

The Case for Six Dog Races



Background

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 six dog race fields.

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...reduced field sizes.'

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

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-Governmentresponse-recommendations.pdf

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 2017, 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 six dog race fields.

Interim Recommendation 10. Reduce the number of starts from 8 to 6.

Interim Recommendation 10 Discussion

Chapter 6 of the Report contains discussion of Interim Recommendation 10. This discussion is shown below in italics.

'6.62 One of the main reasons for congestion and traffic jam zones is an excessive number of greyhounds per race.

6.63 Other jurisdictions such as the UK and Ireland are examples where 6 start greyhound races are conducted.

6.64 As a direct intervention for reducing congestion and traffic jam zones UTS strongly recommends (Interim recommendation #10) trialling reducing the number of starts per race from 8 to 6.

6.65 It is suggested that boxes 3 and 6 are not used as a supplementary congestion lowering intervention.

6.66 If the results from this intervention trial confirm less interference at start and the first turn, this intervention should be progressively deployed nationally at all tracks.'

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[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)

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

GRNSW responded as follows:

'UTS recommend trialling reducing the number of starts per race from 8 to 6. It is suggested that boxes 3 and 6 are not used as a supplementary intervention lowering congestion. One of the main reasons for congestion and traffic jam zones is an excessive number of greyhounds per race and other jurisdictions such as the UK and Ireland are examples where 6 start greyhound races are conducted. If the results from this intervention trial confirm less interference at start and the first turn, this intervention should be progressively deployed nationally at all tracks.'

GRNSW supported this recommendation with the following comment.

'GRNSW is currently trialling 6 six dog racing at non-TAB races in Lismore. **If this trial is successful GRNSW will progressively roll-out six dog racing to all non-TAB tracks.** (Bolding by CPG). Extensive financial modelling and consultation with wagering operators and other external stakeholders will need to occur before rolling-out six dog racing to TAB tracks as there will be a reduction in wagering revenue.'

UTS additional research

⁵As a result of additional research, UTS reported that '*Over a two-year period, race data were recorded from 33 tracks in NSW. Even though the races are usually with eight greyhounds, there were races with fewer greyhounds due to one or more scratching. The comparison of injury rates showed a smaller number of injuries in the races with lower number of competing greyhounds. A more controlled experiment was done in one track in NSW.*' Although UTS does not name this track, the NSW Greyhound Welfare and Integrity Commission (GWIC) has advised that a six dog trial was conducted at Tamworth.

The UTS additional report went on to state '*The statistical analysis showed that there were significantly lower number of injuries in 6* start races compared to races 8 greyhounds. No injuries that lead to a greyhound death were recorded in the 6* start races. The results showed that 6* start races have statistically significant lower number Major and Catastrophic injuries compared to 7 and 8 races.*'

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

⁵ <https://opus.lib.uts.edu.au/bitstream/10453/135271/1/ISB19-Mahdavi-final.pdf>



Six dog trials by state

New South Wales

Advice from GWIC is that the NSW trial actually occurred in Tamworth in 2019. Stewards' reports for Tamworth for 2019 are not available on the website. GRNSW has been asked if the report of the trial is publicly available. To date there has been no response from GRNSW.

Victoria

Greyhound Racing Victoria (GRV) announced in December 2018 that they intended to run six dog maximum greyhound races on Victorian greyhound tracks from 1 February 2019. GRV intended to test the six dog fields in all maiden races at Ballarat, Shepparton and Cranbourne.

In a statement GRV said *'The move to six dog fields, follows the aborted GRNSW trial of six dog fields in NSW almost 12 months to the date. NSW quietly abandoned the trials and issued no reports or follow up information as to the success or otherwise of the trials.'* GRV went on to state that they intend to adopt the six dog field format justifying the move as an effort to "prioritise racing safety".

The pilot program of six dog maiden races has been endorsed by the "Racing Reference Group (RRG)" as well as being discussed with GRV Clubs. The details of the pilot program are as follows:

- Run from 1 February 2019 through to 30 April 2019.
- Trialled at three tracks: Ballarat, Cranbourne and Shepparton.
- Conducted as advertised events listed on GRV's Fast Track System.
- Maximum of four 6-Dog Maiden races will be programmed at each meeting. If insufficient nominations are received for the meeting, the number of 6-Dog Maiden races may increase accordingly.

According to GRV, they intended to "assess the impact of this pilot program and will consult further with industry prior to making any long-term decisions in regard to 6-Dog Maiden races". CPG contacted GRV and asked if there was a publicly available report of this trial. GRV advised that there was not.

South Australia

In April 2019, GRSA announced it would commence a three month trial of G-SIX racing at Angle Park, Gawler and Mount Gambier from Thursday 2 May 2019. The announcement went on to say '*G-SIX will maximise racing opportunities for trainers in each of the key TAB-track regions of South Australia, drive up participant returns by the equivalent of more than \$1 million annually, allow cleaner racing with less interference and allow for more races at more meetings across all South Australian TAB venues.*' In January 2020, CPG contacted GRSA and asked if there was a publicly available report on the G-SIX trial. GRSA advised that the G-SIX is still underway and therefore no report has been completed.

