensuring high standards of welfare for all animals, at all stages of their lives. We have some of the highest standards in the world and take animal welfare very seriously.

Greyhound racing in Wales is unregulated, in contrast to England where independent tracks are subject to the Welfare of Racing Greyhounds Regulations 2010 and tracks registered with the Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB) are subject to UKAS accredited self-regulation.

Wales has one privately owned greyhound track (the Valley Greyhound Stadium, Ystrad Mynach), which typically holds races on a weekly basis.

The track intends to undergo an upgrade in advance of becoming a GBGB registered track under new ownership. It is suggested, under this regime, the amount of racing will increase significantly. Registration under GBGB industry standards is likely to result in improved welfare standards. However, welfare organisations have expressed concerns the increase in the number of race meetings may result in a rise in the number of surplus dogs and injuries.

In 2019 Welsh Government secured funding for a Partnership Delivery Plan to enable Caerphilly County Borough Council to carry out welfare inspections at the Valley Greyhound Stadium. The objective was to facilitate inspections under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and the Voluntary Code of Practice for the Welfare of Racing Greyhounds (produced by the Animal welfare Network Wales). Animal Health Officers, which included an experienced ex-RSPCA Inspector carried out eight inspections at race events held on Saturday evenings between 2020 and 2022. On the three occasions the officers were accompanied by a veterinary expert, with no serious animal welfare issues reported following these inspections.

I have met with welfare organisations, The Greyhound Board of Great Britain and the owner of Valley Stadium.

I would like to thank the members of the Committee for their Report on greyhound racing in Wales. I have set out my response to the Report's recommendations below.

Detailed Responses to the report's recommendations are set out below:

Recommendation 1

The Welsh Government is already committed to considering licensing of greyhound racing as part of its Animal Welfare Plan. We would encourage that work being prioritised.

Welsh Government response: Accept

We intend to consult on proposals for the licensing of activities involving animals later this year. The consultation will also seek views on how to improve the welfare of racing greyhounds in Wales.

Recommendation 2

A majority of Committee Members believe that Welsh Government action should include a phased ban on greyhound racing in Wales.

Response: Accept in principle

A question considering a phased ban will be included in the consultation. The outcome of the consultation and what action will be taken cannot be pre-empted

Recommendation 3

A greyhound's racing career can make up a short part of its life. Welsh Government action to improve animal welfare should not be restricted to a ban on racing – like the industry's own strategy, it should consider the whole life of dogs, and the conditions in which they are kept before and after their racing careers. This would include the plight of dogs travelling through Wales on their way to races.

Response: Accept

Keepers of greyhounds are required to comply with the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and the Welfare of Animals (Transport) (Wales) Order 2007.

In addition, the Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs applies to all dogs, including greyhounds. The Code is intended to encourage all those who are responsible for dogs to adopt the highest standards. It explains what a person needs to do to meet the standards of care the law requires. If you own or are responsible for a greyhound you have a legal duty to take reasonable steps to ensure its welfare needs are met.

The welfare of animals during transport is protected by The Welfare of Animals (Transport) (Wales) Order 2007. It is an offence to transport any animal in a way which causes, or is likely to cause, injury or unnecessary suffering to that animal. Keepers, or the authorised responsible person, who take greyhounds on a journey, whatever the length, must always apply good practice including appropriate safe containment, ensuring consideration is given to health and welfare requirements prior to, and during the journey.

Recommendation 4

Welsh Government should ensure any changes are subject to widespread consultation, and that advice is available to those working in the industry on how to comply with any new rules or regulations.

Response: Accept

Any changes to policy are subject to full public consultation and will be communicated to those involved and the wider public to ensure compliance.

Recommendation 5

In considering a ban on greyhound racing, the Welsh Government should also look at other sports where animals compete.

Response: Reject

The importance of exemplary welfare standards for animals in Wales extends to all animals. Our Animal Welfare Plan for Wales 2021-26 includes a framework for the realisation of the four animal welfare Programme for Government commitments. It also outlines how we will integrate a broad range of ongoing animal welfare policy work, including statutory guidance for existing Regulations, licensing of animal exhibits, microchipping of dogs and cats, welfare of animals in transport and Codes of Practice.

The need to review existing animal welfare legislation is also recognised. Whilst we maintain some flexibility should new policy actions be required, there is no scope within the current commitments to extend this work to look at banning other sports where animals compete.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lesley Griffiths". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end of the name.

Lesley Griffiths AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Materion Gwledig a Gogledd Cymru, a'r Trefnydd
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