

NATIONAL ACT EDITORIAL

Greyhound racing ban tough but necessary

By The Canberra Times
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There's no room for vacillation when pronouncing a death sentence, and Mike Baird was all steely unforgiveness when he announced the termination of the NSW greyhound racing industry this week, effective from July 1 next

year. "There's no other alternative," the NSW Premier said on Thursday. "Justice [Michael] McHugh [author of the inquiry into the NSW greyhound racing industry which Mr Baird initiated and which informed his decision] has shone a light on an industry that has overseen the slaughter of tens of thousands of healthy dogs whose only crime was not being fast enough".

The year-long grace period will enable the industry, which turns over about \$335 million annually, to transition to new employment. What that might be exactly, Mr Baird didn't say. Racing will continue under close government supervision, during which time it's hoped the 6000 to 10,000 dogs bred and trained to race in NSW each year will be re-homed. The ACT will also implement a ban on the industry. .



Greyhound racing ban is tough but necessary.

Photo: Illawara Mercury

Mr Baird's firm declaration that there was "no alternative" to shut-down was not true, strictly speaking: Justice McHugh's main recommendation was that given his findings concerning industry management and governance, the "Parliament of NSW should consider whether the industry has lost its social licence and should no longer be

permitted to operate". The remaining 79 recommendations canvassed a range of governance and oversight measures to be implemented in the event the government granted the industry a reprieve.

The decision to "save" the Parliament the bother of considering the matter more broadly has hardly been commented upon. Instead, Mr Baird has been widely applauded and commended for his decisiveness, not least by animal rights groups which have repeatedly (and successfully) sought to embarrass an industry they claim regularly trades in live baiting, the destruction of unwanted dogs (or "wastage"), and the cover-up of deaths and injuries.



It was disturbing footage of live baiting aired on *Four Corners* in February 2015 – and the ensuing public outrage – which led the NSW government to set up the special commission. Greyhound Racing NSW claimed live baiting was limited to a minority of renegade trainers but nonetheless resolved to get its house in order. Regarding that pledge, the commission accepted that GRNSW "is not the organisation that it was in February 2015" and had undergone significant change, "most of it for the better".

However, its conclusion was damning: "Permitting GRNSW a further period of time in which to attempt to demonstrate it can successfully address issues of overbreeding and wastage appears to the commission to be likely to prove fruitless and, at the same time, continue to result in the deaths of many more thousands of healthy greyhounds".

As well as totally discounting GRNSW's ability to drive internal change, the commission also posited the theory that greyhound racing has forfeited its "social licence" to operate – that is, it no longer sustains the legitimacy, credibility and trust which all industries are required to demonstrate in order to win and retain community acceptance.

The commission's view that that the industry has "a dark side" rooted in the widespread view of the "greyhound as a commercial commodity" has been all too plainly on view in recent years, and it explains why Mr Baird acted as he

did. He may have been influenced, too, by the assessment that the industry's economic and social benefits had been overstated.

That greyhound racing is a small and therefore perhaps expendable industry should not colour public judgment of Mr Baird's decision. It ought to have moved more swiftly to stamp out unacceptable practices, get rid of bad apples and repair its reputation (never particularly sweet-smelling). Yet, there remains a view in certain quarters that the industry has been judged on standards not applied to thoroughbred racing, for example, and that it has been denied a second chance at redemption.

There are warnings, possibly overstated, that banning greyhound will result in the "wastage" of thousands of dogs before next July. This aside, Mr Baird has struck a significant blow for animal rights, one with ramifications, particularly for politicians. Adjudicating on calls for an end to the live-cattle trade or intensive piggeries, for example, will be not be as simple or straightforward as banning greyhound racing.



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