

# Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee

## 12<sup>th</sup> Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday, 20 April

### Petition PE1758: End Greyhound Racing in Scotland

<b>Petitioner</b>	Gill Docherty on behalf of Scotland Against Greyhound Exploitation
<b>Petition summary</b>	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to put an end to greyhound racing in Scotland.
<b>Webpage</b>	<a href="https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1758">https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1758</a>
<b>SPICe briefing</b>	<a href="http://archive2021.parliament.scot/ResearchBriefingsAndFactsheets/PB19-1758.pdf">http://archive2021.parliament.scot/ResearchBriefingsAndFactsheets/PB19-1758.pdf</a> (Provided by SPICe for consideration by the Session 5 Public Petitions Committee)

## Introduction

1. This paper supports the Committee's evidence session on petition PE1758: End Greyhound Racing in Scotland, which was referred to the Committee following previous consideration in Session 5 by the Public Petitions Committee and the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee.
2. Additional written evidence from the petitioner and other relevant stakeholders is provided in **Annexe A**.

## Background

3. The Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB) is the body with responsibility for the governance, regulation and management of the sport of licensed greyhound racing in England, Scotland and Wales.
4. The GBGB provides rules and regulations on the welfare of greyhounds and facilities at licenced 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."

5. These requirements do not apply to independent greyhound tracks which are not regulated by the GBGB. There is no requirement for central registration or licensing and no code of practice apply to these greyhound tracks.
6. There are currently 23 dog racing tracks in the UK, 19 of which are registered and licensed by the GBGB.
7. At present, there are two greyhound tracks in Scotland. Shawfield Greyhound Stadium (licensed under the GBGB), South Lanarkshire, has been closed since March 2020, following the suspension of racing due to the COVID-19 pandemic and it is unclear whether it will reopen.
8. The second, Thornton Greyhounds (independent), Kirkcaldy, is the only greyhound track currently operating in Scotland.

## **Petitioner's view**

9. The petitioner is concerned for the welfare of greyhounds at greyhound racing tracks and calls on the Scottish Government to introduce legislation to make greyhound racing illegal in Scotland.
10. In the petitioner's most recent submission (provided in Annexe A), the petitioner raises the following key concerns:
  - Inherent track risks
  - Injuries and deaths
  - Quality of life
  - Doping of dogs
  - Traceability of dogs
  - Current legislation being ineffective
11. In relation to injuries and death, the petitioner cites annual statistics, published by the GBGB. The petitioner states that:

“since 2017, when the industry first published data, until the end of 2020, there were 18,345 injuries on UK registered tracks including Shawfield. In this same period the industry was responsible for the deaths of at least 3,066 greyhounds”.
12. The petitioner also states that the Cross-Party Group for Animal Welfare requested data relating specifically to Shawfield from the GBGB, but the information received was limited as it did not provide full injury and death statistics. The petitioner believes that the statistics shared do not include dogs who have died while on the track or due to neglect or illness while in racing kennels.
13. The data provided by GBGB on greyhound racing at Shawfield shows that, from 2017 to the end of 2020, there were 18,821 dogs runs, 197 injuries and 15 “total euthanasia”.

14. The petitioner cites the use of drugs in greyhound racing as a major concern, stating that:

“between 2017-20 there were almost 30 instances of dogs racing at Shawfield Stadium being found to have cocaine metabolites, atenolol, steroids and other drugs in their systems – designed to influence the outcome of a race, mask pain, slow down or speed up the animal.”

15. The petitioner is concerned by a lack of regulations at “independent” racing tracks, stating that:

“The reason this situation quite frankly terrifies us is that Thornton is not regulated. A Freedom of Information request submitted to Fife Council in October 2021 revealed that Thornton has a “premises licence”. However there have been no inspections for many years. There is no vet on site. No kennel or track inspections. No records kept pertaining to injury or death of dogs. No requirement to keep such records. The dogs racing there are not traceable. No drug testing is carried out. Fife Council directed us to the SSPCA and the Gambling Commission. We are awaiting responses from FOI requests.”

