

The NSPCA: Dog racing - gambling with the lives of dogs



The dog racing industry treats dogs like running machines. The dog is on the track for only a few minutes before spending many long hours in a confined cage or kennel. This is a cruel sport and, despite dog racing not being permitted under South African law, some people participate in dog racing in one way or another.

Information and photos
provided by the NSPCA
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The NSPCA has been working on the dog racing issue since 1993 and has gathered a lot of information, from around the world, which indicates that this activity is highly problematic, prone to abuse and produces vast numbers of surplus animals.

On the surface, or "at the races", it may appear that this activity is not problematic. Certainly, on the day of the race, which happens in public, there may not be a mass of evident problems, but the ways in which the dogs are kept, trained, bred and disposed of also have to be considered, as that is where the majority of problems lie.

Dog racing has been illegal in South Africa for more than half a century, after being banned in 1949. In 2011, a government commission looked into the possibility of legalising greyhound racing, but the majority ruled that it should not be legalised. Despite the commission's decisions, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) put forward a new draft

National Gambling Norms and Standards Bill in 2014 which included greyhound racing, among other gambling activities.

Based on all the evidence that the NSPCA has gathered throughout the years, it firmly opposes the legalisation of dog racing. The NSPCA's objections to the legalisation are based on the following facts:

- animal abuse is inherent in this industry
- law enforcement is hugely problematic; and
- social concerns associated with it are apparent and relevant.

Government subsidies

Government subsidies for dog racing occur in other parts of the world. The NSPCA believes that it is morally indefensible for funds to be utilised for a sporting activity such as this when there are so many critical challenges in South Africa, such as in terms of providing basic services to communities.

It is indefensible to consider legalising an industry that would require strict policing to control abuse when the SAPS is already stretched to maximum capacity, dealing with other crime. To divert valuable policing services in order to monitor what is just a "hobby" for some people could not be condoned.

As mentioned earlier, dog racing is declining in other parts of the world and racetracks are closing. It appears that this is a dying industry. In the UK, the latest figures from the Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB), the governing body for licensed greyhound racing, show that the country's 25 racecourses lost £5.5 million (R98 million) in 2013. There is growing consensus that dog racing should not be supported at all, nor reinstated in countries where it has been banned for decades.

Legislation overview

Activities that are proven to be harmful to animals, such as dog racing and dog fighting, are illegal in other parts of the world. South Africa is no exception. In fact, in some parts of the world, where dog racing was legal in the past, legislation has now been instituted to ban it. Social responsibility and an increasing awareness of the reality behind dog racing have led to an ever increasing and progressive approach of rejecting this unnecessary

activity. The majority of USA states have banned dog racing, except for seven states that allow this cruel sport to continue on the country's 21 remaining dog tracks.

In South Africa, there have been numerous bids to legalise dog racing over the years and the NSPCA, together with other animal protection groups, have given evidence before a number of government commissions investigating this matter. Each bid has failed.

In the Free State High Court, in **United Greyhound Racing and Breeders Society v Vrystaat Dobbel en Wedren Raad en Andere 2003(2) SA 269 (0)**, the applicants sought an order in the following terms:

- The Ordinance against dog racing had become abrogated by disuse as there were no efforts to enforce it.
- Alternatively, it has been substituted by implication by the Free State Gambling and Racing Act 6 of 1996.
- Further, or alternatively, its provisions were unconstitutional.

The applicants **failed on all counts** and had insufficient funds to pay the cost orders made against them.

Gambling is now legal in South Africa and proponents argue that the ban on dog racing should be lifted due to the change in gambling laws. However, many things have changed since 1949, including South Africa becoming a fully-fledged democracy and the introduction of the Animals Protection Act being promulgated in **1962**.

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The following statements are also strongly opposing dog racing:

- The Kennel Union of Southern Africa (KUSA) indicated its stance on dog racing, regarding greyhounds in particular, in a media statement in

which it stated that KUSA, which is recognised internationally, wishes to make it known that it is opposed to the introduction of greyhound racing in South Africa.

- In a position statement on greyhound racing, the South African Veterinary Association (SAVA) opposed the legalisation of greyhound racing in South Africa.

South African legislation

Dog racing is prohibited in South Africa in terms of four different ordinances:

- Ordinance 4 of 1949: Abolition of dog race meetings and the prohibition of betting on dog races - sections 1 to 6 [p1 & 2] (Transvaal);
- Ordinance 11 of 1986: Prohibition of dog races - sections 1 to 2 (Cape Province);
- Ordinance 23 of 1985: Prohibition of dog race meetings - Sections 1 to 4 (Natal);
- Ordinance 11 of 1976: dog race meetings - section 1 to 4 (Orange Free State).

In terms of these ordinances, all dog racing is illegal (including greyhound and sled dog racing), whether or not betting takes place.

Many people think that because dogs are involved, the SPCA has the responsibility of **enforcing these ordinances**, but this is, in actual fact, **the responsibility of the SAPS**. The NSPCA acknowledges that the SAPS has to deal with hundreds of pieces of legislation and that this aspect of law enforcement may be uncommon or unfamiliar to many police members, but says that it is nevertheless the responsibility of the SAPS to undertake any investigations and uphold the law.

A cruel gambling game with a few participants

Dog racing is harmful and many South Africans find it offensive and unnecessary. It offers no benefit to our society as a whole and, in fact, the NSPCA believes that it undermines the strides that have



been made in terms of humane education widely encompassing issues such as respect, awareness and social responsibility, which have been shown by accepted international research to be linked to animal cruelty.

Currently, a small minority of people wish to undertake dog racing, largely for financial gain. As one proponent said: "If we can't race them (the greyhounds) and we can't hunt with them, then what must we do with them?" This statement illustrates the view of some dog racers according to which **these dogs are not pets, but are merely tools that are utilised to make money**.

The abuse these dogs suffer

Racing dogs are not pets, they are racing machines that suffer at the hands of an inhumane industry.