MINUTES - Greyhound Working Group
26 July 2006, Nobel House, 11am

Those present:

Henry Hoppe	Defra, Animal Welfare Bill Team
Graham Thurlow	Defra, Animal Welfare Bill Team
Laura John	Defra, Animal Welfare Bill Team
Kevin Ruston	Defra, Better Regulation Unit
Ruth Thompson	Defra, Better Regulation Unit
Alun Streeter	National Assembly for Wales
David Lipsey	BGRB
John Petrie	BGRB
John Haynes	BGRB
Hazel Bentall	NGRC
Edward Bentall	NGRC
John Curran	Promoters Association
Chris Laurence	Dogs Trust
Clarissa Baldwin	Dogs Trust
Amanda Gibbs	RSPCA
Mike Hobday	LACS

Apologies:

Ian Strachan	Scottish Executive

Minutes:

Introduction

1. Minutes of meeting of 25 April 2006 approved. HH noted Defra will find a new independents representative in time for the next meeting.

2. KR gave an update on the better regulation agenda. A BR Executive and Commission have been set, and Defra's simplification proposals published. A baseline study of current administrative burdens has been completed, against which any reductions can be measured. Codes of practice have been assessed as burdens because courts can take them into account, but they are lesser burdens than regulation. David Milliband is committed to risk-based regulation and alternatives to regulation; Defra will therefore need a strong evidence base before intervening. AS confirmed that better regulation is built into the National

Assembly's structure and procedures. KR agreed to find the research used to measure animal welfare

Action Point: KR

Greyhound Forum and monitoring standards

3. CB explained that the welfare organisations represented on the Greyhound Forum would prefer that the Forum remain independent of any enforcement body. The organisations are opposed to self-regulation, and do not feel it would be compatible with their objectives to be involved. In addition, the Forum is not properly constituted, as it has no Constitution and no terms of reference. She did note, however, that some members of those welfare organisations had indicated their willingness to serve as inspectors on an enforcement body in their individual capacities. Also, if in future the Government commits to self-regulation, then the organisations may wish to reconsider their involvement.

4. MH noted that the working group is reaching a point where further progress is limited until Ministers commit to an approach. HH noted that Ministers have not shifted from their stated position of preferring self-regulation. However, Ben Bradshaw has indicated in response to the Seaham case that the industry is "drinking in the last chance saloon as far as self-regulation is concerned" and is looking to see tighter enforcement.

5. GT queried whether the Group was yet agreed on what was required from the industry in order to prove they are 'open and auditable'. HB explained that the NGRC have met with the UK Accreditation Service – a Governmental Executive Agency - to discuss possible audit of standards. The process would be:
   (a) robust standards set in code of practice eg 10% reduction in racing injuries
   (b) UKAS audits whether achieving
   (c) report published
   She noted that if the audit process were to be the same, and robust, it should make no difference whether the industry or a separate body were enforcing, because they can be properly monitored. So long as standards are met, it doesn't matter who's doing it.

6. She noted that the Report would not contain every piece of data gathered; only those that were relevant indicators of welfare.

7. DL noted that the welfare organisations should consider the feasibility of the alternatives. Individual trainers may travel 300 miles to a track, and may visit several tracks- industry is more transient than people think and the maximum welfare protection will be secured by industry wide, rather than local, regulation. HH noted that the potential for serious problems

remaining undetected is the same with local authority regulation as it is with industry. HB suggested that the picture will change further when the independents are regulated – at the minute one can't apportion problems to each sector.

8. JC noted that tracks do not care who issues their licences; what the do mind is the burden the licence places on them.

9. HH summed up that there is disappointment from industry that there isn't more detail forthcoming on what welfare organisations think they need to do to be sufficiently open and auditable; in particular, whether there is anything over and above working with UKAS that they would like to see. He also noted that it was still not clear what value local authorities might add. It was agreed that Defra would prepare a paper to consider possible alternatives, including LA regulation, and would arrange for the Horse Racing Authority to attend the next meeting and discuss their system with the group.

Action point: HH, GT

10. EB also agreed to provide the group with a paper on UKAS audits. MH queried whether it could show the number of dogs moving from NGRC racing to independent tracks; HB noted that they cannot monitor outside their jurisdiction, and while this is a hole in the system it cannot be closed until there is a single system in place.

Action point: EB

11. HB noted that the working group could feed into the process of standard setting for UKAS purposes. The Greyhound Charter is close to being agreed and can form the basis of a code of practice.

12. If UKAS audit indicated that standards were not being met, the sanction would be Defra intervention.

Independents

13. HH indicated that our lawyers view is that a code of practice enforced by local authorities is a feasible alternative; however, we would expect most if not all independents to join NGRC.

14. CL also observed that if the Greyhound Charter were to form the basis of a code of practice under the Bill (HH noted that it was likely to) then independents failing to comply with it would be breaching the Bill's welfare offence in any case.

Seaham

15. DL noted that the incident was ghastly, but ultimately productive. BGRB response has been:
    a. Unequivocal condemnation of violation of NGRC rules (note nothing illegal in lay person slaughtering greyhounds if done humanely), and catch any trainer involved
    b. Develop policy to tackle basic problem – increase rehoming and decrease the number of dogs racing
    c. British Greyhound Racing Fund deploying funds in support of animal welfare.

16. He also noted that he could not give out specific details as he did not want to prejudice any investigations (or the NGRC would face judicial review).

17. JC noted need for education at track level about responsibilities. This was an acceptable practice until the 1980s, and was routinely used in canine destruction. As 40% of the industry is outside the NGRC there is no Rule 18 to let them know it is not acceptable any longer.

18. HB noted that Ireland is a particular problem in tackling issues over the lifespan of greyhounds, and they would welcome suggestions from welfare organisations as to how this could be addressed.

AOB

19. HH noted that a representative from Defra's Transport Team would be at the next meeting to discuss the new European Transport Regulation, and thanked everyone for their attendance.

Laura John
Animal Welfare Bill Team
Defra
18 August 2006