



# Greyhound inquiry hears up to 90 per cent of trainers used live baiting

September 28, 2015



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The NSW greyhound industry was predicated on "the mass slaughter of healthy young dogs", inquiry hears. *Photo: Vince Caligiuri*

As many as 17,000 greyhounds are killed in Australia each year because they are too slow, a NSW inquiry into the sport has heard. And before the practice of live baiting was exposed, up to nine in 10 trainers were using animals such as rabbits and piglets to "blood" their dogs.

These statistics came from the industry itself during the Special Commission of Inquiry's first public hearing on Monday.

"The industry is responsible for the unnecessary deaths of anywhere between 13,000 and 17,000 young greyhounds every year," Greyhounds Australasia wrote in an internal memo this year that was read to the commission.

That means up to 96 per cent of greyhounds do not survive the year. In contrast, the RSPCA puts down 15 per cent of the dogs it receives each year, about 7000 in 2013-2014.

"Healthy young dogs are being destroyed for no other reason than that they did not cut the mustard," counsel assisting the commission, Stephen Rushton, SC, said.

Mr Rushton said the industry was reliant on over-breeding, also known as "wastage". While the regulator, Greyhounds Racing NSW, has publicly committed to reducing the number of deaths, it has so far resisted strict breeding restrictions.

Mr Rushton said it was "myth" that the regulator put animal welfare first, as it claimed. He said the industry was secretive, driven by profit and benefiting from "unspeakable acts of cruelty".

"GRNSW has been a failure," he said.

The commission has heard in private hearings conducted since June that the use of small animals as live bait was "rampant" until it was exposed by ABC's *Four Corners* program in February.

Two Sydney trainers told the inquiry 85 to 90 per cent of greyhound trainers used the practice or hired others to do so. They admitted to live baiting a dog at the Richmond race track, one of Australia's largest tracks.

Trainer Wayne Smith said if his dog was a "problem dog", not a "100 per cent chaser", he would pay an "educator" \$100 for a week's worth of live bait training.

"I expect evidence will be given this week that live baiting was seen as a traditional and necessary method of training young greyhounds," Mr Rushton said.

An internal report from 2010 showed GRNSW knew about, but kept secret, a practice that amounts to aggravated animal cruelty. The report identified the live baiting issue as "an opportunity for change".

"It's conduct which could see you off in the chokey for two years and GRNSW and industry participants are having a "talkfest" about opportunities for change," Mr Rushton said.

He said GRNSW admitted animal welfare had been treated as a "hygiene issue".

"What do you say in defence of that ... If I was conducting a court case now, commissioner, I would sit down now."

The inquiry's commissioner, former High Court judge Michael McHugh, QC, said the greyhound death statistics were "appalling".

Mr McHugh, in his opening address in June, said he would consider shutting the industry down.

His counsel assisting told him there was no evidence to suggest anything less than a ban would be acceptable.

Recommendations from the commission had been due on September 30 but the deadline was pushed back to next March.