BRIEFING | Investigation into live baiting in the greyhound racing industry

Ground-breaking investigations conducted by Animals Australia and Animal Liberation Queensland have revealed significant numbers of greyhound trainers engaging in the barbaric practice of 'live baiting'. Evidence gathered in training facilities in Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales has directly implicated some 70 individuals, including leading trainers in this illegal activity. Extensive legal briefs were lodged with the RSPCA in each State. Raids have been conducted leading to the immediate suspension of 23 trainers, with investigations continuing.

What is live baiting?

Live baiting refers to the practice of using live animals for the purpose of training greyhounds.

The evidence provided to the RSPCA reveals two illegal training methods: the tying of live animals onto lures to be chased down and mauled by dogs; and the tying of live animals on leads/leashes, with trainers taunting and inciting dogs to attack the helpless animals.

Greyhounds are 'sight' hounds - they chase on the basis of visual stimulation - they are gentle dogs by nature. The practice of live baiting is used by trainers to make dogs chase more aggressively to gain a winning advantage.

The suffering of animals used in live baiting is extreme - both in terms of associated terror and the direct physical trauma suffered through being mauled.


Why were the investigations conducted?

Testimony has been given to government inquiries by individuals, vets, industry informants and the RSPCA that systemic live baiting was occurring in the greyhound industry. The RSPCA spoke of the difficulty in obtaining the physical evidence necessary for investigations and prosecutions to be launched. RSPCA NSW gave six such examples in a government inquiry regarding specific allegations of live baiting that could not be progressed due to lack of first hand evidence.

Acting on information from members of the public, ALQ and Animals Australia investigators used cameras to carry out surveillance of training facilities to enable the gathering of evidence on which the RSPCA could act.

How widespread is live baiting?

The investigations reveal that live baiting is an accepted and routine training method for a significant number of greyhound trainers. Our investigations have implicated 70 individuals, which include trainers and their employees, directly engaging in this illegal practice, but twice this number were present at tracks where live baiting is conducted. Evidence gathered in these investigations should only be
considered a 'snapshot' of the likely extent that live baiting is occurring nationally, in noting the large number of trainers involved and general acceptance of the practice evident in the footage.

**What did the investigations reveal?**

The cruelty documented across three States is egregious and profoundly disturbing. Evidence shows live piglets, possums and rabbits being tied to mechanical lures and flung around race tracks at high speed while being pursued and mauled by dogs. The fear and distress of these animals is obvious yet the perpetrators seem indifferent to their suffering, in some cases even joking about it. Injured animals were not put down by trainers, they continued using them for further training until they eventually died from their injuries.

**Queensland**
Surveillance cameras were used at a greyhound trial track at Churchable, near Gatton in Queensland.

The evidence shows:
- 42 trainers and staff participating in live baiting and numerous others watching.
- piglets, possums and rabbits tied to a mechanical lure; chased, mauled and killed.
- trainers bringing their dogs to the track; they pay $5 for a normal lure, $10 for a live animal and it’s free for people who bring their own live animals.
- in one incident, a possum has her baby pulled from her back then is tied to the lure. She is left on the lure for nearly an hour as dogs chase and rip her to pieces.
- in other incidents live piglets are tied to the lure and flung around the circuit many times, with dogs chasing and ripping at them while the animals scream in terror.

**Victoria**
Surveillance cameras were used at a trial track at Tooradin, near Melbourne in Victoria.
- 17 trainers and staff, including the owner of the track, participating in live baiting.
- a live piglet and live rabbits tied to a mechanical lure; chased, mauled and killed.
- live rabbits on leads being thrown around in front of greyhounds to “excite” and “tease” them, and then encouraging the greyhounds to attack the live rabbits.
- live rabbits stacked in cages in the shed, kept for the purpose of live baiting.
- the young daughter (aged around 5 years old) of one of the trainers is present while rabbits are being used as live bait. She is also holding the sack full of live rabbits that will be used on the leads and lure.
- numerous other trainers present at the track aware of live baiting but not directly implicated because the animal on the lure was dead by the time their dogs trained.

