

# The Final Bend?

## P-06-1253 Ban greyhound racing in Wales

December 2022



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# About the Committee

The Committee was established on 23 June 2021. Its remit can be found at:  
[www.senedd.wales/SeneddPetitions](http://www.senedd.wales/SeneddPetitions)

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Current Committee membership:



**Committee Chair:  
Jack Sargeant MS**  
Welsh Labour



**Rhys ab Owen MS \***  
Independent Plaid Cymru  
Member



**Luke Fletcher MS**  
Plaid Cymru



**Joel James MS**  
Welsh Conservatives



**Buffy Williams MS**  
Welsh Labour

\*Rhys ab Owen MS joined the Committee December 2022.

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## Chair's foreword

Wales has a strong recent record on animal welfare, and Members of the Senedd's Petitions Committee are no strangers to petitions which seek to make life safer for animals.

As a Committee our number one priority has been the wellbeing of greyhounds and that was always our first reference point when hearing and discussing evidence.

After considering the evidence from animal charities and the industry, including the steps already taken and planned to improve animal welfare, our majority conclusion is to support the growing calls for a ban on greyhound racing in Wales.

While one Member had concerns about supporting a ban, we are all agreed that the Welsh Government should consider all options when consulting on future arrangements, to ensure that the welfare of greyhounds is paramount – at all stages of their lives.

We are very grateful to everyone who contributed to our inquiry and in particular to the petitioners who worked to get such a large number of signatures. The petitions process belongs to the people of Wales and I encourage anyone who wishes to follow this petitioner's lead and start a petition to do so.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jack Sargeant." The signature is written in a cursive style. A horizontal line is drawn underneath the signature, starting from the left and ending with an arrowhead pointing to the right.

**Jack Sargeant**

Chair, Petitions Committee

# 1. The Petition

## Ban greyhound racing in Wales

In Wales we have one independent greyhound track racing once a week. Since April 2018, Hope Rescue & their rescue partners have taken in almost 200 surplus greyhounds from this track, 40 of which sustained injuries. There are plans for the track to become a Greyhound Board of Great Britain track, racing four times a week, greatly increasing the number of surplus dogs & injuries. Greyhound racing is inherently cruel & greyhounds have little legal protection. It is already banned in 41 US states.

Campaign groups have collated data and evidence of poor welfare within greyhound racing in the U.K:

- Alliance Against Greyhound Racing  
[www.aagr.org.uk/category/why-is-greyhound-racing-cruel/](http://www.aagr.org.uk/category/why-is-greyhound-racing-cruel/)
- League Against Cruel Sports  
[www.league.org.uk/greyhound-racing](http://www.league.org.uk/greyhound-racing)

There have also been press articles and undercover investigations in to greyhound racing:

- RTE Investigates: Greyhounds Running For Their Lives  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZYTb2qBjIMM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZYTb2qBjIMM)
- Panorama investigates: Doping and rigging bets  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=I0p0bHskIAk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I0p0bHskIAk)
- [www.theguardian.com/sport/2021/jun/26/activists-renew-calls-to-end-greyhound-racing-as-400-die-despite-lockdowns](http://www.theguardian.com/sport/2021/jun/26/activists-renew-calls-to-end-greyhound-racing-as-400-die-despite-lockdowns)
- [www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/greyhounds-being-shipped-pakistan-illegal-23765480](http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/greyhounds-being-shipped-pakistan-illegal-23765480)
- [www.thesun.co.uk/news/13086085/british-greyhounds-racing-dogs-mass-graves-bolt/](http://www.thesun.co.uk/news/13086085/british-greyhounds-racing-dogs-mass-graves-bolt/)

A recent petition is due to be debated in Parliament after securing 104,882 signatures:

- <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/554073>



## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1.** The Welsh Government is already committed to considering licensing of greyhound racing as part of its Animal Welfare Plan. We would encourage that work being prioritised ..... 13

**Recommendation 2.** A majority of Committee Members believe that Welsh Government action should include a phased ban on greyhound racing in Wales..... 13

**Recommendation 3.** A greyhound’s racing career can make up a short part of its life. Welsh Government action to improve animal welfare should not be restricted to a ban on racing – like the industry’s own strategy, it should consider the whole life of dogs, and the conditions in which they are kept before and after their racing careers. This would include the plight of dogs travelling through Wales on their way to races..... 13

**Recommendation 4.** Welsh Government should ensure any changes are subject to widespread consultation, and that advice is available to those working in the industry on how to comply with any new rules or regulations..... 13

**Recommendation 5.** In considering a ban on greyhound racing, the Welsh Government should also look at other sports where animals compete..... 13

## 2. Greyhound Racing in Wales

This chapter sets out the situation in Wales in relation to greyhound racing.

