

Cross Party Group on Animal Welfare in the Scottish Parliament
Committee Room 1
6.00pm Tuesday 2 April 2019

MSPs: Christine Grahame MSP (Convener)
Alison Johnstone MSP (vice-Convener)
Colin Smyth MSP (Vice-Convener)
Rona Mackay MSP
Emma Harper MSP

Associate Members: Libby Anderson OneKind
Edna Elliot McColl
Representative Greyhound Welfare
Kay Hamilton Scotland for Animals
Andrew Voas Scottish Government
Helene Mauchlen British Horse Society
Jennifer Terris Dogs Trust
Patricia Saluja University of Aberdeen
Elaine Whitelaw
Sue Whittle Compassion in World Farming
Peter Stevenson Compassion in World Farming
Alison Craig Edinburgh Napier University
Elspeth Stirling Cats Liberation
Caroline Bellinger Edinburgh Dog and Cat Home
Brian Robinson Association of British Riding Schools
Peter MacDonald Horse Rescue Scotland
Patricia Colville British Small Animal Veterinary Association/
British Veterinary Association

Christine Nevin
Simon Gower Greyhound Board of Great Britain
Mark Bird Greyhound Board of Great Britain
Caroline McManus
Mike Reynolds Professional Greyhound Trainer
James Reynolds Professional Greyhound Trainer
L Findlay
G Findlay
Rhona O'Malley Advocates for Rabbit Welfare
Chris Collins
John McFaull Bogarie Labradors
Zofia Bekas University of Edinburgh
Anna Davidson Greyhound Welfare
Alastair Seagroatt
Mike Flynn Scottish SPCA
Richard Doherty Office of Alison Johnstone MSP
Cathy Dwyer Jeanne Marchig International Centre for Animal
Welfare Education, University of Edinburgh

Luis Molero Animal and Plant Health Agency
Michael Park Animal and Plant Health Agency
Max Wiszniewski Revive
Meg Reynolds Help A Hound

1. Welcome and introductions

The Convener (CG) welcomed members and circulated an attendance list.

2. Apologies

No apologies had been intimated.

3. Minutes of previous meeting

Mike Reynolds (MR) requested that his designation on the minutes be amended to “Professional Greyhound Trainer” and that mention be made of the presentation he had given and the British Standards Institute (BSI) standards document to which he had referred. MR also objected to a statement by Mike Flynn (MF) of the Scottish SPCA referring to greyhounds being kennelled for up to 23 hours a day. MF said that he had made the statement and therefore the minutes were accurate on this point.

4. Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Presentation – Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB)

Mark Bird (MB), GBGB Director described the Board’s efforts to improve the welfare of greyhounds both during their racing careers and at retirement. He agreed that improvements were required. As part of its Greyhound Commitment, GBGB was now publishing data on track injuries and retirement outcomes on an annual basis – the next figures would appear in June 2019. Measures to improve welfare included new apprenticeship schemes in animal care and the presence of independent vets at licensed tracks. The BSI standards were being augmented by a new code of practice for trainers and kennel hands. Stadium standards and track preparation were being reviewed by the Sports Turf Research Institute. Injuries were thought to occur mainly when dogs were not properly trained or were running with pre-existing “niggles”.

MB said that 1,000 dogs were euthanised in 2017 and there were two main reasons for this: economic euthanasia, where the trainer could not afford to treat a condition or injury; and euthanasia of a dog deemed unfit for re-homing. GBGB intended to reduce economic euthanasia rates to 0 in five years. In the absence of insurance for racing dogs, the Board would fund some veterinary treatments. For re-homing, more specialist homes would be sought. Out of its £8 million budget, £1.4 million would go to the Greyhound Trust to support re-homing.

MB said that GBGB was funded by a voluntary levy on bookmakers, in contrast to the British Horse Racing Board, where the levy was statutory. He stressed that if a statutory levy was not available and the Board was unable as a result to meet expectations on welfare, greyhound racing would have to cease.

On doping of dogs, MB said that out of 8,000 tests carried out, 0.5% had been positive for a variety of contaminants. It was thought that intentional doping was a small percentage of this. There had been ten cases at Shawfield Stadium in Glasgow, involving six trainers, who had all been expelled.

6. Discussion – greyhound welfare

CG acknowledged the funding issue and noted that licensing was a reserved matter.

Simon Gower (SG), GBGB veterinary director, said that there was a more positive attitude to improving welfare since MB had joined the Board.

Colin Smyth MSP (CS) welcomed the move to publishing euthanasia figures and noted the numbers of dogs put to sleep because they could not be re-homed. He asked how funding difficulties affected the drive to reduce these figures. SG said that previously, dogs would be put to sleep following trackside injuries. Trainers were now being educated about rehabilitation, treatment and re-homing, with funding through the new welfare scheme. MB said that educating only 10% of trainers that dogs were not commodities could achieve a 20% reduction in euthanasia rates. He repeated the need for statutory funding if greyhound racing was to continue.

CG asked about the reasons for the euthanasia of 1,000 dogs in 2017. MB said that 370 were put to sleep due to the cost of treatment or a poor prognosis, while 307 were unsuitable for re-homing.

A Greyhound Welfare representative (GW), who preferred not to give her name, criticised the "green form" used for euthanasia. SG said this was now revised to ensure that the veterinary surgeon had a full discussion with the owner before agreeing to humane destruction. Discussions had also been held with the RCVS about compulsory CPD.

GW asked why it took so long to publish figures. MB said that track figures were ready but the retirement process took longer. They also wished to look into 257 track fatalities and whether vets were making the right checks.