**New South Wales**
Surveillance cameras were used at two greyhound ‘breaking in’ properties at Box Hill and Londonderry.

The evidence shows:
- 13 individuals directly participating in live baiting.
- live rabbits tied to a mechanical lure; chased, mauled and killed.
- a live possum tied to a mechanical lure; chased, mauled and killed.
- live rabbits on leads being thrown around in front of greyhounds to “excite” and “tease” the greyhounds, and then encouraging the greyhounds to attack the live rabbits.

**In summary**
The investigations across three States expose entrenched, widespread, criminal behaviour involving numerous greyhound trainers. By the number of people present during these activities, it is clear that there is widespread industry acceptance of live baiting in Australia.

**Who is supposed to regulate the greyhound racing industry?**

Australia's greyhound racing industry is self-regulated with peak bodies in each State governing the rules of racing. There is minimal (if any) government oversight. Inspections of training facilities by racing bodies vary in frequency. In Queensland in 2014, just 3.5% of Queensland trainers’ properties were inspected; in New South Wales, new rules will see training facilities inspected once every two years; and the most recent figures available from Victoria from 2011 indicate an inspection rate of once every two years. Information from other States is not available.

**Government inquiries**

Numerous inquiries into the racing industry have raised serious issues surrounding integrity, oversight, animal welfare, doping and criminal activity.

A report presented to the Queensland government in 2014 found the racing industry in that State was being run like a ‘private empire’ and recommended former board members and employees be referred to ASIC. A racing review in Victoria in 2008 found links to criminal activity and noted the conflict of interest whereby the State controlling body responsible for the operation of the industry was also responsible for integrity assurances. An inquiry in New South Wales in 2014 received more than 2000 submissions, with many highlighting the abhorrent treatment of animals by the greyhound racing industry, and allegations of live baiting. This review resulted in no recommendations that would sufficiently address these serious welfare issues. In fact one key recommendation – to conduct an inquiry into greyhound breeding to reduce wastage – was rejected.

**Government funding**

State governments provide millions of dollars each year to the greyhound racing industry – actively encouraging growth and participation through breeding incentives, appearance fees, infrastructure and race-day attraction grants and even prize money.

In Queensland, the government is investing $12 million in a controversial new race track at Logan, near Brisbane; and contributes $1.2 million a year in appearance fees.

In Victoria, the government has provided $10 million over the past 4 years for track redevelopments; $1.2 million in grants to clubs to attract more people to the races; and is providing $1.5 million over four years to encourage greyhound breeding in Victoria.

In New South Wales, at least $1.3 million has been provided since 2012 for track improvements; the government is considering a recommendation to cut wagering tax rates which could inject a further $15 million into the NSW greyhound racing industry.

In Tasmania, the greyhound racing industry is sharing in $27 million in state government funding (20 year funding deal from 2009 - 2029).
In Western Australia, greyhound racing is sharing in $13 million of state government funding for infrastructure projects; $6.6 million through the Royalties to Regions program; and was recently allocated $13 million to secure its future at the Cannington race track at Perth.

In South Australia, the government provided $300,000 for track upgrades and marketing.

In the Northern Territory, the government provided $800,000 to the Darwin Greyhound Racing Association in 2013/2014 for facility upgrades and prize money.

Problem Gambling

Australians spend more on gambling per capita than any other country. Over $4 billion is wagered on greyhound racing each year in Australia. A Productivity Commission review estimated the social cost of problem gambling to be at least $4.7 billion a year. A Price Waterhouse Coopers report in NSW in 2014 concluded that the racing industry is a ‘consumptive sector’, and doesn’t ‘generate any significant productivity benefits to the rest of the economy’.

The Greyhound industry and animal welfare

Only about one in every 10 greyhound pups born each year will live a full lifespan. Each year, up to 18,000 healthy dogs, unwanted for greyhound racing, are killed.

