

Greyhound racing: 82 per cent want Australia-wide industry shutdown, poll finds

Lateline By Brigid Andersen

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Almost 22,000 people have voted in a poll asking whether there should be an Australia-wide ban on greyhound racing, with 82 per cent in favour of completely shutting down the industry.

Lateline ran the Facebook poll asking about a nationwide ban, after New South Wales and the ACT moved to end the sport in 2017.

The decision to ban greyhound racing comes after a special commission report into the practice found horrific evidence of animal cruelty, mass killings of greyhounds and the live baiting of animals like possums, piglets and rabbits.

Australia is one of only eight countries in the world where commercial greyhound racing is still legal.

Other countries include Macau, Vietnam, New Zealand, Ireland, Britain, the United States and Mexico.

Lateline received hundreds of comments in response to the poll, including from greyhound owners and former trainers and breeders.

Philip Begbie, who described himself as a former greyhound owner, breeder, trainer, bookmaker and veterinary surgeon, wrote that in his experience, the dogs were very well cared for.

"And whenever euthanased, done with a heavy heart," he said via email.

"Who, these days in the 21st century finds racing animals for sport to be an acceptable behaviour? Can we now also look at horse racing?"

- David Jay

"It can't even come close to being called a sport."

- Bobbyscout Davey

"Ban it. Ban it now. It's banned in most states in the USA. Anywhere there is gambling and animals there is cruelty. The average racing greyhound doesn't get to live past 3.5 years, when their natural life span is 14 years.

Greyhound racing is rotten to the core."

- Mary Delaney



PHOTO: The poll found overwhelming support for a nation-wide ban. (AFP: Robyn Beck, file photo)

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There were fears though about what would happen to the greyhounds no longer needed if the racing industry:

"I do not want to see tens of thousands of dogs made redundant overnight."

- Susan Louise Pitt

And some people were worried about the economic impact of shutting down an industry that employs thousands.

"You are not only going to cause hardship for those that do the right thing but those who do the wrong thing are going to continue by taking it underground."

- Helen Brown

New South Wales Premier Mike Baird said there would be a transition plan to help look after those involved in the industry and their dogs.

Animal rights groups, greyhound industry debate need for ban

The New South Wales greyhound racing ban was also the subject of discussion on Lateline between NSW Greyhound Breeders, Owners and Trainers Association (GBOTA) chief executive Brenton Scott, and Animals Australia executive director, Glenys Oogjes.

Mr Scott said Premier Baird's decision was a "knee-jerk reaction" with "no industry consultation at all".

He also accused the recent Special Commission of Inquiry into the Greyhound Racing Industry of using "old and flawed" information, adding that GBOTA were "undertaking a credibility review on that report".

Mr Scott insisted the industry had made significant changes in the past 18 months that were not taken into account.

"We're an industry that has changed, is changing, and is ready to embrace whatever change is needed to have a respectable role in the future," he said.

But Ms Oogjes said she supported an Australia-wide ban, arguing change in the greyhound industry was not possible after "abhorrent cruelty by any measure that's been known for decades".

"And those in the industry not involved in it, knew about it," she said.

Ms Oogjes also defended the Royal Commission.

"It is the most comprehensive, extensive, and well-referenced report that I have seen on any animal welfare issue," she said.

"Justice McHugh said that it would be fruitless to try to change the inherent issues that this industry has because of the culture particularly."

Mr Scott conceded that the industry must breed less dogs and that it "must accept responsibility for a whole-of-life experience for the greyhounds post-racing".

He said cleaning up the industry rather than a ban would protect communities.

"The industry employs 10,000 people, there's another 15,000 participants involved in the industry," he said.

"We make a \$335 million economic contribution on an annual basis and the flow-on effect to other industries, other community endeavours, are held together in many of the racetracks because of the commercial activity."

"We make a substantial contribution to the social fabric of many communities."

Ms Oogjes pointed out Premier Baird's offer of assistance to people needing to move out of this industry, but added: "In any event, commercial industry considerations is not something that should allow a cruel industry to continue".

"We stopped human slavery and the arguments against that at the time, and why it took so long, is that people said people would go out of business — of course they would , out of a cruel busines

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