

# **Greyhounds in 2017: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly**

by Jeff White

## **The Good**

Greyhound Racing New South Wales brought in a new race day hydration policy at all tracks in the state in February. Dogs were required to be provided with drinking water while awaiting their races. Several trainers throughout the rest of the year were defiant; some were disciplined for refusing to comply.

With the infamous Canidrome set to close down in July 2018, activists in Macau and around the world got to work making plans to rehome the more than 600 greyhounds that will be discarded. A handful of greyhounds were rescued from the Canidrome and rehomed, thanks to the efforts of ANIMA in Macau.

In a victory for a multi-year activist campaign, the Queensland government cancelled plans to build a dog racing track in Logan.

### **Track closures:**

- The greyhound track in Coonamble, NSW was shut down after quarterly injury reports showed it was the most dangerous track in the state, with 11 major or catastrophic injuries per 1000 starts.
- Hall Green racetrack in Birmingham, U.K., was closed down.
- After a multi-year battle, the Wimbledon, U.K. greyhound racetrack was finally closed and made available for redevelopment as a football stadium.
- An appeals court overruled Florida racing regulators, and permitted Magic City Casino in Miami to replace its greyhound racetrack with a jai alai fronton.
- Money-losing Harold's Cross greyhound stadium in Dublin was sold by the cash-strapped Irish Greyhound Board; the land will be redeveloped as a school site.
- Mobile Greyhound Park in Alabama closed its doors forever.

The Irish dog racing industry was in turmoil as a bitter dispute between the Irish Greyhound Board and owners and trainers escalated into a boycott of the Shelbourne Park track, which was forced to close down for four months.

A Florida state senator has proposed an amendment to the state constitution that would outlaw greyhound racing. If accepted, it will be put to a vote in the general elections next November.

The Australian Capital Territory and the state of Tasmania both announced plans to repeal or amend laws requiring pet greyhounds to be muzzled when in public. Victoria is expected to make an announcement on the subject very soon.

Legislators in the state of Kansas failed to pass a bill that would have reduced the gambling taxes on greyhound racing, thereby thwarting plans of billionaire gambling magnate Phil Ruffin to reopen two mothballed greyhound tracks. Local councillors in Sedgwick County, however, voted

to sell the land on which the long-closed Wichita Greyhound Park is located. It is likely that Phil Ruffin will be the highest bidder for the property.

Local councils turned down several expansion applications by Australian racing industry participants:

- Latrobe city council in Victoria rejected an application to establish a greyhound keeping, training, and breeding facility.
- Moorabool council in the same state refused permission to a greyhound trainer who had bought an animal boarding house to expand the premises to accommodate 120 greyhounds.
- Bundaberg city council in Queensland rejected a trainer's application to enlarge his kennel capacity from 18 to 38 dogs.
- A couple in Mandurama, NSW lost their appeal against a local council's denial of a development application to build a greyhound training facility.

An arbiter in NSW ruled that the racing regulator and the racing minister had wrongly claimed privilege for thousands of secret documents that they had been ordered to produce to the Legislative Council, thereby making them available to any member of the public to examine.

The last remaining greyhound racetrack in Iowa once again lost money this year.

1,650 people attended "Shut It Down" rallies across Australia on the weekend of April 9.

The Australian Capital Territory government passed the Domestic Animals (Racing Greyhounds) Amendment Act 2017, which forbids greyhound racing in the territory after April 30, 2018. Owners, breeders, and trainers in the ACT will still be permitted to continue their business, so long as the dogs are raced on tracks outside the territory.

A study of racetrack design, commissioned by GRNSW, concluded that oval race tracks were hazardous to the safety of greyhounds, and recommended the use of straight tracks. Reaction from the industry was generally favourable.

Racing regulators in South Australia and Western Australia announced plans to offer "rebates" to owners of dogs that suffer on-track injuries, to mitigate the cost of surgery and reduce the incidence of "euthanasia" for repairable injuries.

Greyhounds have been rescued from the "meat trade" in China and South Korea, and activist campaigns have created a growing public awareness of the problem worldwide.

In 2016 Greyhound Racing Victoria proposed a series of changes to the local rules of racing, regarding greyhound rehoming, euthanasia, exports, and participant registration. Those came into effect October 1, 2017, and, predictably, were met with howls of protest from industry participants. GRV has also asked for public comment on draft penalty guidelines for animal welfare infractions, to be implemented next year.

A whistleblower ex-employee of a Texas canine blood collection company presented detailed and damning evidence of squalor and neglect of the ex-racing greyhounds imprisoned there.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) led a successful campaign to get the dogs rescued and rehomed, putting the "blood bank" out of business. Meanwhile, the National Greyhound Association, which had insisted all along that the greyhounds were in no danger, nevertheless attempted to take credit for the rescue of the dogs, and belatedly brought out guidelines for industry members to follow when giving or selling greyhounds to be canine blood donors.