CPG action

Following the confirmation from GRV and GRSA that there would not be a publicly available report on the six dog race trials, CPG decided to collect the death and injury data from stewards' reports on the six dog races conducted at Ballarat, Cranbourne and Shepparton in Victoria and Angle Park, Gawler and Mt Gambier in SA during the trial periods. CPG also collected data from the same tracks via stewards' reports for seven and eight dog races conducted at those tracks in November and December 2019 and January 2020. CPG used the GWIC Injury Classification System as shown below to collect the death and injury data. No data were 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 six dog trials

Victoria

Six dog race data

The death and injury data for six dog races is shown in the tables below.

Ballarat	No. of 6 dog races	MINOR 2	MEDIUM	MAJOR 1	MAJOR 2	CATASTROPHIC
Total	70	23	3	Nil	Nil	Nil

Cranbourne	No. of 6 dog races	MINOR 2	MEDIUM	MAJOR 1	MAJOR 2	CATASTROPHIC
TOTAL	66	20	3	Nil	2	Nil

Shepparton	No. of 6 dog races	MINOR 2	MEDIUM	MAJOR 1	MAJOR 2	CATASTROPHIC
TOTAL	68	10	5	2	1	Nil

Seven and eight dog race data

The death and injury data for seven and eight dog races is shown in the tables below.

Ballarat	No. of 7/8 dog races	MINOR 2	MEDIUM	MAJOR 1	MAJOR 2	CATASTROPHIC
TOTAL	60	23	5	Nil	2	Nil

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Cranbourne	No. of 7/8 dog races	MINOR 2	MEDIUM	MAJOR 1	MAJOR 2	CATASTROPHIC
TOTAL	72	25	6	1	5	Nil

Shepparton	No. of 7/8 dog races	MINOR 2	MEDIUM	MAJOR 1	MAJOR 2	CATASTROPHIC
TOTAL	70	7	9	3	Nil	2

CPG Analysis

Following the collection of the relevant data CPG compared the total injuries and deaths in Victoria in six dog races against seven and eight dog races on the same tracks as shown in the following table.

6 Dog Races	No. of races	MINOR 2	MEDIUM	MAJOR 1	MAJOR 2	CATASTROPHIC
TOTAL	204	53	11	2	3	Nil
7/8 Dog Races						
TOTAL	202	55	20	4	7	2

South Australia

Six dog race data

The death and injury data for 6 dog races is shown in the tables below.

Angle Park	No. of 6 dog races	MINOR 2	MEDIUM	MAJOR 1	MAJOR 2	CATASTROPHIC
Total	110	8	3	3	Nil	1

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Gawler	No. of 6 dog races	MINOR 2	MEDIUM	MAJOR 1	MAJOR 2	CATASTROPHIC
TOTAL	104	3	4	1	2	Nil

Mt Gambier	No. of 6 dog races	MINOR 2	MEDIUM	MAJOR 1	MAJOR 2	CATASTROPHIC
TOTAL	115	5	3	1	2	Nil

Seven and eight dog race data

The death and injury data for seven and eight dog races is shown in the tables below.

Angle Park	No. of 7/8 dog races	MINOR 2	MEDIUM	MAJ 1	MAJ 2	CATASTROPHIC
TOTAL	109	11	5	1	2	Nil

Gawler	No. of 7/8 dog races	MINOR 2	MEDIUM	MAJOR 1	MAJOR 2	CATASTROPHIC
TOTAL	103	9	10	5	5	1

Mt Gambier	No. of 7/8 dog races	MINOR 2	MEDIUM	MAJOR 1	MAJOR 2	CATASTROPHIC
TOTAL	116	5	3	1	7	1

CPG Analysis

Following the collection of the relevant data CPG compared the total injuries and deaths in South Australia in six dog races against seven and eight dog races on the same tracks as shown in the table below.

6 Dog Races	No. of races	MINOR 2	MEDIUM	MAJOR 1	MAJOR 2	CATASTROPHIC
TOTAL	329	16	11	2	4	1
7/8 Dog Races						
TOTAL	328	25	18	7	14	2

Analysis outcomes

The research conducted by CPG found that six dog race fields result in a significant reduction in all injury and death categories. CPG research supports the findings of the UTS that six dog race fields result in fewer injuries and fatalities. Although six dog racing is safer than seven and eight dog racing it still carries the risk of serious injury and death.

CPG conclusions

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

Racing industry actions

Despite GRNSW stating that 'If this trial is successful (Tamworth) GRNSW will progressively roll-out six dog racing to all non-TAB tracks' and GRV stating that 'they intend to adopt the six dog field format justifying the move as an effort to "prioritise racing safety' neither organisation has adopted 6 dog racing. GRSA is continuing to run six dog racing at Angle Park, Gawler and Mt Gambier with the majority of races on these tracks being G-SIX.

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 six dog races are inherently safer than seven or eight dog races.