

The brutality must be punished

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FULL TEXT

IS the greyhound racing industry irredeemably rotten or can it be saved from the minority of miscreants who continue backward practices that repulse decent human beings?

Not everyone involved in greyhound racing is an animal-abusing low-life but there are too many animal-abusing lowlifes in the industry, even after the reckoning that followed the 2015 live-baiting scandal.

If the latest allegations are accurate then we are faced with the disturbing reality that the industry has individuals willing to commit horrendous acts of cruelty in the hope of gaining a minor (perceived) advantage. Last week the Herald Sun reported that a number of trainers were alleged to have been involved in a new live-baiting scandal in which live possums were used to "blood" racing greyhounds.

Just imagine for a second what is being alleged here. A man walks into bushland to trap possums, the terrified animals are then passed on to greyhound trainers who strap them to a lure to be chased and then mauled by racing dogs being "blooded" in the hope that they'll run faster.

It is that type of sadistic brutality that makes reasonable people detest a sport and industry that is enjoyed by many decent folk who would never dream of participating in such practices. Four years ago the entire greyhound racing industry was on its knees after revelations that dozens of trainers were implicated in live baiting. A Four Corners report revealed stomach-turning instances of animal abuse of piglets, rabbits and possums that shocked Australia. Animals Australia, with Animal Liberation Queensland, had shot hours of footage, including a possum thrashing as it was mauled by dogs, another possum being torn apart after being attached to a lure and hurled around a track at breakneck speed, and other animals suffering similar gruesome deaths.

"The screaming of terrified piglets and rabbits as they were flung around the track is spinechilling, but equally so was seeing trainers completely unmoved by the suffering of these animals," ALQ's Hayley Cotton said.

"Those involved don't even put suffering animals out of their agony, they just use them again and again while they remain alive." Cotton said that, once the story was aired, greyhound forums were alight with chatter confirming the practices were widespread.

"It's even been suggested live kills are needed to get greyhounds to chase," she said. The belief that dogs will run faster if you increase their prey drive is why some animal activists believe the industry will always have a live-baiting issue.

"I'm not surprised at all that it's happening behind closed doors," said Julia Cockram, from the Coalition for the Protection of Greyhounds. "I'm pretty sure it's much more widespread than three individuals in the industry." Last time around, the outcry was so strong that the NSW government made the kneejerk decision to ban the sport, a move that played a not insignificant part in diminishing support for then Premier Mike Baird, but there were also plenty in favour of ending an industry that is highly lucrative for the betting agencies.

TAB turnover on greyhound racing was more than \$930 million in 2017-2018. But despite the high stakes, the RSPCA does not want to see a ban. RSPCA CEO Dr Liz Walker called the latest allegations "horrendous" but applauded Greyhound Racing Victoria for investigating those suspected of live baiting.

"It's horrendous to think that anybody thinks it's OK to strap a live animal on a lure and then let other animals chase it, terrorise it and bite it," Dr Walker said on 3AW.

"The level of fear, terror, pain and stress that those animals would feel is just incomprehensible ...it's really

disappointing to think that, four years down the track, there's still people who think it's OK. What is comforting is that there's evidence from Greyhound Racing Victoria, you can look at their annual report, is that they've found this and working to hold them to account." GRV deserves praise for pursuing these inquiries and doing what it can to stamp out a brutal, backward practice that has no place in a civilised country.

Whether it's wildlife, livestock, racing animals or pets, those who abuse animals display a sociopathic lack of empathy for sentient beings that feel fear, stress and pain. Rita Panahi is a Herald Sun columnist.

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