

# Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee

**30<sup>th</sup> Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday, 16 November**

## **Petition PE1758: End greyhound racing in Scotland**

<b>Petitioner</b>	Gill Docherty on behalf of Scotland Against Greyhound Exploitation
<b>Petition summary</b>	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to put an end to greyhound racing in Scotland.
<b>Webpage</b>	<a href="https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1758">https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1758</a>
<b>SPICe briefing</b>	<a href="http://archive2021.parliament.scot/ResearchBriefingsAndFactsheets/PB19-1758.pdf">http://archive2021.parliament.scot/ResearchBriefingsAndFactsheets/PB19-1758.pdf</a> (Provided by SPICe for consideration by the Session 5 Public Petitions Committee)

### **Introduction**

1. This paper supports the Committee's consideration of petition PE1758, which was referred to the Committee following previous consideration by the Public Petitions Committee and the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee in Session 5.
2. Correspondence and additional written evidence from the petitioner and other relevant stakeholders is provided in **Annexe A**.

### **Background**

3. The Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB) is the body responsible for the governance, regulation and management of the sport of licensed greyhound racing in Great Britain.
4. The GBGB provides rules and regulations on the welfare of greyhounds and facilities at licenced tracks. These include requirements on inspections, that a veterinary surgeon be present at all races, and detailed rules on racing surfaces, traps, fencing, kennels etc. The GBGB rules of racing also state:

“Every person subject to the GBGB Rules of Racing shall have full regard to Greyhound welfare and shall accept the provisions of the Animal Welfare Act 2006.”
5. These requirements do not apply to independent greyhound tracks which are not regulated by the GBGB. There is no requirement for central registration or licensing and no code of practice apply to these greyhound tracks.

6. Since the Committee last considered the petition in June 2022, the greyhound track at Shawfield Stadium, Glasgow, has closed permanently. Shawfield was a track regulated by GBGB.
7. The independent and unregulated track managed by Thornton Greyhounds, Fife, is now the only greyhound track operating in Scotland.

### **Consideration by RAINE Committee**

8. The Committee held an evidence session with the petitioner Gill Docherty, representing Scotland Against Greyhound Exploitation (SAGE), on [20 April 2022](#).
9. Following the evidence session, the Committee agreed to write to key stakeholders seeking further information in relation to the welfare of racing greyhounds in Scotland—
  - to [Thornton Greyhound Stadium](#), for information on their provisions for greyhound welfare including fitness-to-race assessments, the attendance of a vet to administer first aid or euthanasia, and anti-doping testing;
  - to the [Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs](#), on the effectiveness of the [Animal Health and Welfare \(Scotland\) Act 2006](#) in protecting the welfare of racing greyhounds; and
  - to the [Scottish Animal Welfare Commission](#) (SAWC), for its views on the welfare of racing greyhounds in Scotland particularly on unlicensed tracks, and on its prioritisation of greyhound welfare in its work programme.
10. In their response, the owners of Thornton Greyhound Stadium set out their general opposition to the petition. To the Committee's specific queries, Thornton's owners state that fitness-to-race assessments are at the discretion of greyhound owners ("owners are more than capable of checking their dogs over to ensure they are fit and healthy to race") and they indicate that financial constraints prohibit the attendance of a vet ("there is no vet in attendance at Thornton Stadium as the cost would be totally prohibitive") and the administration of anti-doping testing ("we cannot afford to submit samples for mass spectrometry testing, and feel there is no reason to do so").
11. At its meeting on 29 June 2022, the Committee agreed to invite the owners of Thornton Greyhounds to give evidence on the issues raised in the petition. The owners of Thornton Greyhounds declined the Committee's invitation on the basis that they consider [their correspondence of 19 June](#) sufficient in setting out their views on the petition.
12. The owners of Thornton Greyhounds have submitted video material of a number of greyhound races held at Thornton stadium in early 2022.
13. In the [response from the Cabinet Secretary](#), the Scottish Government expresses the view that the existing legislation on animal welfare is sufficient for the protection of greyhounds. The Scottish Government notes that the Scottish

SPCA is chiefly concerned with the “practical difficulties in gathering sufficient evidence of possible offences” at unregulated tracks rather than the provisions of the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006.

