Frequently Asked Questions: Greyhound welfare

Why are Greyhounds used in racing?

Greyhounds are sight hounds that can run up to 60km per hour, making them one of the fastest animals in the world. Unfortunately this innate ability to run at high speed has resulted in many thousands of Greyhounds being bred and trained for racing each year in Australia alone.

In many countries around the world, Greyhound racing is an amateur sport but in Australia, it is a part of a major gambling industry worth tens of millions of dollars every year. Greyhound racing is quickly becoming a socially unacceptable form of entertainment. In the USA alone, it is illegal in 39 states.

Is the RSPCA opposed to Greyhound racing?

The RSPCA believes that there are serious animal welfare problems inherent in and associated with the Greyhound racing industry. Based on these issues below, the RSPCA demands an urgent review by the Victorian State Government. Regulation by Greyhound Racing Victoria has simply not been effective at protecting the welfare of these dogs. These issues include:

1. **Significant overbreeding and oversupply of Greyhounds**

   Sadly, thousands of Greyhounds are born in Australia each year that do not compete in racing and are ‘surplus’ to industry needs. Industry statistics show that up to around 7,000 Greyhounds every year (40% of Greyhounds born) are not registered with a name and do not compete in racing. These dogs are described by the industry as ‘wastage’. The RSPCA believes this is a disgusting term to describe the lives of sentient, companion animals.

   Although the industry is quick to suggest that they are proactively working to reduce overbreeding - financial incentives for breeding, appearance fees as well as the lure of prize money all ensure this that overbreeding continues. Ongoing ‘wastage’ also continues over time as active racing Greyhounds retire from racing or are discarded by the industry due to injury or sub-optimal performance, among other reasons.

   The racing career for a Greyhound is relatively very short. Dogs who begin a racing career usually start racing at about 1.5 years of age and are generally retired by 2-5 years of age, or earlier if they develop injuries or do not perform well.

   Many of these unwanted Greyhounds will be euthanased despite being otherwise healthy and suited to new homes. Yes - because they are too slow, they lose their life. Statistics on the fate of unwanted Greyhounds are not published by industry, but based on the available information it is clear that the euthanasia rate is unacceptable high, with a conservative estimate of 9,000 adult Greyhounds tragically put down every year.

   While Greyhound adoption programs are a step forward, they cannot cope with the high numbers of Greyhounds (thousands each year) moving through the system. Only a very small proportion of ex-racing Greyhounds (around 1,000) are adopted annually in Australia through industry Greyhound adoption programs.
2. **High rate of injuries**

For Greyhounds making their way to the track, they are at risk of suffering injury, pain and distress as a result of training or competition. Various types of injuries are regularly reported including serious bone fractures and muscle injuries: the first turn of the racetrack is a common site for accidents or collisions to occur. Serious injuries can lead to death on the track or require immediate euthanasia. Injury statistics are not published for all tracks, but based on industry figures we estimate that around 600 Greyhounds may be injured every month on Greyhound tracks during races across Australia. Add to this, injuries will occur during training.

3. **Inadequate socialisation and living in confinement**

Many Greyhound puppies and adult Greyhounds are never adequately socialised, either with other dogs or with humans. Dogs that are socially deprived are more likely to develop fearfulness and antisocial behaviour which impacts negatively on their welfare. Lack of adequate socialisation also makes it more difficult to rehome retired or unwanted Greyhounds.

Racing Greyhounds usually spend their lives living in a kennel environment at their trainer’s facility rather than living with their owner. Aside from their racing training, this kennel is their home. For the small portion that have an opportunity to find a new home, they face learning about the outside world - most don’t know how to use stairs, walk on floor boards or some have never seen windows. The reality of a racing Greyhound is not consistent with the loving home a companion dog should experience.

4. **Drugging with banned substances**

Various pharmaceutical substances have been administered to racing Greyhounds in the quest for enhanced performance and increased potential to win races. Racing authorities maintain a list of banned substances and run drug testing programs, however drug use still occurs. Administration of banned substances is a serious animal welfare issue as many of these drugs can have serious physical and psychological effects on Greyhounds. Dogs have tested positive to amphetamines, caffeine, anabolic steroids, Viagra, cocaine and erythropoietin (EPO).

5. **Lack of industry transparency and accountability**

Currently there is a major lack of published data on the life cycle and outcome for racing Greyhounds. This lack of transparency has major ramifications in terms of tracking animal welfare outcomes. What is happening to all these dogs exploited in the name of ‘sport’? Missing figures include: the exact number of Greyhounds born each year; the number of Greyhounds ‘named’ as a proportion of the Greyhounds born; rates of euthanasia and the number of racing Greyhounds exported.
6. Inadequate regulation or enforceable standards

The Greyhound Racing industry is overseen by each state and territory’s Greyhound Racing Authority who is responsible for both the regulation of the industry and its commercial development, promotion and marketing. Animal welfare standards in the industry are minimal and in many cases unenforceable. This self-regulatory model fails to ensure that the welfare of Greyhounds is prioritised and can lead to serious conflicts of interest, such as the use of financial incentives to promote Greyhound breeding which in turn increase the number of Greyhounds who die in the name of this ‘sport’.

