

PGRWB 18 Alain Thomas, Trustee, Greyhound Rescue Wales

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

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[Bil Gwahardd Rasio Milgwn \(Cymru\) | Prohibition of Greyhound Racing \(Wales\) Bill](#)

Ymateb gan: Alain Thomas, Ymddiriedolwr, Achub Milgwn Cymru | Response from: Alain Thomas, Trustee, Greyhound Rescue Wales

Working to secure voluntary improvements and statutory regulation to protect the welfare of greyhounds in Wales – a timeline.

Context

In a hearing of the committee on 14.10.25, a committee member said they were not aware of efforts by welfare organisations to work with the industry and Welsh Government in Wales to secure welfare improvements through voluntary initiatives or regulation. I have been involved in this work since 2001 and this document summarises a timeline of the key events. The pause in efforts between 2009 and 2018 explains why the member concerned may not have been aware of this work as that time period includes his term of tenure as the Minister responsible for Animal Welfare.

2001 The start of work to improve greyhound welfare in Wales.

Greyhound Rescue Wales started work in 1993. In its early years the organisation took into its care many greyhounds who were literally being thrown onto the streets once their racing days were over. Some were handed over by members of the public who had found them, others were taken into local authority pounds and came to GRW from there.

GRW knew the abandonment of greyhounds was a serious welfare problem but needed to evidence it. The opportunity came with the establishment of the National Assembly for Wales.

In 2001, GRW was invited to make a presentation at the first meeting of the All-Party Group for Animal Welfare, at the recently established National Assembly for Wales.

This presentation led to the establishment of the Wales Greyhound Forum which brought together Dogs Trust, RSPCA Cymru, and GRW. The Forum was chaired by Assembly Member Lorraine Barret and conducted crucial research which found that 139 abandoned greyhounds had been handed in to local authority pounds in Wales in a single year. The findings were published by the National Assembly for Wales All Party Group for Animal Welfare and Greyhound Rescue Wales in a report: "The fates of former racing greyhounds and working lurchers in Wales"¹. This report estimated that hundreds of greyhounds would meet what it called "unacceptable fates" in Wales each year at the end of their racing career. These fates included abandonment or death.

2002 -2004 Attempts to engage with the Welsh Tracks

There were three independent tracks in Wales at this time: Bedwellty, Swansea and Valley. Because the industry was small in scale Wales Greyhound Forum members believed welfare improvements could be achieved by engaging directly with the three tracks. The tracks were therefore invited to send representatives to meet with the Forum members to work for welfare improvements. Only the Swansea track sent a representative, it therefore proved impossible to make any progress.

2004 The tragedy of Last Hope.

On May 2nd 2004, a black greyhound called "Last Hope" was found on a mountainside near Caerphilly. He had been shot in the head by a bolt gun and both his ears had been cut off to prevent him being identified through his ear tattoos. This event sent shock waves through people involved in animal welfare and in greyhound racing in Wales. GRW worked with the RSPCA, Gwent Police, and people involved in greyhound racing to identify all the people involved in Last Hope's death and successfully prosecuted the man who killed him.

Last Hope's death had many consequences.

- For many years after Last Hope's death greyhound owners and trainers would come to GRW to ask us to rehome their dogs, few had done so previously
- As a tribute to Last Hope and to help other dogs whose life was at immediate risk GRW set up the "Last Hope Fund" which has since paid for life saving treatment for many injured greyhounds.
- The death of Last Hope also moved Vanessa Waddon to become actively involved in dog welfare and the charity she set up is named after him.
- Another consequence of direct relevance to the issue of working with the Welsh tracks is that following Last Hope's death they finally engaged with the Wales Greyhound Forum.

¹ The fate of former racing greyhounds and working lurchers in Wales, the National Assembly for Wales All Party Group for Animal Welfare in association with Greyhound Rescue Wales, 2001.

Within 24 hours of Last Hope's death GRW representatives had visited all three tracks in person and all three had signed a pledge to work with welfare organisations to make sure nothing like this happened again.

2004-2007 The first greyhound welfare code of practice for Wales

Track and welfare representatives worked together for several years under the chairmanship of Lorraine Barrett AM. This work culminated in the production of a set of draft regulations to protect greyhounds in Wales; "A better bet for greyhounds"², which was launched at what is now the Senedd on 21.11.2007.

Discussions then began with Welsh Government about implementation of the regulations. At first these were promising and because of this and the fact that draft Welsh regulations were more comprehensive than the Welfare of Greyhounds legislation being developed in England³, welfare organisations focused on securing the implementation of "A Better Bet for Greyhounds" rather than pressing for Wales to adopt the English legislation.

