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RSPCA urges government to ban greyhound racing after disturbing revelations

Henry Belot and Clare Colley

Canberra's greyhound racing community will come under additional scrutiny as the RSPCA launches a campaign to ban the sport indefinitely.

The group has called on the ACT government and newly installed Racing and Gaming Minister Mick Gentleman to show leadership, rather than waiting for other governments to introduce a ban.



Greyhounds competing at the Canberra Greyhound Racing Club. Photo: Melissa Adams

RSPCA chief executive Tammy Ven Dange said evidence presented to a special commission of inquiry into NSW greyhound racing found up to 17,000 greyhounds were killed each year.

Last year, an ABC *Four Corners* investigation showed footage of piglets, rabbits and possums being mauled and used as live bait for greyhounds to increase their performance on the track.

The footage provoked strong reactions from animal welfare and calls for the sport to be banned or subject to tighter regulation across the nation.

Ms Ven Dange said the live-baiting footage was shocking, but wastage remained the major issue for the greyhound racing industry.

"In many ways, the live-baiting revelations have made these gentle giants look like the villain, when it has always been about the despicable behaviour of their trainers and owners," she said.

The Canberra Greyhound Racing Club was contacted for this story, but did not respond.

The club has previously told Fairfax Media live baiting does not occur in Canberra, with chairman on Ron Peck condemning the actions of trainers interstate. The club also announced intentions to spend \$30,000 on new security systems to ensure there was no untoward activity at the only greyhound racing and training venue in the capital.

Ms Ven Dange said the RSPCA would launch an [online petition](#) for Canberrans to show their support for the ban and a national rally would be held at Glebe Park on Sunday afternoon.

Owner of two rescued greyhounds and ACT Greyhound Support Network co-ordinator Cindy Daley said a ban on greyhound racing had been "a long time coming", but she was concerned about the effect it would have on the already high number of dogs abandoned by the industry.

"That would be my challenge to the boards of inquiry and RSPCA, if we're calling for it to be shut down ... how are we then going to manage the shutdown in a way that's kind to the animals already in the industry and to those that we need to either find homes or manage kindly?" she said.

"My greatest concern is since the expose on the ABC the amount of dumped dogs and the volumes of calls we're getting to come and get dogs has risen exponentially to the point that it's frightening.

"Unless it's legislated that everyone must own a greyhound, which would delight me, we can't rehome them all."

As part of the Greyhound Support Network Ms Daley works with Sydney-based rescue groups to assist with rehoming the dogs in the ACT.

She said the racing industry was coming under increasing pressure to rehome dogs rather than destroy them and rescue groups were struggling with the influx.

"The overbreeding in the industry and the wastage rate is so unsustainable and they've known for a long time," she said. "We've reached the tipping point with possibly 10s of thousands of dogs having to be destroyed."

In 2014, Fairfax Media exposed allegations of race-fixing, drug use, money laundering and alleged criminal activity within the greyhound racing industry, despite reforms that had been aimed at cleaning up the sport.

There are about 200 Canberra Greyhound Racing Club members and about 20 trainers who have access to the training facilities every week. The club has insisted that anyone acting illegally at the ground will be caught by security cameras. Mr Peck has also called for anyone involved in live baiting to be banned from the sport for life.

Ms Daley said a ban in the ACT would have little effect if NSW continued to allow racing, but insisted it would send the right political message with bans in many US states showing it was possible

"Greyhounds are inherently kind and gentle dogs it's the things we do to them that force them to race," she said.