7. Export of Greyhounds

Australian Greyhounds are sold and exported overseas for racing purposes to a range of countries including China and Vietnam. Exporting places them at significant risk of poor animal welfare outcomes including stress and injuries associated with long-distance transport, lack of animal welfare legal protection in importing countries, and the potential to enter the dog meat trade. In 2014, Greyhounds Australasia introduced voluntary suspensions of Greyhound passports to certain destinations due to animal welfare concerns. Unfortunately this is only voluntary.

Who oversees the Greyhound racing industry in Australia?

The Greyhound Racing industry is overseen by each state and territory’s Greyhound Racing authority. Each state and territory’s Minister for Racing oversees the organisations and has the power to increase regulation, which the RSPCA suggests is desperately needed.

What is the RSPCA’s view on the self-regulation of the Greyhound racing industry?

The RSPCA’s view is that the current framework where Greyhound Racing Authorities self-regulate their industry presents a conflict of interest. It is inappropriate for a controlling body to simultaneously promote and expand an industry whilst also being responsible for integrity and regulatory matters.

In order to address this issue, a formal separation needs to occur between the commercial management functions of Greyhound authorities, such as the promotion of the industry, and other regulatory and integrity functions such as participant disciplinary action, stewards management and Greyhound welfare.

What happens to Greyhounds when they can no longer race or are deemed too slow/unsuitable for racing?

Similar to many other companion dogs, Greyhounds may live up to 13 years but the vast majority of racing Greyhounds do not see this age or have the opportunity to live in a loving home. When deemed unsuitable for racing, many Greyhounds are faced with euthanasia at the request of their trainer.
Are all Greyhound trainers ‘bad’?

There are some very sincere Greyhound trainers who love their dogs and have the utmost respect and admiration for the Greyhound racing industry, but there are many who disregard the welfare of their dogs, viewing these animals as a commodity. The inherent issues in this industry suggest that many more trainers are openly compromising the welfare of Greyhounds throughout Victoria for profit.

Is Greyhound racing banned anywhere in the world?

Greyhound racing is illegal in 39 states of the USA, including most recently a ban in Colorado.

Is it true that Australian Greyhounds are exported overseas?

Yes. Australian Greyhounds are currently exported for racing purposes. Most are exported from QLD and NSW and are sent to countries such as China, Vietnam, Macau and South Korea. In 2010, a total of 797 Greyhounds were exported.

There are a number of serious animal welfare concerns associated with export. Transport is inherently stressful for animals and therefore transport should only be undertaken where absolutely necessary. There are injury and stress risks throughout the transport process which increase as the journey length increases. In addition, animal protection laws may not exist in the destination countries (or if laws do exist they may not be enforced). There are also serious concerns about the apparent lack of formal re-homing programs in the destination countries.

How has the RSPCA worked to influence change in Greyhound welfare?

The RSPCA works to tirelessly fight animal cruelty and has been working to improve the welfare of Greyhounds behind-the-scenes by influencing government and other organisations. We have made a number of submissions to governments calling for strengthening of regulation, enforcement, offences and penalties to help protect Greyhounds from cruelty and prevent practices such as live baiting from occurring. The RSPCA has also worked hard to raise the profile of Greyhounds as pets to improve rehoming rates for ex-racing Greyhounds.

Is racing itself dangerous for Greyhounds?

Greyhounds love to run but sadly, competitive racing leads to serious injury and sometimes death. Various types of injuries are regularly reported including serious bone fractures and muscle injuries: the first turn of the racetrack is a common site for accidents or collisions to occur. Serious injuries can lead to death on the track or require immediate euthanasia. Injury statistics are not published for all tracks, but based on industry figures we estimate that around 600 Greyhounds may be injured every month on Greyhound tracks during races across Australia. Additional injuries will occur during training.

Are all Greyhounds at risk of hurting small animals?

Most Greyhounds are no more likely than any other dog to harm other animals. Many Greyhounds live in harmony with cats and small animals. Like any companion animal, it’s important that Greyhounds are temperament tested for their suitability to live with other animals before putting them in this situation.
How can I adopt a Greyhound?

Greyhounds are gentle and well mannered, thriving on human companionship. Greyhounds are intelligent, friendly dogs, well suited to a variety of different lifestyles. Those interested in giving a Greyhound a loving new home are welcome to visit our website and search our Adoption Centres across the state. Alternatively, there are several other welfare organisations that help to rehome retired racing dogs.

Why does the RSPCA work to rehome dogs from the Greyhound Adoption Program (GAP) which is run by Greyhound Racing Victoria?

Sadly due to the overbreeding of Greyhounds for racing, there are large numbers of these dogs needing a second chance at happiness. Working with GAP, we are able to find more of these animals homes.

How can I take action to improve Greyhound welfare?

1. The Victorian Racing Minister Hon. Martin Pakula MP has authority to intervene and demand changes in the racing industry - visit www.rspcavic.org/Greyhoundracing to obtain his contact details.
2. Never attend or gamble on a Greyhound race and educate your friends to also not support the industry.
3. Consider adopting a retired Greyhound from the RSPCA or another welfare organisation.