



The dark underbelly of dog racing

UNMASKING THE LINK TO ORGANISED CRIME

By Jacques Peacock and Arno de Klerk

The serene beauty of the South African landscape often conceals a sinister reality, a world where the pursuit of wealth and adrenaline collides with cruelty and organised crime. This is the grim underbelly of dog racing, a nefarious industry with ties to illegal hunting and the breeding of dogs, shrouded in secrecy and perpetuated by those who seek to profit at the expense of innocent animals. In this exposé, we delve into the intricate web of this illicit trade, unveiling how it embodies the very elements of organised crime, and we explore the hidden world that breeds suffering in its wake.

Dog racing's illegitimate prowess

The continuation of illegal dog racing, a practice that has been banned in South Africa since 1949, is a harsh testament to the lengths people will go to for money, with little regard for the welfare of the animals involved. Despite the prohibition, these races continue clandestinely. The welfare of the animals involved in this illegal activity is a grave concern especially since the dogs are often bred and kept in inhumane conditions, typically being starved directly prior to racing to avoid torsion.

The entanglement with organised crime

Dog racing's nexus with organised crime becomes glaringly evident when we dissect the underlying structure of this clandestine trade:

- **Hierarchy:** Similar to any organised crime operation, there's a clear hierarchy in dog racing circles, with leaders, enforcers and participants each playing their respective roles.
- **Continuity:** The persistence of illegal dog racing highlights its organised nature, persisting over the years despite being outlawed.
- **Specialisation:** Participants have specific roles, whether as breeders, trainers or money handlers, aligning with the organised crime model.
- **Criminal code:** With its own unwritten code of silence and secrecy, dog racing participants share a trait common to many organised crime syndicates.
- **Monetary gain:** Financial profit drives this illegal enterprise, echoing the motive of organised crime groups.
- **Secrecy:** The clandestine nature of dog racing is a key trait shared with other organised criminal activities.
- **Violence and intimidation:** The use of intimidation and threats mirrors the modus operandi of organised crime, maintaining control through fear.
- **Infiltration:** Dog racing operators may infiltrate and corrupt various sectors, similar to how organised crime seeks to infiltrate legitimate businesses.
- **Global reach:** This illegal trade transcends borders, demonstrating the global reach in some organised crime operations.
- **Corruption:** Attempts to corrupt authorities and institutions are common and widespread in both organised crime and dog racing.

- **Loyalty:** Those involved in dog racing are expected to show unwavering loyalty to their illicit enterprise, the same way organised crime members are expected to show loyalty.

The use of technology and cash: An untraceable empire

Perpetrators in the dog racing world leverage the power of social media by showcasing and advertising their illegal racing and hunting as well as selling dogs and breeding opportunities. The veil of secrecy also extends to their financial dealings, as cash bets and prizes remain untraceable to evade the watchful eye of the South African Revenue Service (SARS).

A grave threat to wildlife and biodiversity

The illegal acts of dog racing and dog hunting are inextricably linked and its kinship with organised crime casts a long shadow over South Africa's rich wildlife heritage and biodiversity. "Modern hunting" methods and "taxi" hunters, have emerged as a menacing and corrupt offshoot, supplanting traditional hunting methods characterised by typically urban residents, often armed and possessing large packs of dogs, driven to hunts often on private property or conservation areas. These dogs compete against each other in hunting all species of prey indiscriminately. Prey, including livestock are torn down and hunters show minimal regard for property rights or animal suffering and lack respect for the ecosystem and society in general.

Hunting with dogs is as illegal as dog racing, typically contravening the following laws:

- Animals Protection Act 71 of 1962
- Trespass Act 6 of 1959
- Stock Theft Act 57 of 1959
- Game Theft Act 105 of 1991
- Provincial Nature Conservation Ordinances
- Biodiversity Act 10 of 2004
- Criminal Procedure Act 51 of 1977

Dog racing is prohibited in all nine provinces of South Africa in terms of the following ordinances which are still in effect:

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

A real-life interception

A real-life story of an intercepted illegal dog race reveals the depths of this ongoing problem. Despite warnings, the illegal race seemed ready to proceed in Dannhauser, KwaZulu-Natal. The NSPCA, determined to protect the animals and uphold the law, arrived with a warrant and inspection team. Though the illegal race did not take place, the NSPCA's presence at the scene demonstrated the tenacity of the dog



National Council of SPCAs

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racing world. Spectators and dog owners gathered, attempting to intimidate and silence the inspectors. Thanks to the SAPS's support, the NSPCA and SAPS stood their ground, preventing the illegal event.

An industry plagued by drug abuse

The dog racing industry is also plagued by drug abuse where dogs are "doped" using therapeutic and non-therapeutic drugs to enhance performance, mask injuries and manipulate race outcomes, risking the health and safety of the dogs.

Legal challenges and modern ethics

In the modern era, South Africa's shift to democracy, the introduction of the Animal Protection Act in 1962, and the transformation of gambling laws all challenge the notion of lifting the ban on dog racing.

Over the last 30 years there have been numerous failed bids to legalise dog racing in South Africa. The NSPCA has vigorously opposed these bids to legalise an activity, with cruelty entrenched, which is now being banned in other parts of the world.

As we explore the dark world of dog racing and its insidious links to organised crime, it is evident that the chase after monetary gain has overshadowed the welfare of animals and the sanctity of our wildlife and ecosystems. South Africa stands at a crossroads, where the pursuit of justice and compassion must rise above the shadows of organised crime to protect our nation's most vulnerable.

About the authors

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