

Greyhounds 'a bloodbath'; injury toll too high

TONY WALL Last updated 05:00 20/04/2014

Three greyhounds were destroyed after suffering injuries during a single race meet this month and the sport's governing body admits its death and injury toll is still too high.

Greyhound Racing NZ last year stopped making its injury statistics publicly available because it claimed its critics were using them to "manipulate the facts".

But after questioning by the Sunday Star-Times, the organisation last week released the latest data which shows that since late 2012, when an industry review was launched following publicity about the welfare of racing dogs, 92 dogs have suffered serious injuries on the track.

Of these, owners decided to euthanase 64. Four dogs suffered serious leg injuries during a race meet in Manukau, South Auckland, on April 6, and three of those were later destroyed.

Greg Kerr, Greyhound Racing's animal welfare manager, said "sweeping changes" under the sport's dog welfare programme, including new track standards, were aimed at reducing injuries.

"Even though [the injuries] represent 0.00017 per cent of all 53,760 starters, we consider this is still too high," he said.

Aaron Cross of the Greyhound Protection League said it was sad that there had been no reduction in the numbers of greyhounds killed at racetracks over the past 18 months, despite the appointment of an animal welfare officer.

"The newly revealed injury data proves that greyhounds are continuing to be run to death in the entertainment industry. Greyhound racing is an ongoing bloodbath for these poor dogs."

He said the industry talked about "euthanasing" dogs but leg injuries should not be fatal. "The dogs are investments. They are not euthanased, they are culled for financial reasons.

Kerr said the decision to put down an injured dog rested with the owners, "based on the nature of injury and likelihood of recovery".

He said public reporting of track injuries and euthanasia had in the past been "grossly misrepresented by one activist [Cross] to defame the more than 5000 people who race greyhounds. We therefore took the decision last year to not continue making that information publicly available".

However, the sport felt it was important to release the figures to Fairfax Media to provide context.

Kerr said the industry had undertaken a top-down independent review of the sport and established working relationships with organisations interested in animal welfare, such as the Ministry for Primary Industries, the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee and the NZ Companion Animal Council.

Cross said his organisation did not manipulate figures - it obtained all its data from government agencies and the industry itself.

He accused the industry of playing loose with the numbers.

"They try and bloat figures by referring to 'race starters' instead of individual race dogs, which means the death and injury rates are diluted, but if the same dog races ten times and dies as a result of its injuries in its last race, it's still a dead dog."