Greyhound Welfare Working Group
24 August 2005 11am Conference Room C, Nobel House, London

Attendees:

Henry Hoppe (chair)	Defra	John Cush	RSPCA
Will Fry (Secretary)	Defra	Andrew Davies	Welsh Assembly
Graham Thurlow	Defra	Chris Laurence	Dogs Trust
Raymond Gee	Society of Greyhound Vets	Hazel Bentall	NGRC
Ivor Stocker	Retired Greyhounds Trust	Sue Watson	Lacors
Lord Lipsey	British Greyhound Racing Board	Alistair Mclean	NGRC
John Haynes	British Greyhound Racing Board	Heather Holmes	Scottish Executive
Bill Glass	NGRC Racecourse Promoters	Tim Miles	RSPCA
Mike Hobday	League Against Cruel Sports	George Russell	Highgate Stadium

1. Henry Hoppe gave an update on the Bill. He stated that Defra hope that the Bill will be introduced in this session and are planning on the basis of a pre-Christmas introduction though that was by no means guaranteed.

2. Lord Lipsey gave his general observations on the steering group paper produced since the previous meeting. He described it as an 'aspirational paper', the scope of which surprised him. The impression given at the time of publication of the draft Bill was that the Government were looking at the licensing of tracks and not statutory regulation of such minutiae. The group should be focussing on tracks and produce a paper based on the statistical analysis of costs and benefits not aspirations.

3. Lord Lipsey quoted the remit of the group to produce something which is compatible with the better regulation agenda. He outlined this to mean:
    a. Proportionality
    b. Regulatory cost assessed
    c. Risk-based
    d. Market-based rather than absolute standards.

    It was his opinion that there is no overlap between the steering group's paper and this agenda.

4. Mike Hobday pointed out that the steering group had been composed to include welfare groups, industry representatives and the independent tracks. It was hoped that they would reach a broad agreement/compromise. Lord Lipsey and Alistair Mclean clarified that the NGRC and BGRB are independent of each other. John Haynes suggested that trainers would be most affected by the recommendations of the paper but they were not represented in the steering group.

5. Alistair Mclean confirmed that the better regulation considerations would be helpful. The NGRC agreed with some of the contents but not all of the paper and, in fact, already did a lot of what was in the paper anyway.

6. Henry Hoppe suggested that a further paper be produced to compare the current situation with recommendations for changes incorporating a cost-benefit analysis. Defra economists would be involved in this paper.

7. Mike Hobday cautioned that the statistics needed for such a rigorous analysis may not be available. He asked (a) if the industry do have such data would they make them available and (b) could the precautionary principle apply in the absence of such data? Chris Laurence was also concerned about a lack of information

8. Both Alistair Mclean and Lord Lipsey acknowledged that the industry was not yet where it would want to be in terms of having robust data available but significant and rapid steps were being taken towards that goal.

9. Lord Lipsey clarified the areas of the paper causing him most concern:
    a. "anyone near a dog must have a license"
    b. BGRB support qualifications but have reservations about making them mandatory
    c. Imposing minimum physical standards to kennels could well be counter-productive and may not be the best way to achieve the desired result.

10. Andrew Davies gave an update on the situation in the National Assembly for Wales Government. There is a very small team there which has just started looking at the Animal Welfare Bill and its implications – as such they are still taking the lead from Defra. Independent tracks are a particular issue for Wales. He hopes to make contact with individuals shortly to start discussing the issues in more detail.

11. Hazel Bentall suggested that she felt the steering group had been asked to set out the broad principles for the whole group to consider. The NGRC were more than happy to provide any information they had in order to help inform the discussion.

12. Mike Hobday said that he had not expected this paper to become the basis for statutory regulation and was very conscious that there would be a second paper to establish 'how' to regulate. He cited the transport of dogs as an example – the inclusion of it in the paper did not prejudge the way to solve the problem but simply that it is an area which might be an issue. Alistair Mclean suggested that transport was a good example because in this case the NGRC was already working with the industry without the need for any form of statutory regulation.

13. Will Fry suggested that the group consider this paper as a 'scoping paper' even if that is not how all originally intended it or viewed it now. The next paper could then go on to look at the evidence basis for the recommendations made and reach conclusions on that basis. Graham Thurlow added that the welfare offence would also, hopefully, exist in the future and this should be taken into consideration when considering the risks, costs and benefits.

14. Chris Laurence accepted that the welfare groups had not considered cost-benefits when contributing to the paper. They had sought to answer the question "what affects greyhound welfare and how can we protect those greyhounds?".

15. Henry Hoppe suggested that the BGRB, Scottish Executive and Welsh Assembly join the steering group and that Defra produce a template to show where the gaps are in the paper and agree this with the group. He noted that the paper needed to address the impact of any proposals on the independent tracks.

16. Chris Laurence did not think such an approach would work. He felt that the group had agreed the aspirations that should be looked at in some way, the group should next look at whether action in each area should be by government, industry, other or if there should be none. The group could then finally consider the question of 'how' to enforce anything decided on.

17. Mike Hobday suggested that, with the proviso of where the paper highlights disagreements, they could accept the paper as aspirational.

18. Lord Lipsey queried the urgency and suggested that as long as the Government can show Parliament that there is progress when the Bill is introduced then it is better to not rush things. He suggested a timescale of 9 months to 1 year. The Working Group agreed that this was acceptable and that the priority was to do the work thoroughly.

19. Hazel Bentall suggested that a longer timescale would allow data from an injury survey to be available to the group. This data would not cover independents though Hazel Bentall offered to provide the forms and analyse the responses for independent tracks if they wished. George Russell suggested that because independent trainers only had 2-3 dogs and were not under the pressure which BAGS trainers were under their dogs had better welfare.

20. Henry Hoppe concluded that Defra will produce a further paper to look at the question of which areas of greyhound racing might cause welfare concerns. In line with 'better regulation' this would include a rigorous analysis of the risks any intervention would address as well as the costs and benefits of each possible solution to that risk.