

# Queensland greyhounds: 550 injured and 14 dead in first two months of 2016

Animal Liberation Queensland says dogs who died from racing injuries were still being officially listed as 'retired', understating how common fatalities were



'Greyhounds routinely suffer injuries as part of racing and they are often euthanised as a result,' says Chay Neal of Animal Liberation Queensland. Photograph: Jamie McDonald/Getty Images

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More than 550 greyhounds were injured and 14 deaths resulted from racing in Queensland in the first two months of 2016 despite sweeping reforms of the industry ordered following a national live baiting scandal.

Animal Liberation Queensland said dogs that died from racing injuries were still being officially listed as "retired", understating how common fatal injuries in the industry were.

The group said the toll, collected from stewards' reports that included some but not all injuries at trial tracks or in training, showed the industry needed to be shut down.

It pointed to the example of Mister Sister, a dog that was put down after injuring a hind leg racing in Ipswich on 2 January but described as “retired” on an industry website.

Chay Neal, the president of ALQ, said the public had a “right to access current and comprehensive information related to racing dogs and it’s still not being reported accurately”.

“Greyhounds routinely suffer injuries as part of racing and they are often euthanised as a result. There is no way to completely eliminate the risk of injury and death,” he said.

Brenton Wilson, the president of the Australian federation of greyhound breeders, owners and trainers, said the number of “scratchings” and “suspensions due to injury” overstated the number of genuine injuries.

Some scratchings “related to various issues including soreness, but also female season, grading error, virus, weight variation, won race (out-graded), order of stewards, scours, kennel cough, throat infection and steward’s permission”.

He said of 85 racing suspensions due to injury, 11 of these were for “marring” - when a dog makes head or muzzle contact with another - nine for “failing to pursue” and eight for “unsatisfactory performances”.

This left 58 injuries, which represented 1.6 per cent of the 3,520 starters that month.

“You will find our injuries per one hundred competing, is one of the lowest in any animal or human sport,” Wilson said.

ALQ has complained that oval tracks used for racing heightened the risk dogs would be fatally injured from “collisions on the turn”.

ALQ was instrumental in exposing the national cruelty scandal around greyhound racing and won praise from premier Anastacia Palaszczuk.

Prominent members of the Queensland establishment are among those involved in an industry the ALQ wants outlawed.

They include barrister Michael Byrne - previously chairman of the now abolished Queensland greyhound racing board who was subsequently appointed chair of the Palaszczuk government’s organised crime inquiry - and state opposition frontbencher John Paul Langbroek, who has previously been a joint-owner of racing greyhounds.

A racing integrity bill proposed by the Queensland government would do “nothing to address our ongoing concerns for their welfare”, Neal said.

A parliamentary committee is due to hand down recommendations on the bill in the next sitting of parliament from this week.

It follows an independent review by barrister Alan MacSporran, which last year found that about 14,200 dogs were likely killed in the decade to 2013 after being deemed unsuitable for racing in a phenomenon referred to as “wastage”.

The report by MacSporran - now chair of the state's Crime and corruption commission - recommended more enforcement of a system of tracking greyhounds from birth to retirement, including by microchipping pups and forcing new reporting requirements on owners and trainers.

A new Queensland integrity racing commission would maintain a public database, detailing all injuries from racing and whether dogs are put down.

The commission called for laws that allow a disqualified dog owner or trainer to "simply dispos[e of an] animal, as long as it is done humanely" to be replaced by rules forcing that owner to pay for a dog's care until it can be adopted.

But it also said: "The real question, is what, if any, level of wastage is acceptable for any modern society which has due regard for animal welfare."

*Editor's note: This report originally stated that stewards' reports did not include injuries at trial tracks or in training. In fact, while injuries at trial tracks or in training are not officially recorded, some are reflected in stewards' reports of dogs "scratched" from races. Comment from Brenton Wilson has also been added.*