

GREYHOUND RACING THE CASE FOR STRAIGHT TRACK RACING

Greyhound Industry Reform Panel

In 2016 the NSW Government established a Greyhound Industry Reform Panel to provide recommendations on potential new animal welfare and governance arrangements to reform the industry. The Panel reported to the NSW Government in February 2017.¹ The Panel made 122 recommendations. These included the following which are relevant to the case for straight track racing.

Recommendation 103 ‘Research already commissioned by GRNSW on track design and safety by the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) should be completed and funded by the new commercial body.’

Recommendation 104 ‘GRNSW should develop minimum track design and safety standards that support the safest form of racing which could include:.....more straight track racing’.

Government Response to the Recommendations

Following receipt of the Panel’s report, the Government examined the recommendations and provided the following responses:

- **Recommendation 103.** Accepted. Additional research activities, such as chase motivation research that is being developed by the University of Sydney, should also be completed.
- **Recommendation 104.** Accepted.²

University of Technology Sydney Research

A research services agreement between GRNSW and UTS was executed on 15 February 2016 to investigate factors influencing greyhound racetrack safety (as defined by incidents and injury risk) and develop best-practice recommendations.

University of Technology Sydney Report

In June 17, UTS delivered a Phase I Report covering the period Jan 2016 to 31 Dec 2016 titled *Identifying Optimal Greyhound Track Design for Greyhound Safety and Welfare*.³ The report contains 11 interim recommendations including recommendation 10 which is relevant to straight tracks.

¹ https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/101738/final-panel-report-february-2017.pdf

² https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/102165/Greyhound-racing-reforms-Government-response-recommendations.pdf

³ [http://www.grnsw.com.au/uploads/GRNSW%20Phase%20I%20Report%20FINAL%2020170605\(1\).pdf](http://www.grnsw.com.au/uploads/GRNSW%20Phase%20I%20Report%20FINAL%2020170605(1).pdf)

Interim Recommendations

A.1 Clearly the best option is to use only straight tracks.

A.2 The use of straight tracks would eliminate all injuries associated with greyhounds needing to negotiate their way safely around the bend.

Interim Recommendations A1 and A2 Discussion.

Chapter 6 of the Report contains discussion of Interim Recommendations A1 and A2. This discussion is shown below in italics.

6.12 Clearly using a straight track would eliminate all injuries that are directly associated with bends.

6.13 Bends are problematic for a number of reasons, including but not limited to: the centrifugal force causes the leading greyhound to slow down as it enters the bend and this slowing down results in increased congestion for the closely trailing greyhounds as they are also going through a transient phase in motion and this correction in travel cascades down through the pack; high concentrations of greyhounds such as occurs with races that have more greyhounds; elevated centrifugal forces; instability from changes in heading; only single paw in contact in full gallop; the lack of adequate camber to counteract necessity to lean into the bend; constant changes in the acceleration vectors applied to the greyhounds; and combinations of these reasons.

6.14 The greyhounds are running at the limit state of track and their bodies i.e. the system. Any aberration in their travel such as interference has the potential to result in a catastrophic failure of the system and if this occurs it will result in an injury.

6.15 It is strongly recommended that GRNSW and the Australian Greyhound Industry reconsider their aversion to straight tracks and consider developing purpose-built straight tracks.

GRNSW response to interim recommendations of UTS Track Design Study April 17⁴

GRNSW responded as follows:

‘It is recommended (by UTS) that GRNSW and the Australian Greyhound Industry reconsider their aversion to straight tracks and consider developing purpose-built straight tracks. Clearly using a straight track would eliminate all injuries associated with greyhounds needing to negotiate their way safely around the bend. Bends are problematic for a number of reasons. The low number of spectators attending race meetings does not warrant or justify the continued usage of oval-shaped tracks. Technology now exists to allow excellent live coverage from the boxes to the finish and nationwide broadcast in digital high definition quality’.

