



## Call for the UK and Ireland to limit greyhound breeding on welfare grounds

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The leading independent greyhound rescue and welfare organisations in England, Wales and Ireland have joined forces to call for action on the number of racing greyhounds being bred and entering the sport.

- **Organisations warn that almost twice as many dogs leave the industry as can be found homes as pets. Approximately 9,000 animals retire from greyhound racing each year in the UK and the number is estimated to be the same in Ireland. However only 5,300 find homes through rescue charities in the UK and even fewer in Ireland, with most of them homed outside of Ireland.**
- Dogs who don't find a place with a rescue organisation face a precarious fate, as highlighted by the recent campaign to prevent Irish greyhounds being exported to the infamous Canidrome track in Macau.
- **One of the key drivers behind the breeding of cheap, disposable dogs, is the Bookmakers Afternoon Greyhound Service (BAGS), where dogs are often owned by syndicates who have no relationship with the dog and little interest in its welfare.**
- The charities say that controlling the number of dogs being bred and entering the racing industry each year would have a dramatically positive effect on greyhound welfare from cradle to retirement.

Forever Hounds Trust (Forever Hounds Trust), the Greyhound Rescue Association of Ireland (GRAI) and Greyhound Rescue Wales (GRW) say that the recent campaign to prevent Irish greyhounds being exported to Macau has highlighted the need for more to be done in the UK and Ireland to protect the greyhounds used by the racing industry.

The charities are concerned that the dogs face a very precarious future. Emily Burns- Sweeney, Director of Welfare for Forever Hounds Trust says: “With dog ownership in the UK on the decline, rescues are finding it increasingly difficult to find homes for ex-racing greyhounds. In the last five years homing figures for some leading greyhound welfare organisations fell by a staggering 25%. This leaves racing greyhound trainers and owners with a real dilemma when it comes to what they do with their retired dogs. Euthanasia on economic grounds, export abroad, send back to Ireland, keep to breed, keep to retire, sell or give away for free via Gumtree or Preloved, wait up to nine months for a rescue space to become available or abandon..... The sheer volume of dogs forces even the most responsible and caring of trainers and owners to seek alternative ways to dispose of their dogs and gives license to those with less moral imperative to dispose of them irresponsibly.”

The organisations are calling for controlled breeding of greyhounds because they believe the current level of breeding causes insurmountable welfare problems. Lindsay Jackson, Chair of GRW, says: “Welfare organisations currently face an impossible task to find homes for the thousands of greyhounds who retire from racing each year in Britain and Ireland. Capping the numbers of litters will, over a few years, reduce the number of greyhounds, retiring each year. Breeders will charge more per puppy and the average cost of a racing greyhound will increase. If greyhounds cost more they would be better looked after. There would be a reduction in euthanasia on economic grounds or injury. We would see increased welfare measures both on and off the track and research into breeding programmes and health. Additionally, with fewer dogs to cater for, the welfare budget would be less stretched.”

In addition, the public demand for greyhounds as pets may increase as they become rarer and therefore more desirable. With fewer dogs in need, rescue charities would be better placed to cope with the output and to manage their resources appropriately.

Another huge concern for the organisations is what happens to the puppies born but not subsequently registered to race. Richard King, Press Officer

for GRAI, says: “Between 2010 and 2015 at least 105,000 greyhounds were born in Ireland. Of those, 94,405 were named for racing. Not every greyhound pup born makes it – 2,294 greyhounds were destroyed in Irish dog pounds between 2010 and 2014 – a rate of 38 greyhounds every month. Hundreds of greyhounds are exported each year to countries in South America, Spain and Pakistan. Records of change of ownership of greyhounds are often not updated, which is a breach of the Welfare of Greyhounds Act 2011 and makes traceability of exported greyhounds difficult to be exact.”

The situation in Ireland has recently been exacerbated by a €700k investment into racing by the Irish Greyhound Board. This encourages new owners and breeders into the industry and supports existing breeders to breed more. Richard explains: “This investment did not outline one cent for welfare or retirement of greyhounds in Ireland. Indeed, we would like to meet with the IGB and discuss their lack of effort for retired greyhounds in Ireland.”

Racing dogs that are owned by syndicates are an increasing problem. Emily Burns-Sweeney says: “We have seen a rise in the number of dogs taken in by Forever Hounds Trust that come from the pounds and are syndicate owned. Nobody has a vested interest in the welfare of these dogs once they are no longer winning races. There is no monetary value associated with them and so they become disposable. The lucky ones end up with a rescue organisation such as ours and ultimately enjoy life as a family pet but there are many others which remain unaccounted for.”

Forever Hounds Trust, GRAI and GRW are calling on the Irish Government, IGB and GBGB (Greyhound Board of Great Britain) to enhance existing legislation and regulations to limit the numbers of racing greyhound puppies born each year and the number of dogs entering the sport. Lindsay Jackson explains: “Welfare organisations recognise that greyhound racing is facing economic challenges but the fact remains that the resource on which they rely is a living, breathing animal and with that comes an inherent responsibility for their lives when the industry no longer requires them. The British Racing Greyhound Fund (BRGT) funding of the industry’s rehoming organisation, the Retired Greyhound Trust, is just £1.4 million per annum which accounts for just one third of their required income.”

Emily Burns-Sweeney added: “Independent welfare organisations receive no funding from the industry to help with homing costs or to market greyhounds as pets. Even if 9,000 pet homes could be found each year, the cost to home them would stand at around £7.4 million. This is an impossible ask of welfare organisations and the public, who already

independently fund the cost of homing ex-racers to the tune of £3 million per annum.”