

9th September 2020

Dr Alicia Fuller
General Manager, Welfare Strategy and Development
Greyhound Racing NSW

RE: Behavioural Assessments for Greyhounds

Dear Alicia,

Thank you for responding to our previous correspondence, and acknowledging the contact made by Judy Lind, CEO, Greyhound Welfare & Integrity Commission.

Upon receipt of your reply, I did attempt to contact you by phone on a number of occasions, sadly going to voice-mail each time.

I would like to apologise for my delay in providing further information to you regarding our concerns with the behavioural assessments for greyhounds for re-homing. In the time since your response Animal Care Australia (ACA) has provided testimony at two NSW Inquiries (**SELECT COMMITTEE ON ANIMAL CRUELTY LAWS IN NEW SOUTH WALES** and **EXHIBITION OF EXOTIC ANIMALS IN CIRCUSES AND EXHIBITION OF CETACEANS IN NEW SOUTH WALES**) as well as contributing to the current Review into Animal Welfare Legislation in NSW with the Department of Primary Industries. As I am sure you can appreciate they have occupied a vast amount of our time.

Firstly let me state clearly that ACA has no intention to become involved in the racing aspect of greyhounds, or how they are raced, housed or trained, or the legislation and policies surrounding those areas – unless direct welfare concerns are raised with us via our members or general public. One of our primary objectives is with the keeping, breeding and care of pets and companion animals and in this instance that relates directly to the re-homing of greyhounds as pets.

It has been brought to our attention that there are a number of issues relating to the re-homing of greyhounds in NSW, particularly focussed around the success/failure of behavioural assessments and also in the skill sets/training requirements of assessors.

It is our understanding the Greyhound Adoption Program (GAP) NSW utilise an assessment process initiated in Queensland by [REDACTED] has been/is associated with the RSPCA Australia, Sentient, Animal Liberation Queensland, just to name a few. It is also well known within the industry that during [REDACTED] time with GAP QLD, [REDACTED] had the highest kill rates and lowest re-homing rates of that organisation’s history and ceased that role due to those concerns.

Given what is stated above, could you please confirm for us whether the behavioural assessment programs still being utilised by GAP NSW and for that matter anyone associated with the behavioural assessments of greyhounds in NSW is still based around, or remains the same as the program designed and implemented by [REDACTED]? Should this be the case, this raises major concerns for ACA – given [REDACTED] ongoing and well publicised support of and involvement in Animal Rights Extremists (ARE) organisations and movements.

The methods used within that process include:

- utilising a child-sized doll that is walked towards the greyhound

- utilising a small dog from afar (at first) and then slowly walked towards the greyhound (The breed often used is a barking breed to incite a response from the greyhound)
- utilising a person dressed in a long coat and hat – again walking towards the greyhound

The reactionary responses rated are:

- Greyhound is scared and pulls away = FAIL
- Greyhound reacts with teeth bared = FAIL
- Greyhound sniffs low, wags tail and then backs away = FAIL
- Greyhound sniffs low, wags tail and stays = PASS
- Greyhound ignores the doll or man – seen as dismissive and non-interacting = FAIL

There is something severely wrong with an ‘assessment’ process that would FAIL 99% of all dogs reactions to the testing samples, let alone a racing dog with a natural sight-hound prey drive being tested at a racing track or at its place of training, without any allotment of time to allow for re-conditioning and preferably at a location away from that where it has previously been trained to ‘see’, ‘react’ and then ‘hunt’ a moving object presented within its line of sight. (A line of sight of 200m+)

In relation to GAP NSW we are aware that each branch is not adequately monitored and overseen for consistency or accountability. Assessors are trained on the job at various kennel locations and assessed on site by a GAP member trainer/assessor. Trainees are usually trained to how each individual trainer/assessor interprets and performs dog behaviour assessments and not necessarily in line with the required training documents that are deemed to be “current”. Each trainer has their own version of the behaviour assessment, which not only brings inconsistency and radical variance, but can greatly affect the outcome of a pass or fail rate. One dog may pass under one assessor but detrimentally fail under another mostly due to the approach of the process and how an assessment is conducted. Success and fail rates are not monitored on individual assessors performance evaluations by an overseer, to be able to determine where improvements could be made if an individual assessor has an unusually high fail rate compared to another who has a much higher success rate of passes.

It is also noted during the ‘small dog breed’ test, not all small breed dogs that assessors use are of suitable use in such an assessment. In fact it is often the case that many assessors will use small over reactive type breeds such as poodle cross types in which contribute to exciting the greyhound for it to inevitably fail. We are informed the majority of the small breed dogs used in such tests are not generally well socialised themselves and are unsuitable to be used in such extreme situations.

ACA acknowledges there is a recommended process for owners to follow for a pre-entry assessment test, which provides suggested periods of time for greyhounds to have stopped racing, introducing their dogs to other breeds of dog, and ensuring they are capable of being handled, walked on lead and familiarised with traveling in a car etc.

However, the preparation advice is not always put into practice. Dogs may be taken out of work for a minimum of 4-6 weeks and left to their own devices within their racing kennel. At this stage they become bored and very destructive with no replacement routine whilst still situated within a racing kennel environment.

The dogs are generally tested at one of two locations, depending on where GAP branches operate out of. Many are dog racing tracks, while some conduct their assessments on racing kennel grounds. Keep in mind that it is recommended that the dog, pre-entry assessment, ideally should not be in racing mind set, and calm. Yes the dog may not be racing or in work, but it is still in its routine racing environment, leading to a lack of mental and physical stimulation, resulting in a more erratic dog.

If the assessment is at a race track, you then have a dog that has had no mental or physical stimulation while it is out of race work, but is still in its routine racing kennel environment. It is then loaded into its routine racing trailer or van to travel to the race track where the dog has inevitably being trained, trialed

and raced. By this time, the dog is likely to be overly-excited in anticipation, as it assumes it will be racing. The greyhound is abruptly introduced to a small fluffy breed of dog that is aggressively barking and zipping about similar to a rabbit or the lure used during racing.

The responsibility of the greyhound being prepped for such an assessment is generally placed with the trainer or owner of the greyhound, resulting in the majority of greyhounds still held in their racing kennel environments until assessment.

As you could well appreciate, none of this is ideal. Accordingly, ACA would like to see the removal of greyhounds from their racing habitat in entirety for the required pre-assessment duration and conditioning practices, as well as having the assessments take place away from race tracks and race kennels. This would provide greyhounds a fairer chance within the rehabilitation process, resulting in a greater success rate for placement into pet homes. This can happen through foster carer placement or within an off-site rehabilitation kennel facility where the greyhounds can settle into a replacement non-racing routine away from any racing related stimuli.

We would like to see the other dog breeds used in the greyhound assessment process also trained, tested and qualified to be deemed appropriate for use in such a test. This too will benefit the life outcome of a greyhound.

ACA looks forward to seeing what solutions can be put forward into action and if GRNSW would be supportive in changes that would increase the outcome of finding greyhounds new homes.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M Donnelly". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Michael Donnelly

President, Animal Care Australia.

0400 323 843