1. Only one greyhound racing track currently operates in Wales - **The Valley Greyhound Stadium** in Ystrad Mynach. Races occur there once a week.
2. The Valley Stadium is one of three independent race tracks in the UK, which are licenced by the local authority. A further 19 race tracks are licensed by the Greyhound Board for Great Britain (GBGB). GBGB tracks have additional rules designed to protect the animals' welfare (such as the presence of veterinary surgeons). GBGB doesn't have any tracks in Wales currently.
3. However, the track was acquired by Dave Barclay in November 2021, and he announced his intention to develop the track and seek a GBGB license in January 2024. Securing a license would result in more frequent racing, four times a week.
4. In the meantime, the track continues to operate independently. In October 2022 management submitted a planning application to develop new racing kennels at the site.
5. At a wider level, the industry has produced a strategy for animal welfare in the sport – A Good Life for Every Greyhound<sup>1</sup> – and representatives told the committee they are working to address concerns.
6. The Committee heard from a greyhound owner who shared some of his passion for the sport, and the enjoyment he gets from racing his own dog. He noted that greyhound racing is more affordable and accessible than horse racing, for example.

### Current regulation of greyhound racing

7. The Animal Welfare Act 2006, (the 2006 Act) includes general animal welfare provisions and allows action to be taken where there is evidence of cruelty to an animal or a failure to provide for an animal's welfare needs. These provisions could apply where greyhounds are at tracks or kept at trainers' kennels.

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<sup>1</sup> A Good Life for Every Greyhound – the Greyhound Board of Great Britain's new strategic vision to further promote and protect welfare across all stages of a greyhound's life. <https://gbgb-prod-assets.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/11153000/GBGB-A-Good-Life-for-Every-Greyhound-Welfare-Strategy.pdf>

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**8.** Section 12 of the 2006 Act gives regulation-making powers to the Welsh Ministers to promote the welfare of animals. Section 13 provides the Welsh Ministers with powers to introduce licensing schemes to protect animal welfare.

**9.** In England, regulations have been made by the Secretary of State under section 13 of the 2006 Act; *The Welfare of Racing Greyhounds Regulations 2010*. These regulations aim to protect racing greyhounds in England and provide that all operators of greyhound racing tracks must obtain a licence. There are currently no specific legal protections for racing greyhounds in Wales.

## The political situation in Wales

**10.** On 4 November 2021, the Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd, Lesley Griffiths published the **Animal Welfare Plan for Wales 2021-26**. This included a plan to introduce a licensing requirement in relation to animal exhibits and animal establishments – “potentially including mobile animal exhibits, greyhound racing, and animal welfare establishments”.

**11.** In response to questions in the Senedd’s Siambr on 26 October 2022, Ms Griffiths said:

*“I have made no secret about my desire to address concerns relating to the welfare of racing greyhounds in Wales. Our animal welfare plan sets out how we will consider introducing further measures. I look forward to the outcome of the recent petition, currently being considered by the Petitions Committee.”<sup>2</sup>*

## Changes in Civic Society

**12.** A number of animal welfare organisations changed their policy in 2022 – moving from working with stadiums/racing industry to minimise harms, to a more directly oppositional position.

**13.** In September 2022 a number of organisations - Dogs Trust, RSPCA, Blue Cross, Hope Rescue and Greyhound Rescue Wales - launched Cut the Chase<sup>3</sup> – a new campaign to ban greyhound racing in the UK. They hope that Wales will set the lead for the other UK nations to follow.

<sup>2</sup> Record of Proceedings, Senedd Cymru, 26 October 2022, Para 111

<sup>3</sup> [www.bluecross.org.uk/campaign/CutTheChase](http://www.bluecross.org.uk/campaign/CutTheChase)

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**14.** They argue that “greyhound racing has no place in a modern society”, and that racing is inherently risky.

**15.** While introducing a licensing regime in Wales could be used to improve welfare issues, the charities note that thousands of dogs are injured and killed on licensed tracks.

*“On British licensed tracks, over 2,000 greyhounds died and nearly 18,000 injuries were recorded between 2018 and 2021”<sup>4</sup>*

## The Rest of the World

**16.** Wales is one of only 10 countries in the world where commercial greyhound racing still takes place legally - alongside England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Mexico, Vietnam and the USA.

**17.** Following a vote in 2018, the US state of Florida introduced a ban on greyhound racing from the start of 2021. At the time of the vote, Florida was home to 11 of the USA’s 17 dog racing tracks.

**18.** During our evidence gathering we heard of the role that gambling plays in funding the sport, where races are televised to provide live sports content on which people can bet.

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<sup>4</sup> [www.bluecross.org.uk/campaign/CutTheChase](http://www.bluecross.org.uk/campaign/CutTheChase)

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### 3. The petition and the work of the Committee

**19.** The petition was submitted by Hope Rescue and opened in September 2021. It collected 35,101 signatures from all corners of the world. 18,707 of these were from Wales. It closed on 1 March 2022.