2007-2009 Track closures

By 2007 one of the three tracks (Bedwellty) had closed for economic reasons and in November 2009, Swansea, which was widely considered to be Wales' leading track at the time, closed following the prosecution under the Animal Welfare Act, of an individual working at the track. The offence related to the conditions in the kennels where the greyhounds were kept.

GRW had anticipated the closure of Swansea and meticulously planned a concerted effort involving partner organisation including Dogs Trust and RSPCA Cymru to offer every greyhound who raced at Swansea an immediate rescue place. Over 40 greyhounds were taken in by the partners in the days following the last race.

The experience of taking in greyhounds following the closure of Swansea have informed the work of the current Welsh Greyhound Partnership, established in anticipation of the closure of Valley.

2009 - the end of the first phase of pressing for regulation

The closure of Swansea left only one operational track in Wales, the Valley Stadium at Ystrad Mynach. The reduction in the number of tracks led Welsh Government to decide that the scale of the problem no longer merited legislation and the decision was taken not to turn the draft regulations into law. The timeline

² A Better Bet for Greyhounds, a submission to Welsh Assembly Government in view of proposals to introduce regulations and a code of practice for greyhounds racing in Wales, Wales Greyhound Forum 2008.

³ Now the "Welfare of Racing Greyhounds Regulations 2010".

of these events also meant that the opportunity to adopt the English regulations was also lost.

Although the remaining track had signed up to the provisions of “A Better Bet for Greyhounds, it did nothing to implement any of them on a voluntary basis. Nevertheless, GRW and the other welfare organisations decided that it was likely the remaining track would also close soon. For this reason, and because the number of greyhounds needing help had reduced and was therefore more manageable, the welfare organisations decided to suspend efforts to secure regulation.

2018 The start of the second phase: Amazing Greys and the Greyhound Welfare Working Group

By 2018 it was clear that Valley was unlikely to close in the near future so Greyhound Rescue Wales and Hope Rescue jointly decided to restart efforts to secure welfare improvements in Wales.

2018 – 2021 Amazing Greys.

Hope Rescue set up the Amazing Greys project. The project offered an immediate rescue place to every greyhound leaving the Valley stadium. Its work is well documented in other evidence submitted to the Committee.

2018 – 2022 The Greyhound Working Group

Greyhound Rescue Wales initiated and led Animal Welfare Network Wales’ Greyhound Welfare Working Group which included Hope Rescue, RSPCA Cymru, Battersea Dogs and Cats Homes, and the British Veterinary Association to try, once again, to improve the welfare of greyhounds in Wales. The group drew up a “Road Map” which began with efforts to engage with the track and secure voluntary improvements while also working towards statutory regulation. Should these efforts fail, the road map suggested the next step should be to press for a ban.

After some evidence gathering the GWWG’s early efforts focused on working with the remaining track to improve welfare. One initiative involved contacting all veterinary practices within a reasonable distance of the track to try and recruit vets willing to attend the track for £100 per race-night. This is much lower than the commercial rate and it was made clear to the vets that the prime motivation of any practice or individual choosing to participate in the project had to be to improve the welfare of the dogs. Sufficient vets were identified who were willing to attend on a rota basis and this offer was made to the track who turned it down as being unaffordable. This response made it clear to GRW that the track had no interest in improving welfare on a voluntary basis.

The Greyhound Welfare Working Group then focused its efforts on producing a new set of welfare regulations for greyhounds in Wales, at the request of Welsh Government, to set out some clear and up to date standards to which the track could be held accountable.

The resultant voluntary code of practice “The welfare of racing greyhounds (Wales)” was published on 29.10.2019⁴. It is a detailed document setting out standards covering all aspects of the life of the racing greyhound throughout the greyhound’s life cycle.

This code was widely disseminated within the greyhound industry in Wales. Efforts included Amazing Greys volunteers giving to hard copies of the Code personally to the trainers and owners they met while attending race nights.

An addition to the code of practice covering track surfaces was then produced later in 2021.

Despite the extensive dissemination of the code of practice and addendum there was no discernible change in welfare practices affecting greyhounds in Wales.

2022 Changes of position and a new alliance. GRW had adopted a neutral position on greyhound racing and tried to work with the racing industry for over 20 years to secure welfare improvements, but nothing had changed. A proposal was therefore submitted to and approved by a Special General Meeting of members in March 2022 to “support the movement to end greyhound racing in Wales”. This marked a fundamental shift in GRW’s position and allowed the organisation to join once more with Hope Rescue who had been leading a campaign to ban greyhound racing in Wales since the end of the Amazing Greys project. Later that year Dogs Trust, the RSPCA and Blue Cross also changed their position and called for a phased end to greyhound racing.

Alain Thomas

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⁴ Voluntary Code of Practice, the Welfare of Racing Greyhounds (Wales), Animal Welfare Network Wales, 2021.
