

## Greyhound racing ban: NSW is looking at the industry from the dogs' point of view

Written by Clive Phillips, Professor of Animal Welfare, Centre for Animal Welfare and Ethics, The University of Queensland

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Just as President John F. Kennedy [famously implored](#) Americans to ask what they might do for their country rather than vice versa, the New South Wales government's [decision to ban greyhound racing from July next year](#) suggests an approach that asks not what animals can do for us, but what we can do for them.

Nor is NSW the only place looking at dog racing in this way. In the 55 years since JFK's speech, 40 US states have [banned greyhound racing](#), leaving only 19 dog tracks in six states still operating.

The [principal reason](#) for the NSW government's decision is the high "wastage rate". According to the [special inquiry into the NSW industry](#), 50-70% of all greyhounds raised for racing are killed simply because they are too slow, meaning that at least half of the almost 98,000 dogs bred for racing over the past 12 years have been killed.

Reforming the industry was considered possible, but difficult, in relation to the [live baiting scandal](#) that engulfed Victorian racing in 2015. But the wastage of dogs that are too slow has become an integral part of the business model, rather than a rogue practice, and as such is much harder to tackle.

Similar problems exist in the racehorse industry, where the [wastage rate is close to 40%](#). But the financial and political implications of a similar ban on horseracing are far more profound. There have already been suggestions of a [class factor](#) at play here, with the sport of kings protected while the "battlers' sport" is banned.

## Protecting 'useless' animals

Protection for animals that have outlived their useful purpose for humans is relatively rare in Western societies, but in Eastern religions it often features prominently. In India, cows that are too old to give milk are retired to shelters, where the public donate food and money to keep them in good health until they die. This principle is [firmly embedded in the Hindu religion](#).

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In contrast, the Christian and Muslim traditions hold that animals have been put on Earth [solely for our benefit](#)

. For most scientists and philosophers this is a convenient interpretation of the scriptures but biologically absurd, especially when we consider the question of the killing of those that don't suit our purpose or match up to arbitrarily defined standards.

Some will argue that (humanely) killing an animal does not affect its welfare, but most acknowledge that we have a moral imperative to provide animals with a life that is [valued and sufficiently long to be worth living](#)

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Western society is beginning to wake up to the massive wastage in its dairy industry, with male (bobby) calves [routinely slaughtered](#) at just a few days of age, and cows that rarely last more than two or three lactations in the herd being killed at about 5 years of age, when their natural lifespan is 25.

There are the rudiments of protection systems in Western society, for some animals at least. Regarded by the industry as “spent hens”, chickens are routinely condemned to an early death after just one season's laying because they will be less productive in their second year. But charities are beginning to offer opportunities for members of the public to give [homes to these hens](#). Similarly, the [Donkey Sanctuary](#) in the UK offers retirement to weary donkeys.

For many the recognition in Western society that animals are not just a commodity is too little, too late. The animal industries are [intensifying at a rate never experienced before](#) in response to growing demand, particularly in Asia. The financial pressure on greyhound trainers to increase their dogs' speed to win more prize money is so great that they often don't consider the ethics of what they are doing. Illegalising a cruel business is the only answer.

And how will the greyhounds be affected by this decision? There are [concerns](#) that the ban will lead to more deaths as trainers dump their obsolete dogs. Is rehoming an alternative to wastage? The extensive selection of the greyhound for speed makes them less than ideal as pets, and it seems unlikely that new homes can be found for all of NSW's greyhounds.

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Advocates will argue that the dogs love the sport. Admittedly there is something in dogs that makes them chase objects that run in front of them, and many dogs will do it until they are exhausted. It's in their genetic makeup, as over the millennia of evolution those that could do this would have had an advantage. But it is the associated treatment of the dogs as commodities that makes this sport unacceptable in today's society.

### Beyond reform?

The other reason for the NSW government's decision is that the industry was deemed to be inherently corrupt and beyond reform, as detailed by Justice Michael McHugh's [report on the industry](#). This is a sad reflection of how the government/industry partnership model of managing our animal industries has failed to inspire confidence.

The ACT has also [announced a ban](#), although other states seem [unlikely to follow suit](#), citing the profit generated by the industry or the high costs of compensating those involved.

The Victorian government believes it can [reform its industry](#) in the wake of the live baiting scandal, but the Australian federal government has [repeatedly claimed](#) to be able to do this with livestock export and still the exposés of cruelty keep coming.

Asking what we can do for the greyhounds that have been exploited in this way is just the first step in repairing a damaged sense of trust that man's best friend so faithfully placed in us.

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