

NATIONAL VICTORIA

Live baiting scandal: Top greyhound trainers to plead guilty on animal cruelty charges

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Four men once famed among Victoria's greyhound racing industry have indicated they will plead guilty to animal cruelty offences over the use of live rabbits and pigs to bait dogs to run faster.



Lawyers for former trainer Anthony Mills, a one-time legend in greyhound racing, his son Stuart, fellow track manager Lawrence Cunningham, and Darren McDonald, a dual Australian trainer of the year, on Monday told Frankston Magistrates Court the men would all formally plead guilty next month.



Greyhound trainer Anthony Mills at Frankston Magistrates Court on Monday.

The four are among a group of 14 greyhound racing figures connected to a training track in Tooradin who were charged following raids by RSPCA investigators and police at tracks in Victoria, NSW and Queensland.

The Victorian group are charged with offending between November 2014 and January last year.



A still from a Four Corners story on live baiting.

Stuart Mills, 40, and Cunningham, 57, face a combined 79 charges including counts of committing aggravated cruelty to animals – an offence which carries maximum penalties of two years in jail and a \$50,000 fine – and managing a premises for the purpose of baiting or mistreating an animal.

McDonald, 47, and Anthony Mills, 74, face 10 and five charges respectively.

McDonald and Stuart Mills are both charged with using rabbits and pigs to bait greyhounds.

The appearances came days after the NSW government announced it would [shut down its greyhound racing industry](#). The Victorian government has no plans to follow suit.





Greyhound trainer Stuart Mills outside Frankston Magistrates Court on Monday.

Photo: Paul Jeffers

Another trainer, Dennis Dean, also appeared in Frankston on Monday, and could contest his charges, after the court heard investigators who filmed the live baiting were on private property while gathering evidence.

Contractors for Animals Australia, an advocacy group for animals, went onto the track and a neighbouring property to film the live baiting and passed on 10 hours of footage to the RSPCA.

Some footage was played to court and showed a man holding a rabbit on a leash and close to two greyhounds, which became excited.

The rabbit was then put on a lure and chased by the dogs. The identities of the two men in the footage appeared unclear.

Lyn White, Animals Australia's campaign director and chief investigator, told the court she and her contractors did not get permission to enter either the track or be on the adjoining property.

Ms White said there was no other way to get the evidence, as she believed the RSPCA needed footage to prosecute the case and would have been unlikely to have got an inspector at the track at the right time with a warrant.

She believed live baiting was a systemic practice at Tooradin.

"I took the decision we needed to gather primary evidence on how extensive it was," Ms White said.

The contractors who filmed the track both told the court they thought they were on public property when filming outside the track, as there was a path and waterway nearby and no signs.

Prosecutor Greg Lyon, QC, said the RSPCA did not concede the pair were trespassing.

Magistrate Rodney Crisp is yet to determine whether the footage will be admissible in the case against Mr Dean, 47, who faces 10 charges including aggravated cruelty. His hearing continues.

The nine other charged men are due to return at a later date. Most of the 14 have already had either lifetime bans or long suspensions imposed by Greyhound Racing Victoria.

The Tooradin track has been shut down.