## Scottish Government action

16. The [Animal Health and Welfare \(Scotland\) Act 2006](#) includes provisions to ensure that action can be taken if the welfare of greyhounds, whether still racing or retired, is not being met. In relation to the 2006 Act, the SPICe briefing quotes the Scottish Government confirming that “the Act also has the flexibility to allow a wide range of animal related activities, such as circuses, animal sanctuaries, pet dealing, greyhound racing and livery yards to be regulated”.
17. Part 2 of the [Animal Health and Welfare \(Scotland\) Act 2006](#) sets out animal welfare offences, for example, it is an offence to cause a protected animal unnecessary suffering, either through an action or by omission. It is also an offence to not take reasonable steps to ensure the needs of an animal in a person’s care are met.
18. The [Animals and Wildlife \(Penalties, Protections and Powers\) \(Scotland\) Act 2020](#) amended the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006, providing further protections to animals and wildlife in Scotland. Under the Act, a person convicted of the offence of causing an animal unnecessary suffering can now be sentenced to a period of up to five years in prison and/or an unlimited fine.
19. Announced as part of the [Scottish Government’s 2018-19 Programme for Government](#), the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission (SAWC) was fully established in September 2020 and focuses on the protection of wild and companion animals while also providing scientific and ethical advice to government.
20. The SAWC includes greyhound racing as a “potential area [of work] in the medium term”. Its work plan, published July 2021, states—

“Recent petitions on banning racing greyhounds have increased awareness of potential welfare concerns. Could be considered in future as GBGB regulation only covers licensed tracks, to address issues with unlicensed tracks, also whether regulation is effective in, for example, reducing fatalities at tracks.”

## Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee consideration

21. At its meeting on 21 November 2019, the Public Petitions Committee agreed to refer the petition to the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee under Rule 15.6.2 of Standing Orders. The Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (ECCLR) Committee considered the petition on [10 December 2019](#) and [23 February 2021](#).
22. At its final consideration of this petition, the ECCLR Committee agreed to keep the petition open and to write to the SAWC to ask whether the Commission would move the issue of greyhound racing forward in its work plan; share any concerns that it has around animal welfare issues for greyhounds; and whether a report can be produced on its findings and shared with the Committee.
23. Due to an oversight, the letter was not sent to the SAWC by the ECCLR Committee.

## Recent parliamentary questions

24. Animal welfare in greyhound racing was raised in recent parliamentary questions by Colin Smyth on [16 September 2021](#) and by Mark Ruskell on [3 March 2022](#).
25. Mark Ruskell asked the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands, Mairi Gougeon, the following question:

“The Greyhound Board of Great Britain has finally released injury data from greyhound racing at Shawfield, which reveal that injuries in 2020 doubled in comparison with 2018. Given the growing evidence of the systematic abuse of greyhounds, including doping, does the cabinet secretary agree that it is time to explore all options for further regulation of that brutal industry?”

26. Mairi Gougeon responded:

“We do not have plans to ban the racing of greyhounds in Scotland, but we would consider any recommendations that the Scottish animal welfare commission may make on greyhound welfare in due course.

We consider 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 requirements for greyhounds, whether they are still racing or retired, are not being met. The provisions in part 2 of the 2006 act apply to all people who are responsible for animals, including breeders, trainers and owners of racing greyhounds.”

## **For decision**

**27. Members are invited to consider whether to progress or close the petition.**

**28. If the Committee wishes to progress the petition, members may wish to—**

- **Write to the SAWC to ask:**
  - **for further information about its views about the welfare of greyhounds racing in Scotland generally;**
  - **more specifically, its views on unlicensed greyhound racing tracks operating in Scotland; and**
  - **what consideration it has given to including and/or prioritising this issue within its work programme.**
- **Write to Thornton Greyhounds to ask for information about how it protects the welfare of greyhounds racing at its track.**

**Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee clerks  
April 2022**

## Annexe A

The following submissions are circulated in connection with consideration of the petition at this meeting–

### **Petitioner's submission**

[Scotland Against Greyhound Exploitation submission of 4 April 2022](#)

### **Further submissions**

[League Against Cruel Sports Scotland submission of May 2021](#)

[Scotland for Animals submission of January 2022](#)

[All-Party Parliamentary Dog Advisory Welfare Group \(APDAWG\) submission of 14 March 2022](#)

[OneKind submission of 30 March 2022](#)

[Say No to Greyhound Racing submission of 19 March 2022](#)

[Grey 2K USA submission of 11 April 2022](#)

[Scottish SPCA submission of 13 April 2022](#)