### **The Bad**

A large-scale illicit greyhound exporting operation run from New South Wales by four industry insiders was exposed. GRNSW found brothers Mark and Steven Farrugia, and couple Sam and Patricia Cauchi, guilty of a total of 464 administrative charges under the industry's export rules. Investigators identified at least 544 greyhounds that had vanished overseas without appropriate paperwork, 408 of which were registered in NSW. The Farrugia brothers were fined \$22,000 and disqualified for two and a half years for sending 96 greyhounds to Macau and 70 to Shanghai. No penalty has been made public for Sam and Patricia Cauchi. The Australian government still shows no inclination to outlaw exports of greyhounds to any country.

The New Zealand greyhound racing industry ended 2016 by failing to live up to its promise to report injuries and deaths by year end. But a shocking partial picture of those deaths and injuries was exposed in the 2017 "Hansen Report" on greyhound welfare. In the last three seasons 165 greyhounds died or suffered fatal injuries on New Zealand tracks. 309 greyhounds were euthanized in the 2016-17 racing year alone, and 1,447 in the last four seasons, with another 1,271 unaccounted for because of incomplete data and poor record-keeping. The recently-appointed racing minister, with classic understatement, called the figures "unacceptable", but he was quick to blame a handful of people for giving the rest of the industry a bad name. The Hansen Report came only a few days after the minister, Winston Peters, had been informed in briefing reports that the industry was struggling to survive financially.

GREY2K USA issued a report on drugs in the U.S. greyhound racing industry, based on the industry's own publicly available records. From 2007 to 2017 there have been 847 greyhound drug positives, including 71 for cocaine metabolites. Industry spokespeople tried to minimize the report's figures by saying there had been six million racing starts during that period, carefully avoiding to mention the fact that drug tests were administered for only a small fraction of those racing starts.

In November two notorious greyhound training brothers, John and Wayne Vanderburg of New South Wales, who were suspected of involvement in a race-fixing cartel that administered alcohol to dogs to slow them down on the racetrack, pleaded guilty in criminal court to possession of the euthanasia drug pentobarbital, anabolic steroids, and firearm ammunition magazines. They were fined a total of \$7,110. Apparently police were unable to get sufficient evidence to charge them with race-fixing.

Simulcasts of U.K. greyhound racing were expanded into Spain and Nigeria for the benefit of gamblers in those countries.

New South Wales premier Mike Baird resigned, after "backflipping" on the abolition of greyhound racing. The Greyhound Industry Reform Panel (GIRP) came up with 122 recommendations for reform, including the separation of the commercial and animal welfare regulatory functions. Following those recommendations, the Greyhound Racing Act 2017 was passed, repealing the 2016 Act that was to have banned greyhound racing this year, and establishing a new Greyhound Welfare and Integrity Commission (GWIC). The government committed \$41 million dollars over five years to pay for implementation of the recommendations. The chair of the GIRP, Morris Iemma, was later named Chairman of the revamped Greyhound Racing New South Wales. John Keniry was named as one of three Commissioners to head the new GWIC. Keniry had co-ordinated the 2016 Greyhound Transition Taskforce that was established to oversee the winding up of the racing industry in New South Wales, prior to the "backflip". Keniry was one of the people who had advised Baird to reverse the racing ban.

Vietnam legalized gambling on greyhound races. SIBC International Ltd. of Hong Kong launched a feasibility study on opening a second racetrack in the city of Can Tho.

33 greyhounds and other "livestock" died in a bushfire in New South Wales.

A Florida greyhound died and 72 others were sickened after being fed cheap, tainted "4-D" meat in a kennel at Sanford-Orlando Kennel Club.

New South Wales trainer Didier Dupuche was disqualified for 15 years for starving a greyhound to death.

Thousands of Florida racing greyhounds endured the battering of Hurricane Irma, after racing kennel operators elected not to evacuate their dogs before the storm hit. No dogs were reported injured, although many undoubtedly endured psychological trauma.

The West Virginia legislature passed a budget bill that included ending the \$15 million a year subsidy to greyhound breeders, but the state governor vetoed that portion of the bill.

Serial offender Mark Azzopardi was convicted one time too many of presenting a greyhound for racing in New South Wales with a prohibited substance in its urine. The GRNSW Inquiry Panel added another 13 years onto his current disqualification, which will now end in 22 years' time.

An outbreak of flesh-eating disease killed at least four racing greyhounds in kennels in Darwin.

A Florida bill to ban giving steroids to racing greyhounds passed the House of Representatives, but died in the Senate without coming up for a vote. Another bill that would have allowed "decoupling" of dog tracks from other forms of gambling also failed to pass. Similar bills have been introduced for consideration once again in 2018.

