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Rural Affairs and Islands Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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29 August 2025

Dear Convener,

THE GREYHOUND RACING (OFFENCES) (SCOTLAND) BILL

I am enclosing a memorandum setting out the Scottish Government's position on the general principles of the above Bill, introduced by Mark Ruskell MSP on 23 April 2025.

I hope this memorandum assists the Committee in its consideration of the Bill. I look forward to engaging constructively with the Committee and Mr Ruskell on this issue.

Yours sincerely,



JIM FAIRLIE

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MEMORANDUM FROM THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT TO THE RURAL AFFAIRS AND ISLANDS COMMITTEE

Introduction

1. This memorandum has been prepared by the Scottish Government to assist consideration by the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee of the Greyhound Racing (Offences) (Scotland) Bill (“the Bill”), which was introduced by Mark Ruskell MSP on 23 April 2025.

Background

2. Mark Ruskell MSP lodged a draft Bill proposal in the Scottish Parliament on 7 February 2024. The stated aim of the Member’s proposed Bill was to prohibit the racing of greyhounds at racetracks in Scotland. The Member consulted on his proposed Bill from February to May 2024. The consultation received 789 responses, with 680 (just over 86%) fully supportive of the proposal to prohibit greyhound racing at racetracks.

3. On 26 June 2024, the Member lodged a final proposal: the Prohibition of Greyhound Racing (Scotland) Bill. This proposed making it a criminal offence for a person to use or permit the usage of greyhounds in racing at (licensed and unlicensed) racetracks for commercial and non-commercial purposes in Scotland, and the creation of associated enforcement provisions. The Member’s final proposal gained the necessary cross-party support, securing him the right to introduce his Bill to the Scottish Parliament.

4. On 23 April 2025 the Member introduced the Bill to the Scottish Parliament. The Bill as introduced:

- ◆ makes it an offence to run greyhounds on oval racetracks in Scotland;
- ◆ also makes it an offence for racetrack owners, managers and anyone authorised by them to knowingly cause, or permit another person to run greyhounds on an oval racetrack and applies to greyhound racing at licensed and unlicensed racetracks and covers both commercial and non-commercial activities. The offences cover running a greyhound on an oval racetrack, and as such apply to races, as well as time-trials and sales-trials taking place on racetracks. The running of one or more greyhounds at an oval racetrack in Scotland, for whatever purpose, will be an offence;
- ◆ sets out the maximum penalties that will apply to persons convicted of an offence under the Bill. These are:
 - on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or a fine not exceeding £20,000 (or both);
 - on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 5 years or a fine (or both).
- ◆ makes provision for deprivation, disqualification and seizure orders, appeals against them and ways in which a disqualification order may be ended or varied,

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powers of enforcement, time limits for summary proceedings and for individual responsibility where an organisation commits an offence.

- ◆ proposes a coming into force date of 12 months after the day of Royal Assent, should it be passed by the Scottish Parliament.

Basis for the Bill

5. The stated aim of the Bill is to improve and protect the welfare of greyhounds by making it an offence to race or permit the racing of greyhounds on oval racetracks in Scotland. The Member responsible for the Bill considers that there are inherent risks of injury and fatalities associated with the racing of greyhounds. The Member is of the view that existing animal welfare laws are insufficient and cannot protect racing greyhounds from harm, as the risks arise from the very act of racing greyhounds around tracks that are oval in design. The Member considers that too many greyhounds sustain injuries or are killed as a direct result of racing at speed around such tracks and that only a ban on racing on oval tracks can address this issue. The Member further believes that despite any benefits that may arise from the introduction of a statutory licensing scheme for greyhound racing tracks (on which we consulted in 2023), such a scheme cannot address the significant animal welfare risks associated with oval tracks.

6. Numerous factors influence the risk of injuries during racing and include dog genetics, weight, age, sex, speed, weather, track design and surface, race distance and starting position. Among the most widely studied risks associated with greyhound racing injuries are those related to running on the bends of an oval track.

7. Tracks that are oval in design inevitably cause racing greyhounds to bunch together in the tight turns which can lead to collisions, thereby increasing the risk of serious injuries. The tight turns, which are taken at speed, also place considerable strain on a dog's physiology which can result in muscular and/or skeletal injuries which may plague the dog for the remainder of its life. The risk of serious injury, therefore, exists more as a consequence of track design rather than being solely attributable to collisions in tight turns.

8. In February 2023, the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission (SAWC) published its [Report on the welfare of greyhounds used for racing in Scotland](#). This report highlighted evidence stating that greyhounds hit their max speed after 80 – 100 metres, which, at many race tracks, means that the dogs hit maximum speed just before arriving at the first bend, which is also where most collisions and therefore injuries occur. Further, SAWC concluded:

- ◆ *“It is clear that track design has a significant impact on injury rate, but only by racing on straight tracks would the risks and injuries associated with greyhounds running around bends be eliminated.”*
- ◆ *“In summary, our main concerns for the welfare of greyhounds, when racing, is the risk of serious injury, which in some cases results in euthanasia. This is particularly exacerbated by the way racing is undertaken, around a curved track, which increases the risk of collision and stress damage particularly at the first bend in the track.”*

9. The Scottish Government acknowledges that there are risks associated with racing greyhounds around tracks of oval design and this is supported by evidence and reinforced

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by the SAWC. We further accept that the introduction of a statutory licensing framework may mitigate but would not prevent the primary animal welfare concern that this Bill seeks to eliminate.

Scottish Government Position

10. Having considered the Bill's provisions, the Scottish Government position is that we will support its general principles. The Scottish Government recognises and accepts that there are legitimate animal welfare concerns associated with the racing of greyhounds on oval tracks. As the Bill's focus is only to prohibit the racing of greyhounds on such tracks, we are content to support its stated aim, which is to protect the welfare of greyhounds raced on oval tracks in Scotland.

11. While the Scottish Government is content to support the general principles of the Bill, we will seek to work with the Member to bring forward some changes to it. For example, we will seek an amendment to the Bill so that it commences on a date to be specified by Scottish Ministers in regulations, rather than its current provision for fixed commencement 12 months from the day of Royal Assent. We will also be seeking some amendments to the enforcement provisions of the Bill, which currently create bespoke new provisions for investigation, deprivation, disqualification and seizure orders rather than applying the existing, and substantially similar, provisions for animal welfare offences under Part 2 of the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006.

Financial Impact

12. The financial memorandum accompanying the Bill provides a summary of the potential costs associated with the Bill's provisions and accordingly are not repeated here. In addition to the costs presented in the financial memorandum, there may be some cost to the Scottish Government associated with the delivery of comms activity to promote the prohibition on the running of greyhounds on oval tracks. Any such costs are likely to be covered by existing budgets.

Conclusion

13. The Scottish Government acknowledges that there are genuine risks associated with racing greyhounds around tracks of oval design and this is supported by evidence and reinforced by the SAWC. We further accept that while the introduction of a statutory licensing framework would undoubtedly improve aspects of greyhound racing, it would not prevent the primary animal welfare concern that this Bill now focuses on and seeks to eliminate. For this reason, the Scottish Government will support the general principles of the Bill.

14. The Scottish Government will further consider the provisions of the Bill and will propose amendments to address the points raised in paragraph 11 of this memorandum. We will also consider whether there is a need to seek amendments additional to those highlighted.

Scottish Government
August 2025

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