



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Rural Affairs and Islands Committee

Wednesday 18 February 2026

Session 6



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RURAL AFFAIRS AND ISLANDS COMMITTEE

7th Meeting 2026, Session 6

CONVENER

*Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
*Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
*Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
*Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
*Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP)
*Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
*Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Jim Fairlie (Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity)
Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Emma Johnston

LOCATION

The Mary Fairfax Somerville Room (CR2)

Scottish Parliament

Rural Affairs and Islands Committee

Wednesday 18 February 2026

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

Greyhound Racing (Offences) (Scotland) Bill: Stage 2

The Convener (Finlay Carson): Good morning, and welcome to the seventh meeting in 2026 of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee. I ask everybody to ensure that their electronic devices are switched to silent.

I welcome to the meeting the member in charge of the bill, Mark Ruskell, who is supported by officials from the non-Government bills unit, and Jim Fairlie, the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity, who is supported by Scottish Government officials. Officials seated at the table are here to support the member in charge and the minister but are not permitted to speak in the debate on amendments.

Section 1—Offence of racing a greyhound on a racetrack

The Convener: Amendment 1, in the name of the minister, is grouped with amendments 2 and 3.

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): The first two amendments in the group clarify that the offence of racing a greyhound on a track will arise only when the race occurs at a track in Scotland. I acknowledge that Mark Ruskell previously said that the bill does not affect greyhound racing in England, but it is important for the Government to provide a clear statement on what we consider the position to be on the jurisdiction and territorial extent of an offence that can attract criminal sanctions. The number of people affected by the bill is small—it is those who keep greyhounds in Scotland for racing at an oval track in Scotland. However, individuals whose activities are currently lawful are entitled to certainty on which of their current activities will be criminalised by the bill and which will remain lawful. Amendments 1 and 2 are necessary to give the law that clarity.

Racing a greyhound at an oval track in Scotland will be criminalised, but keeping or kennelling a greyhound in Scotland and training a greyhound in Scotland for racing in England will remain lawful, as will transporting a greyhound to England for racing. The offence does not cover those activities. I have lodged these amendments to avoid any confusion about this part of the bill and how it

impacts the criminal law in Scotland. The amendments will make it clear that an offence will not be committed under the bill if a dog is taken from Scotland to run at a racetrack elsewhere. It is important to clarify that, as matters stand, the United Kingdom Government does not have any plans to prohibit greyhound racing in England.

Amendment 2 will also make it clear that the power to change the definition of a racetrack cannot be used to extend the offences in the bill to racetracks outwith Scotland. It is important to have clear words in the bill to clarify those points, so that greyhound owners can have certainty about what they can and cannot do with their dogs. The ban is only on running at oval tracks and does not prevent greyhound owners from exercising their dogs in other ways.

Amendment 3 expressly limits the power to modify the definition of racetrack used in the bill, so that it can be used only for the purpose of preventing harm to greyhounds. That is consistent with the policy behind the bill and will ensure that the power is used to expand the definition beyond oval tracks to include other shapes of racetrack only where there is an animal welfare justification. As I have said throughout the process of the bill, there needs to be a solid evidence base before we legislate on these matters.

I move amendment 1.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Although I am content that the bill is sufficiently clear that offences will apply only where a greyhound has been raced on a track in Scotland, I accept the Government's suggestion that setting that out expressly in the bill would be helpful, particularly given that, should the bill pass, the legal position in relation to greyhound racing will be different in Scotland compared to other parts of the UK. A similar amendment to the Prohibition of Greyhound Racing (Wales) Bill has gone through the Welsh Senedd.

On amendment 3, as the policy memorandum sets out, my intention is to include a regulation-making power that allows Scottish ministers to amend the definition of a racetrack to allow the Government to change the definition should racing on circular or straight tracks, or other types of premises, develop and prove to be harmful to greyhounds. I am content to accept amendment 3 and the other amendments in the group.

Amendment 1 agreed to.

Amendments 2 and 3 moved—[Jim Fairlie]—and agreed to.

Section 1, as amended, agreed to.

Section 2 agreed to.

Section 3—Powers of enforcement

The Convener: Amendment 4, in the name of the minister, is grouped with amendments 5 to 7 and 9 to 17.

Jim Fairlie: My amendments in this group remove provisions from the bill regarding the post-conviction powers of the courts, such as powers to impose deprivation and disqualification orders, and instead amend equivalent provisions of the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 so that they apply in relation to offences under the bill. I have lodged the amendments so that existing rules and procedures in relation to post-conviction orders can be used in relation to the bill and to apply record-keeping duties under the 2006 act in relation to disqualification orders for offences under the bill.