Greyhound Racing Victoria is bringing back financial incentives for greyhound breeders. Incentives were discontinued in 2015, to curb overbreeding.

Shocking testimony about the treatment and deaths of racing greyhounds was given by animal welfare groups to the Irish parliamentary Agriculture committee. And opposition members of the Dáil forced a debate on the welfare of animals, including greyhounds; but the government has taken no action. Nor has it placed limits on greyhound exports, despite a vigorous campaign by activists and public protests calling for an end to exports to China, Pakistan, Macau, Vietnam, etc. Also, European Union rules are said to prevent Ireland from restricting exports to Spain and other EU countries that have inadequate protections for greyhound welfare.

Victoria's government released a draft Code of Practice for the Keeping of Racing Greyhounds, and invited public comment. The reaction from the industry was loud and long, including claims that the mandatory minimum requirements for housing, exercise, socialization, mental stimulation, record keeping, and staffing would bankrupt the industry. The government promptly signalled that it would back down on many of the proposals, and a weakened final version of the code is expected to be released soon.

Queensland's Racing Integrity Commission (QRIC) issued its first annual report. It showed, among other things, that about 1 in 4 greyhounds given by owners and trainers to QRIC's Greyhound Adoption Program (GAP) were "euthanized" after being deemed unsuitable for adoption. This revelation proved so embarrassing to the Commission that it has proposed stringent new procedures to allow the GAP to accept only those greyhounds deemed by a screening process to be suitable candidates for adoption. This will dramatically reduce the reported number of dogs killed by GAP, but we can assume that the dogs they reject will still end up dead nevertheless.

### **The Ugly**

In Hartlepool, England, witnesses reported seeing several greyhounds tossed into the cold waters of the North Sea in November by three men and then taken out again. Some people described it as a local training method for greyhounds, designed to "strengthen their legs". Despite several eyewitnesses and photographic evidence, Police and the RSPCA seem to have made no progress in tracking down the culprits.

#### **Live baiting lives on in Australia:**

- Queensland trainer/owner Donald Peter May was convicted of live baiting greyhounds using piglets. The magistrate called it "barbaric" but gave him a suspended sentence and no fine.
- Barry Tharle of Victoria was banned for life from the racing industry for using a live possum to bait a training lure.
- NSW trainer Chad Achurch was sent to jail for 6 months for live baiting, and banned for life from owning any animals.
- Notorious Queensland live baiter Tom Noble walked out of the Court of Appeal without a fine or a term of imprisonment.
- Paul Anderton had his 8-year disqualification for live baiting overturned by the Victorian Commercial Appeals Tribunal, which found that the rabbit used to lure his greyhound at the

notorious Tooradin trial track in 2014 was probably not alive at the time secret video footage of the incident was captured.

### **Florida's cocaine crisis deepens:**

- Trainer Yoanly Savon had his licence revoked after his dogs had failed 24 drug tests in 2016.
- Malcolm McAllister had his training licence permanently revoked after five of his greyhounds tested positive for cocaine metabolites in a 17-day period.
- But the biggest drug scandal in Florida's greyhound racing history involves two trainers: Charles McClellan, who had 12 dogs test positive for cocaine metabolites a total of 18 times in four months this year, and Natasha Nemeth, from the same racetrack, whose dogs had 6 positive cocaine tests. McClellan has a previous record of drug infractions. Both McClellan and Nemeth went to court to challenge the legality of Florida's drug-testing regime for greyhounds, and the court agreed with their contention that the testing procedures were not done according to law. In the result, Florida greyhound racing is left without any drug testing program, until such time as one is properly enshrined in law.

### **The scum always rises to the top**

- Brendon Cole, whose wife Lisa is the top-winning trainer in New Zealand, is being investigated by the SPCA for the third time for suspected live baiting. Some former employees and others have come forward with information implicating Cole in live baiting practices going back several years.
- One of Ireland's top trainers, Graham Holland, had dogs test positive for pentobarbital and cocaine (twice).
- Prominent British greyhound trainer Malcolm Taylor was banned from the industry after an inspection of his kennel revealed 58 dogs living in horrific conditions.
- Prominent New Zealand trainer Ray Adcock was fined after a greyhound failed a drug test for Salbutamol. The Hall of Fame trainer was given a \$2,000 discount off the \$5000 fine in recognition of his "almost legendary status in the greyhound racing industry".
- Western Australian trainer Keith Harding was fined \$1,500 for "improper handling" of a greyhound. Two weeks later, he was inducted into the WA racing industry's Hall of Fame.
- Tasmania's leading greyhound trainer, Anthony Bullock, was fined \$2000 for a positive arsenic swab.