GW pointed out that the form did not mention the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 (AHW(S)A) in its list of relevant legislation. SG said this would be rectified.

GW said that there had been eleven, not ten, positive drug tests at Shawfield including one where cocaine had been administered to two dogs. She stated that the trainer had been suspended but was now working elsewhere. MB said there had been a difficulty in proving who had administered the substance to the dogs.

SB said that testing was being improved to differentiate between traces of cocaine due to environmental contamination and the presence of metabolites which would indicate deliberate administration of the substance. Longitudinal tests using hair samples were also under way.

MB agreed that all retired greyhounds should be re-homed and GBGB was liaising with the Greyhound Forum.

Alastair Seagroatt (AG) said that dogs were not being re-homed because trainers had to pay for this. SG said that was the reason for the GBGB bond scheme.

Alison Johnstone MSP (AJ) welcomed the commitment shown by the GBGB but noted also the level of expertise and passion in the room. The sport was surviving at the expense of the dogs and there should be more dog-centred policies. Euphemisms about the killing of dogs should be avoided. She asked how the CPGAW could be kept up to date with developments. MB and SG said they would be happy to attend a future meeting.

GW returned to the topic of re-homing costs and asked whether it was true that it cost £900 to re-home a dog through the Greyhound Trust. She stated that two members of the Trust were trainers.

She showed a photograph of a dog that had been re-homed after five months with the Trust and said it was 10kg underweight. MB asked her for further information and he would take it up with the Trust.

There was consensus on both sides of the debate of the need for a statutory levy to ensure welfare.

7. Presentation – egg production in Scotland

Christine Nevin (CN) gave a presentation on the welfare of laying hens. In 2018, there were 6.8 million laying hens in Scotland, of which 48% were in free range systems and 45% enriched cages. Most of these hens (6.7 million) were concentrated in 144 holdings and 3 million of these were in cages.

Enriched cages had replaced conventional battery cages following the EU ban on the latter in 2012. They offered slightly more space (600cm² per hen), a nest area, perch and scratch mat. Birds were still unable to carry out natural behaviours such as foraging, dust-bathing, stretching their wings or shaking their bodies. This was detrimental to their welfare and led to abnormal behaviours such as injurious feather-pecking.

She described ex-laying hens she had seen from cage systems in Fife and Dumfries and Galloway – they had 50% feather loss due to pecking, and sore, red flesh.

CN listed the legislation and assurance schemes applicable to laying hens which, in theory, should provide a strong framework for their protection. In practice, she had been shocked at the condition of hens, including some from free range systems. As a member of the public, she had been unable to find information about inspection reports, animal welfare concerns and enforcement actions.

Even compliance with legislation would not address the birds' behavioural problems. The Farm Animal Welfare Committee (FAWC) had referred to "the extremely severe challenges to welfare" posed by cage systems. Legislation and codes underestimated the detriment they caused to laying hen welfare and CN doubted whether they could comply with the duty to promote welfare provided at s.24 of the AHW(S)A. Some countries including Luxembourg, Austria and Germany had banned cages or were phasing them out.

Some major retailers had committed to phasing out eggs from caged hens voluntarily by 2025, but only one major producer had committed to going cage-free. CN felt that a Scottish Government commitment to phase out these systems would give producers certainty and that would encourage them to invest in alternative systems. Fundamental change was required and there were opportunities such as the Good Food Nation measures, although currently these did not recognise animal welfare. In summary, CN described cage systems as not fit for the 21st century.

8. Discussion – egg production in Scotland

CG noted that she had visited a major egg producer and seen cages for herself. She was also aware that some systems were free range in name only, as the hens had difficulty accessing the pop holes.

AV said that he had obtained the latest figures and these were encouraging, showing a reduction in the number of caged hens from 3 million to 2 million in Scotland, with almost 60% of production now free range. CN said that was positive but 2 million was still a large number of hens suffering in cages.

AV said there were concerns with all systems – for example there was higher disease and mortality in free range. He had spoken to producers in Scotland and thought it unlikely there would be much further investment in cages, due to retailer power. There were now only 17 cage sites in Scotland.

GW said she had seen very poor welfare when re-homing hens from free range systems.

Peter Stevenson (PS) hoped Scotland would follow Austria and Germany and ban enriched cages. Well managed free range systems could be really good. Some other countries had more barn systems and some of these, such as the Dutch brand Kipster, were excellent.

Rona Mackay MSP (RM) asked about inspections. AV said this was the responsibility of the Scottish Government Poultry Unit and included monitoring for frauds such as passing off caged eggs as free range. He noted that a cage ban in Scotland would need to be accompanied by an import ban. PS said there should be a ban on the production and sale of caged eggs, and this would be WTO-compliant. CG said consumer legislation was reserved, however.

Chris Collins (CC) suggested star ratings for different standards and systems which would be linked to tax and could influence the market, as had been done recently with the soft drinks market.

Action point: Group to write to supermarkets to ask about their standards and policies on going cage-free.

9. Live exports

CG had put down some new questions on the transport of animals via England and the effects of a no-deal Brexit. She also wanted official figures on the numbers of calves exported via Ramsgate.

Kay Hamilton (KH) said that bull calves were going weekly or fortnightly to Kent and thence to veal crates, while sheep were sent to North Africa. It brought shame on Scotland and should be stopped.

CS said that a cross party group of MSPs had had dialogue with NFUS, Quality Meat Scotland and others to encourage them to do something about this trade. However progress was too slow and the exports should be banned.

10. Date of next meeting

CG would find out about room availability for June.