The provisions in the 2006 act being applied are modified as appropriate for the offences under the bill. For example, if a disqualification order is made in relation to a conviction for an offence under the bill, any disqualifications imposed can only be in respect of greyhounds and not other animals.

I move amendment 4.

Mark Ruskell: The enforcement powers that are provided for in the bill allow the courts to make deprivation, disqualification or seizure orders where an offence has been committed, should they deem it appropriate to do so. The powers are modelled on the appropriate equivalent provisions in the Animal Health and Welfare Act (Scotland) 2006 and the Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Act 2023, tailored where necessary to ensure that they are appropriate for offences that are created in the bill.

I previously indicated that I was open to the Scottish Government's suggestion that the bill should be amended so that the provisions of deprivation, disqualification and seizure orders under part 2 of the 2006 act can be applied instead of the enforcement powers that are provided for in sections 5 to 9 of the bill as introduced. I thank the minister and his officials for the useful discussions that we have had in regard to the amendments.

I accept the Government's view that it would be preferable and more consistent to provide for post-conviction orders by means of the 2006 act. I also accept the minister's view that the amendments would allow enforcement of the bill to be streamlined and avoid the need to establish new court processes. I hope that that will allow the implementation of the bill to be sped up.

I am content that, should the amendments be agreed to, my intended outcome—that the courts have sufficient power and flexibility to impose appropriate sanctions on anyone who is found guilty of the bill's two primary offences—will be achieved. I am therefore content with the proposed

amendments in this group and am happy to support them.

Amendment 4 agreed to.

Section 3, as amended, agreed to.

Schedule—Enforcement powers

Amendments 5 to 7 moved—[Jim Fairlie]—and agreed to.

Schedule, as amended, agreed to.

Section 4—Time limit for summary proceedings

The Convener: Amendment 8, in the name of the minister, is in a group on its own.

Jim Fairlie: Amendment 8 will remove the time-bar rule in section 4 of the bill for the two main offences under the bill. The amendment is consistent with the approach that is taken in the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006, in which there is no time-bar rule in relation to the offences that are triable either summarily or on indictment. Removal of section 4 will allow greater time for investigation of offences and avoid the prospect of failure to commence proceedings due to the complexity of investigation.

I move amendment 8.

Mark Ruskell: As the minister said, amendment 8 removes the time bar for bringing forward proceedings. That will make the bill more consistent with the approach taken in the 2006 act. It would also allow greater time for investigation of offences and avoid instances where proceedings cannot be commenced—for example, if an investigation was particularly complex. I am persuaded that the amendment would be useful and I am happy to support it.

The Convener: The question is, that amendment 8 be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Convener: There will be a division.

For

Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

The Convener: The result of the division is: For 7, Against 2, Abstentions 0.

Amendment 8 agreed to.

Section 5—Deprivation orders

Amendment 9 moved—[Jim Fairlie]—and agreed to.

After schedule

Amendment 10 moved—[Jim Fairlie]—and agreed to.

Section 6—Disqualification orders

Amendment 11 moved—[Jim Fairlie]—and agreed to.

Section 7—Seizure orders where disqualification breached

Amendment 12 moved—[Jim Fairlie]—and agreed to.

Section 8—Termination or variation of disqualification

Amendment 13 moved—[Jim Fairlie]—and agreed to.

Section 9—Appeals against orders

Amendment 14 moved—[Jim Fairlie]—and agreed to.

After section 9

The Convener: Amendment 19, in the name of Rhoda Grant, is in a group on its own.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

With amendment 19, I am trying to add purpose to the bill. We know that there are no operational racetracks in Scotland, which means that the bill does nothing to improve the lives of greyhounds in Scotland. I was looking to lodge an amendment on the welfare of greyhounds per se, but that fell outwith the scope of the bill. Therefore, I lodged amendment 14 as a probing amendment, to see whether there is anything that can be introduced to the bill that will improve the lives of greyhounds in Scotland. Given that there are no operational racetracks in Scotland, I concede that amendment 14 will not cover any dogs. That is why it is a probing amendment. I hope that we can at least have a debate and a discussion about how we can improve the lives of greyhounds and, indeed, all dogs that are owned and kennelled in Scotland.

I move amendment 19.

Jim Fairlie: I understand Rhoda Grant's reasons for lodging this probing amendment, but I believe that the Scottish Government already has robust legislation to protect the welfare of greyhounds exiting the racing industry. The Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 applies to all dogs, including greyhounds, and requires that their welfare needs be addressed. Last year, the Parliament passed the Welfare of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2025, which requires that anyone selling or otherwise transferring ownership of any dog for

any reason must have regard to a code of practice setting out a range of considerations relating to the health and welfare of the dog, including the provision of veterinary records and medical history.