⁴ [http://www.grnsw.com.au/uploads/GRNSW%20Response%20to%20UTS%20Track%20Design%20-%204%20April%202017%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.grnsw.com.au/uploads/GRNSW%20Response%20to%20UTS%20Track%20Design%20-%204%20April%202017%20(2).pdf)

GRNSW supported this recommendation in principle with the following comment.

‘To commence the transition to safer tracks, GRNSW will conduct a competitive expression of interest (EOI) process to identify a straight track where greyhound racing could occur. It is envisaged that greyhound racing conducted on this straight track would:

- provide an additional pathway to racing particularly for those greyhounds suited to straight track racing;
- facilitate eight greyhounds per race and possibly ten if deemed safe;

UTS would then provide information around the performance of the track and based on this experience, consideration could be given to incorporating straight tracks into the Centres of Excellence model in the medium to long-term.’

EXISTING STRAIGHT TRACK RACING

The Racing Queensland Annual Report 2019 stated ‘straight tracks are widely accepted as having the highest quality safety levels’. In June 2019, RQ announced its participation in the inaugural National Straight Track Championship involving Queensland (Capalaba), Victoria (Healesville), and South Australia (Murray Bridge).⁵

The Greyhound Racing South Australia Annual Report 2019 stated ‘Shortly after the straight track opened for racing a few months ago, we took on the best from Victoria and Queensland in the inaugural straight track championship series, and we look forward to continuing that rivalry when Murray Bridge hosts the national final in 2021. We are confident that these new tracks are amongst the safest tracks in Australia and will sustain our industry for many years to come.’⁶

STRAIGHT TRACK RACING BY STATE

New South Wales

Despite stating that it would ‘conduct a competitive expression of interest (EOI) process to identify a straight track where greyhound racing could occur’ in April 2017 there is no straight track racing in NSW.

Queensland

Straight track racing is conducted at Capalaba.

Victoria

Straight track racing is conducted at Healesville.

South Australia

Straight track racing is conducted at Murray bridge.

⁵ <https://www.racingqueensland.com.au/RacingQueensland/media/Industry/Corporate/201819-Annual-Report.pdf>

⁶

https://sa.thedogs.com.au/Uploads/GRSA_AnnualReport_2019_Web.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0Ew_Z3gp8XRrokqiT86vjZZaPVItPyICyo4JdfA97ZnMO252IfsNx33-0

CPG ACTION

Although UTS has examined data and made a comprehensive analysis of greyhound performance while rounding a bend and the made its number 1 recommendation the CPG decided to collect the death and injury data from stewards reports of straight track racing at Capalaba, Healesville and Murray Bridge. The CPG also collected data for oval tracks at Albion Park in QLD, Cranbourne in VIC and the Murray Bridge oval track in SA for approximately the same number of races as run on straight tracks in order to compare the death and injury rates on straight tracks with those on oval tracks. The CPG used the NSW Greyhound Welfare and Integrity Commission Injury Classification System as shown below to collect the death and injury data. No data was collected for injuries that did not incur an incapacitation period.

Injury classification and examples of injuries

Injury category	Incapacitation period (days)	Example of injury
Minor I	0	No stand-down needed: torn nail or minor abrasion or spike.
Minor II	1-10	Minor cuts, abrasions, pad injuries, Grade 1 muscle injuries requiring treatment.
Medium	14-21	Moderate cuts and pad/toe injuries, joint sprains, ligament or tendon injuries, Grade 2 muscle injuries.
Major I	28-42	Fractured toes, severe split pads, dislocated joints, simple fractures, Grade 3 muscle injuries.
Major II	43-90	Long bone fractures; severe spinal, pelvic or skull injuries; major fracture dislocations, Achilles tendon ruptures.
Catastrophic		Euthanased or sudden death.

RESULTS OF STRAIGHT TRACK VS OVAL TRACK RACING

Because of the possibility of differing standards in vet assessments in different states the CPG analysis will compare straight track death and injury statistics with oval tracks from the same state.

