

Gardens chief says industry must adapt or perish

By CRAIG KERRY

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New Gardens Greyhound Racing club CEO David Kiernan at the Gardens last month. Picture: Darren Pateman

NEWCASTLE Greyhound Club chief executive Dave Kiernan believes some recommendations from a report into the care and training of dogs in NSW are over the top but the industry must embrace change and move forward with community

expectations to survive.

The Greyhound Racing NSW-commissioned report was developed by Working Alliance Australia (WDA), a non-profit organisation which aims to improve the welfare of Australia's working and sporting dogs. It comes as greyhound racing fights for survival in the wake of live-baiting and mass grave scandals which have prompted calls for the sport to be banned.

The report found improvements were needed in participant education, dog rearing and training methods and that there was no evidence that animal-derived products in lures were needed to teach greyhounds to chase.

WDA recommendations included greater education for participants, increased socialisation for greyhounds of all ages, the development of digital record-keeping across states and territories and for "all lures to be synthetic, non-related animal material and not resembling an animal shape".

Kiernan spent 26 years as a greyhound steward, as well as many years as a trainer, breeder and owner, before taking over as chief executive at The Gardens track at Wallsend last month.

He says the measures will make racing greyhounds more expensive for participants but believed the code had to adapt.

"For our industry to survive, we must move forward with community expectations regarding welfare, and we've already started to do that," Kiernan said. "I think times have changed and the industry realises that."

He welcomed the recommendation of uniform record-keeping to track breeding and wastage rates, saying: "I think the rates that they are raising are highly debatable, because many just retire to the greyhound owner's property.

"There are no records to sustain that wastage rates relate to euthanasia, and the lack of regulation over the industry and record-keeping has made our industry look worse than maybe it is."

However, Kiernan was against measures to further restrict breeding.

“To sustain the industry, breeding cannot be cut back much more,” he said.

“Otherwise we won’t have enough product.

“We don’t breed indiscriminately because of the costs of getting dogs to the track.”

Kiernan said the live-baiting scandal had “brought our industry to its knees” despite only “one or two” per cent of trainers being involved. He labelled post-scandal recommendations on the use of lures as ridiculous but said the code had to move with community expectations.

“Before the live-baiting debacle, the RSPCA approved the use of humanely euthanised rabbits,” he said.

“But it’s got to the stage now that we can feed a greyhound with a piece of steak but it’s illegal to put that steak on a lure.”