Further, we are aware that there does not appear to have been any greyhound racing at Thornton since March last year, so we would expect that very few, if any, dogs that were previously kept for racing are likely to be affected. It is also worth remembering that the bill does nothing to prevent dogs that are kennelled in Scotland from being raced in other parts of the United Kingdom, so dogs that are currently being raced in England should not be affected by the bill. I therefore consider the amendment to be unnecessary. I understand why Rhoda Grant lodged it, but I ask her not to press it.

Mark Ruskell: I am not entirely sure what the purpose of the amendment is, and I do not know whether anyone else in the committee is either.

It is quite clear that the bill is intended to prevent a resumption of greyhound racing in Scotland. The committee will know, from evidence that it has taken from the owners of the Thornton track, that the intention is very much to continue to race greyhounds in Scotland. However, the amendment appears to relate to those who are rehoming greyhounds. Again, I do not see the purpose of it.

As the minister stated, the Welfare of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2025 includes a code of practice that sets out a range of considerations relating to the health and welfare of dogs. Should a greyhound that no longer races be rehomed, the new owner would be required to have regard to the code of practice. There is also more general best practice guidance to help those who are responsible for dogs to meet their duty of care under the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006.

10:15

It is worth noting that a number of rescue and rehoming centres that are based in Scotland, including those of the Dogs Trust, which has given evidence to the committee, and the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, have indicated their willingness to care for and find suitable homes for greyhounds that have previously been used in racing. After the Shawfield stadium shut down, all the dogs that previously raced there were successfully rehomed by reputable rehoming charities. Taking that into account and given the existing guidance and codes of practice related to the welfare of dogs, it is unclear what the purpose of additional guidance

would be and what it would contain. Therefore, I do not support amendment 19.

The Convener: I call Rhoda Grant to wind up and to press or withdraw amendment 19.

Rhoda Grant: The discussion takes me back to how fragmented our animal welfare legislation is; it needs to be pulled together. It also highlights that the bill will not impact the welfare of any greyhound and that there is no way that any member can amend the bill to ensure that it does. As I said, it is a probing amendment, but it appears that there is no way to amend the bill to improve the lives of greyhounds. I do not wish to press amendment 19.

Amendment 19, by agreement, withdrawn.

Sections 10 and 11 agreed to.

Section 12—Interpretation

Amendment 15 to 17 moved—[Jim Fairlie]—and agreed to.

Section 12, as amended, agreed to.

Section 13—Commencement

The Convener: Amendment 18, in the name of the minister, is in a group on its own.

Jim Fairlie: The amendment provides that the main provisions of the bill will commence on a date that is specified by ministers in regulations and not a fixed date, as per the current drafting of the bill. That will ensure that the substantive provisions of the bill can be brought into force at an appropriate time, when all the resources, processes and procedures are in place.

I move amendment 18.

Mark Ruskell: The bill as introduced would come into force 12 months after royal assent. When the bill was drafted, that was deemed appropriate, as it would allow a lead-in time for the owners of Thornton racetrack and others, such as rehoming centres, to put in place any measures that would be required to prepare for the change in the law. However, I accept the Scottish Government's reasoning that, by commencing the bill by regulations, it can be assured that all the appropriate measures have been put into place before the bill comes into force. It goes back to the earlier point that we can streamline the approach and relate it more to the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006. I hope that the court guidance can then be updated quickly, so that we can move to a speedy implementation of the regulations under the bill.

Amendment 18 would provide flexibility, allowing the bill to come into force sooner than 12 months after royal assent should all the appropriate measures be in place earlier. I thank the minister and his officials for engaging with me

on this matter and on all the amendments at stage 2. I am content to support amendment 18.

The Convener: I call the minister to wind up.

Jim Fairlie: I have nothing further to add, convener.

Amendment 18 agreed to.

Section 13, as amended, agreed to.

Section 14 agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

The Convener: That ends stage 2 consideration of the bill.

I invite members to consider our next steps on petition PE1758, which calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to put an end to greyhound racing in Scotland. Given our 2024 inquiry into the petition and the completion of stage 2 of the bill, I propose that we close the petition. Do members agree?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: I suspend the meeting to allow non-committee members to leave the table.

10:19

Meeting suspended.

10:20

On resuming—

Seed (Fees) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2026 (SSI 2026/13)

The Convener: Our second and final item of business is consideration of the Seed (Fees) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2026. As no member wishes to make any comment on the instrument, that concludes the committee's proceedings.

Meeting closed at 10:20.

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