14. In the [SAWC’s response](#), the Commission details its key concerns regarding the welfare of greyhounds and state that it does not support the continuation of unregulated tracks in Scotland. On the prioritisation of greyhound welfare within its work programme, the SAWC set out its intention to consider the issue upon completion of [the Dogs Trust commissioned review of greyhound welfare in Great Britain](#).
15. On 27 September, the Committee received [a letter from the Dogs Trust, RSPCA and Blue Cross](#) which stated they “have recently conducted internal policy reviews on the welfare of racing greyhounds” and that, “as a result of these reviews, we are calling for greyhound racing to come to a phased end”. The Convener [then wrote to the SAWC on 4 October](#) to ask how it intends to respond to the issue of racing greyhound welfare in light of the completion of the Dogs Trust, RSPCA and Blue Cross review.
16. [The SAWC responded to the Convener](#) with an update on its position in relation to greyhound racing on 9 November. In her response, the Chair of the SAWC stated—

“SAWC has continued to monitor the progress of discussions around this topic, including the change of policy on the welfare of racing greyhounds by the above organisations following their unpublished internal review. SAWC maintains its stance of not supporting the continuation of unlicensed tracks in Scotland. However, we have taken the decision to undertake more research and fully consider the available evidence, in order to reach a balanced conclusion on the various issues that have been raised. I expect SAWC’s work in this area to continue into the new year, and I aim to send you our further collective views by the end of February”.

17. GBGB wrote to the Committee on [31 October](#) and [3 November](#) in relation to the petition and to provide a copy of its strategy for greyhound welfare.

### **Recent parliamentary debate**

18. [On 6 October 2022, a parliamentary debate was held](#) on a motion, submitted by Mark Ruskell, about the closure of Shawfield Stadium and on the welfare of racing greyhounds.
19. During the debate, the Minister for Environment and Land Reform set out the Scottish Government’s position—

“The provisions that are included in the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006, as amended, ensure that action can be taken where there is evidence that the welfare needs of greyhounds, whether still racing or retired, are not being met”.

“The Scottish Government’s position is that the 2006 act, as it stands, is sufficient, but we are interested in how enforcement, particularly in the case of greyhound racing, can be improved.”

I would not want to pre-empt the work of the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission. From the Government’s point of view, all I can say is that we look forward to hearing its comments, as we look forward to hearing the comments of the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee, and we will take all that into consideration”.

## **For decision**

**20. The Committee is invited to consider its next steps.**

**21. The Committee may wish to wait until the SAWC has reached a conclusion on the issue of greyhound welfare and has shared its collective views with the Committee in February 2023. The Committee may wish to take further evidence at that point, including from the GBGB, when it considers the SAWC’s conclusions.**

**Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee clerks  
November 2022**

The following correspondence and written submissions are circulated in connection with consideration of the petition at this meeting–

**Petitioner's submission**

[Scotland Against Greyhound Exploitation, 4 April 2022](#)

**Correspondence**

[Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands, 16 May 2022](#)

[Scottish Animal Welfare Commission, 23 May 2022](#)

[Thornton Greyhounds, 19 June 2022](#)

[Scotland Against Greyhound Exploitation, 27 September 2022](#)

[Dogs Trust, RSPCA and Blue Cross, 27 September 2022](#)

[Greyhound Board of Great Britain, 31 October 2022](#)

[Greyhound Board of Great Britain, 3 November 2022](#)

[Scottish Animal Welfare Commission, 9 November 2022](#)

**Written submissions**

[League Against Cruel Sports Scotland, May 2021](#)

[Scotland for Animals, January 2022](#)

[All-Party Parliamentary Dog Advisory Welfare Group \(APDAWG\), 14 March 2022](#)

[OneKind, 30 March 2022](#)

[Say No to Greyhound Racing, 19 March 2022](#)

[Grey2K USA Worldwide, 11 April 2022](#)

[Scottish SPCA, 13 April 2022](#)