QUEENSLAND

The death and injury data for straight track races at Capalaba run between 4 August 2019 and 20 October 2019 is shown in the table below.

DATE	No. of races	MINOR 2	MEDIUM	MAJ 1	MAJ 2	CATASTROPHIC
Incapacitation period		1-10 DAYS	14-21` DAYS	28-42 DAYS	43-90 DAYS	
TOTAL	142	8	3	3		

The death and injury data for oval track races at Albion Park run from 4 August 2019 to 23 October 2019 is shown in the table below.

DATE	No. of races	MINOR 2	MEDIUM	MAJ 1	MAJ 2	CATASTROPHIC
Incapacitation period		1-10 DAYS	14-21` DAYS	28-42 DAYS	43-90 DAYS	
TOTAL	146	20	6	4		2

VICTORIA

The death and injury data for straight track races at Healesville run between 4 October 2019 and 4 November 2019 is shown in the table below.

DATE	No. of races	MINOR 2	MEDIUM	MAJ 1	MAJ 2	CATASTROPHIC
Incapacitation period		1-10 DAYS	14-21` DAYS	28-42 DAYS	43-90 DAYS	
TOTAL	144	22	10	3	1	

The death and injury data for oval track races at Cranbourne run from 5 November 2019 to 23 December 2019 is shown in the table below.

DATE	No. of races	MINOR 2	MEDIUM	MAJ 1	MAJ 2	CATASTROPHIC
Incapacitation period		1-10 DAYS	14-21` DAYS	28-42 DAYS	43-90 DAYS	
TOTAL	140	36	11	1	9	

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

The death and injury data for straight track races at Murray Bridge run between 24 July 2019 and 29 January 2020 is shown in the table below.

DATE	No. of races	MINOR 2	MEDIUM	MAJ 1	MAJ 2	CATASTROPHIC
Incapacitation period		1-10 DAYS	14-21` DAYS	28-42 DAYS	43-90 DAYS	
TOTAL	147	6	4	1	1	

The death and injury data for oval track races at Murray Bridge run from 28 July 2019 to 2 February 2020 is shown in the table below.

DATE	No. of races	MINOR 2	MEDIUM	MAJ 1	MAJ 2	CATASTROPHIC
Incapacitation period		1-10 DAYS	14-21` DAYS	28-42 DAYS	43-90 DAYS	
TOTAL	141	7	14	3	7	

ANALYSIS OUTCOMES

The research conducted by the CPG found that there was an increase in all injury categories across all states with the exception of Major 1 injuries in Victoria. Some injury categories doubled when racing on oval tracks. The only deaths occurred on oval tracks. The CPG research supports the findings of the UTS that racing on straight tracks result in fewer injuries and fatalities. Although racing on straight track is safer than oval track racing it still carries the risk of serious injury and death.

RACING INDUSTRY ACTIONS

Straight track racing is conducted on only three tracks throughout Australia despite the fact that all greyhound racing state bodies recognise that straight tracks reduce the number of greyhounds killed and injured compared with oval tracks. This is clear evidence that greyhound racing state bodies place profit well before greyhound welfare.

CPG CONCLUSIONS

Both the UTS and CPG studies have proven that 6 dog racing is safer than 7 and 8 dog racing. The lack of action by GRNSW, GRV and GRSA to adopt 6 dog racing as a standard race field size shows that the racing industry is ignoring proven measures to improve animal safety and welfare.

GOVERNMENT ACTION REQUIRED

Governments of all Australian States and Territories profess to put animal welfare ahead of all other considerations in regard to the greyhound racing industry. State and Territory

Legislation gives these governments the power to regulate the industry. To prove that they are serious about putting animal welfare first State Governments and the Government of the Northern Territory must acknowledge that straight tracks are inherently safer than oval tracks and regulate that greyhounds are only permitted to race on straight tracks..

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