- Up to 20,000 greyhound puppies are bred each year nationally, but only 60% of those puppies will be registered to race. The others (around 8,000 pups) are all unaccounted for… judged unlikely to win races, most of these pups will be killed.
- Around 12,000 greyhounds are ‘retired’ from racing (at just 2-4 years old) each year, but less than 2,000 will be rehomed - the others will be killed.
- The Victorian industry’s five year Strategic Plan aims for only 30% of dogs born to be killed before racing and for 50% of racing dogs to be rehomed rather than killed … which reveals how grim the current situation is and the industry acceptance of deaths of unwanted dogs.

Each week, 4 to 5 dogs are killed on racetracks and around 200 are injured.

- Injuries and deaths could be significantly reduced by installing straight tacks and reducing the number of dogs in races - yet the industry has failed to act on these obvious measures.

Each day, the life of most greyhounds is one of deprivation.

- When not training or racing, dogs are kept in small pens and denied stimulation and socialisation. Greyhounds, in their basic needs, are no different to any other dogs who have been bred to be human companions.

The training and racing methods designed to encourage aggressive chase behaviour make dogs difficult to rehome. Greyhounds are effectively trained to fail re-homing and adoption - again revealing that the priority of the industry is using dogs as mechanisms to win races, with little consideration of the welfare, or to the future, of individual animals.
What about the industry’s greyhound adoption program?

The Greyhound Adoption Program (GAP) operates in most States but re-homes only a relatively small number of ex-racing dogs ... around 1,000 nationally each year. The longest established GAP in Victoria rehomed 536 greyhounds last year and the other States significantly fewer. Other rescue groups also rehome greyhounds, but together those efforts mean less than 10% of all pups born each year will live out a natural life.

Prize money

Over 43,000 greyhound races occur in Australia each year at 77 tracks around the country. Races are held every day except Christmas Day and Good Friday.

Successful trainers and breeders can earn well in excess of $1 million each year. Feature races now routinely offer more than $350,000 to the winning dog. Greyhound Racing Victoria is currently advertising that 40 million dollars in prize money is available in Victoria during 2015.

Typical first-place prize money for a novice dog is $5000 at city tracks. If the dog shows potential, it graduates to Group 3 races (prize money of about $25,000), Group 2 races (prize money of $30,000 to $70,000), then, for elite performers, Group 1 feature races.

In each State, 'appearance fees' are on offer to trainers for putting dogs in races. Breeding incentives are also in place - despite the fact that thousands of unwanted greyhounds are killed each year.

Racing integrity

There is little doubt that significant prize money and financial incentives on offer, in combination with minimal regulatory oversight, has led to significant numbers of trainers engaging in illegal practices to gain a winning advantage.

Last month Victoria's leading trainer, Jenny Hunt (the step-daughter of suspended Hall of Fame trainer Graeme Bate) had a greyhound test positive to amphetamines and methamphetamines. This trainer earned well over $1 million in prize money last year and has a dog nominated in Victoria's Greyhound of the Year Awards. In WA, Linda Britton, of the famous Victorian greyhound training dynasty, was named 'Trainer of the Year', despite being suspended for 18 months for drugging offences.

Three of the greyhounds nominated in Victoria's Greyhound of the Year awards to be held on Friday 20th February 2014, are trained by a leading trainer implicated in live baiting offences in this investigation. Last year's NSW Trainer of the Year uses the services of a NSW 'breaker' implicated in live baiting offences in this investigation.

There will be questions around the ability of these dogs to race again given they have been trained using methods that could give them an advantage on an ongoing basis. Hundreds, if not thousands of greyhounds could be implicated. Racing bodies must guarantee the welfare of these dogs and put in a place a plan to ensure they are rehomed, not killed.
How big is greyhound racing internationally?

Australia is one of only eight countries in the world with a commercial greyhound racing industry – Australia’s is by far the biggest. However internationally, it is an industry in decline. In the USA, as a result of increased awareness of the welfare issues inherent to greyhound racing, it is now illegal in 39 states, 28 of the 49 tracks have closed in the last decade and wagering has dramatically reduced.