**20.** The Committee decided to take evidence and produce a short report. This will inform a future debate on the issue.

**21.** Two evidence sessions took place on 23 May 2021 (Panel 1 – greyhound welfare charities), and 13 June 2021 (Panels 2- greyhound racing participants). A list of participants, and additional correspondence received on this petition, can be found in Annex A: Evidence.

**22.** The Committee is grateful to all those who gave evidence, which helped shape our discussion and conclusions.

## The Committee's view

This chapter sets out the Committee's conclusions and recommendations to the Welsh Government.

**23.** There is a long tradition of greyhound racing in Wales. While there is only one independent track in Wales, the racing community is part of the wider British scene, so there will be dogs which are raised and train in Wales that compete across the border, and equally there will be former racing dogs that retire to live out their days as pets here in Wales too. Equally we are aware that greyhounds frequently travel from Ireland through Wales to access tracks in England.

**24.** Throughout our inquiry, our emphasis has been on the welfare of dogs. Wales should have a regime which is more robust as other parts of the UK, when it comes to animal welfare. As a Committee we are committed to ensuring that any recommendations we make would improve the quality of life for dogs at every stage of their lives: as pups, as racers, and in retirement. We would also want to ensure that dogs being transported through Wales are also protected.

**25.** Looking specifically at the Valley Track, the evidence provided by the owners suggests the track is no more dangerous than any other. The improvements which would be required to become a GBGB licensed track would only improve safety. But they would do so while increasing the volume of racing which happens in Wales. Even with an improvement in safety levels, it is likely that a sharp increase in the number of races and in the number of dogs racing, would lead to an increase in the overall number of dogs injured.

**26.** During the course of our inquiry a number of animal charities have reviewed their own policies and practices, and a number have adopted new policies in relation to racing. Where previously they felt they could be most useful working with the industry to improve welfare and safety, they have now moved to adopt a more radical approach, supporting the ban requested in this petition. This is an important step, which has not been taken lightly by any of the organisations concerned.

**27.** The *Cut the Chase* campaign launched earlier this year sets out a compelling case for change, and endorses a practical phase-out approach rather than a hard cut-off. While a majority of Members support this phased ban approach, Joel James MS believes more should

be done to enforce and tighten existing regulation to improve the welfare of dogs, but does not agree with a ban.

**Recommendation 1.** The Welsh Government is already committed to considering licensing of greyhound racing as part of its Animal Welfare Plan. We would encourage that work being prioritised

**Recommendation 2.** A majority of Committee Members believe that Welsh Government action should include a phased ban on greyhound racing in Wales.

**Recommendation 3.** A greyhound's racing career can make up a short part of its life. Welsh Government action to improve animal welfare should not be restricted to a ban on racing – like the industry's own strategy, it should consider the whole life of dogs, and the conditions in which they are kept before and after their racing careers. This would include the plight of dogs travelling through Wales on their way to races.

## Implications

**28.** Banning greyhound racing and/or introducing stricter animal welfare rules for dog trainers would have an economic impact on individuals involved in the industry. There would also be a direct impact on the Valleys Stadium, and the medium-term development of the Ystrad Mynach area. There would need to be widespread consultation with the industry ahead of any significant changes.

**29.** We would also recommend consultation with organisations who take in former racing greyhounds, to ensure that they are able to provide their services without being overwhelmed by demand.

**Recommendation 4.** Welsh Government should ensure any changes are subject to widespread consultation, and that advice is available to those working in the industry on how to comply with any new rules or regulations.

**30.** Of course, greyhound racing is not the only sport where animals race for the entertainment of humans, who gamble on the results. However, our inquiries have been guided by the petition, and we have not looked at other sports. Clearly, it will be a matter for the government to consider whether the changing consensus on greyhound racing has implications for other sports.

**Recommendation 5.** In considering a ban on greyhound racing, the Welsh Government should also look at other sports where animals compete.

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## Annex A: Evidence

The following witnesses provided oral evidence to the committee on the dates noted below. Transcripts of all oral evidence sessions can be viewed on the Committee's website.

Date	Name and Organisation
<b>13 June 2022</b>	<b>Lord (David) Lipsey,</b> Chair of Premier Greyhound Racing <b>Malcolm Tams,</b> The Valley Greyhound Stadium <b>Mark Bird,</b> Chair of the Greyhound Board of Great Britain <b>Professor Madeleine Campbell,</b> Independent Board Member of the Greyhound Board of Great Britain
<b>23 May 2022</b>	<b>Vanessa Waddon,</b> Hope Rescue <b>Alain Thomas,</b> Greyhound Rescue Wales <b>Alex Nilan,</b> Almost Home Dog Rescue

Additional written evidence can be seen on the petition's page

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