

I'd like on behalf of the Irish Council Against Blood Sports, to thank the committee for inviting us here today to express our views on greyhound racing and hare coursing.

The Irish Council Against Blood Sports was founded in 1966 and is a voluntary organisation campaigning for an end to the hunting of wild animals with dogs and other cruel sports that exploit and abuse animals.

Greyhound racing and coursing is inherently cruel, resulting in the premature deaths of thousands of greyhounds annually, while in the region of five thousand hares, annually, suffer terror and stress by being snatched from the wild, kept captive and used as live lures for greyhounds at coursing matches.

England, Scotland, Wales and our near neighbours, Northern Ireland, have banned hare coursing, leaving our Republic as the last outpost for this barbarism.

Last year, there was an opportunity, with Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan's Private Member's Bill, to rid the country of this wildlife abuse, but regrettably and shamefully, the majority of our legislators turned a blind eye to the cruelty and voted the Bill down, despite the fact that the majority of our citizens want to see hare coursing outlawed, and this is borne out in the most recent poll, scientifically conducted for the RTE Clare Byrne programme last February, which showed 64% wanted hare coursing banned.

Many people seem to think that because the greyhounds are muzzled in coursing, hares are not being injured and killed, but this is certainly not the case, as reports from National Parks Rangers, who attend some of the meetings show. Hares are being struck, pinned down and

mauled, and we ourselves have filmed such maulings. You may have seen the RTE footage of a hare being severely mauled by muzzled greyhounds at the national finals in Clonmel last February.

Let's hope that when this issue next comes before the Dail, our legislators will do the right and consign this barbarity to history.

And what of the greyhounds themselves? The natural lifespan of a greyhound averages 14 years, but in greyhound racing and coursing, for many, it's said to be a mere 3-4 years and many are also culled as pups, if they are not deemed suitable for the track or coursing. The ones that do go on to race must be winners to survive – if not, they're put down. In fact the Irish Coursing Club advises greyhound owners not to give away unwanted greyhounds – it's better to put them painlessly to sleep. (**Source:** Directives, Instructions and Guidance Notes for Club Secretaries, Control Stewards, Judges and Slippers – 1969-2013).

And a greyhound trainer candidly remarked: "I've seen dogs being shot. It has to be done as there's too many of them to rehome."

The ones that aren't put painlessly to sleep face a cruel fate. In the recent RTE Prime Time programme on the greyhound industry, Marion Fitzgibbon of Limerick Animal Welfare, a tireless campaigner, who has been rescuing abandoned greyhounds for decades, said, and I quote: "Very little money is diverted into greyhound welfare, and it's left to the small charities around Ireland to try and rescue as many of these as we possibly can, but we're fighting a losing battle. We believe that there are maybe eight, nine, ten thousand put to sleep. They can be killed in all sorts of fashions. We've had instances of finding them shot, ears cut off and brutalised, drowned or sold on to live in appalling states."

I'd like to take this opportunity to commend RTE's Primetime and Sharon Ni Bheolain for highlighting the dark side of greyhound racing, the doping and the cruelty. This was a great example of public service broadcasting. The public now know where their taxes are going – to fund a cruel, cheating, debt-ridden industry.

BLOODING

Although it is kept well hidden, blooding of greyhounds, a common training method in the greyhound racing industry, using rabbits, hares and other small animals, is an open secret within the industry. It is widely believed by greyhound owners and trainers that to keep a dog keen to follow the mechanical lure at the track, it must be blooded.

Many will have been appalled at the horrific footage, shown on RTE's Prime Time recently, of a tiny piglet, strapped to a moving lure at an Australian training track in 2014, being savaged by greyhounds, as part of a blooding exercise. An Irish greyhound handler, working for an Australian trainer, was shown taking part in the cruelty.

In 1994, there was a high profile case of blooding of greyhounds at a training track in Donaskeagh, Co. Tipperary. Well known broadcaster and journalist, Donal McIntyre, came to the private track to film for a BBC documentary on greyhound racing. Cages of rabbits were brought to the track and the BBC cameraman was instructed to turn off the camera while the blooding took place. However, the camera remained running and the horrific cruelty was recorded. The dogs being blooded were those of a top Irish trainer at that time, whose son was present while the cruelty took place.

Greyhound commentator and journalist, the late John Martin, who was known for his warts and all assessments of the greyhound industry,

wrote in the Irish Independent, and I quote: *"The bald truth is that greyhound racing would not continue to exist without bleeding. It follows that, with a constant greyhound population of close on 30,000, bleeding must be widespread. Do not expect an admission of that from Bord na gCon. To concede the point would be to accept that they are custodians of a sport whose very existence is based on bleeding."*

DOPING

There is a serious problem in this country with regard to the doping of greyhounds. The Morris review, commissioned by Bord na gCon, and published in July 2016, was particularly damning. It was critical of Bord na gCon's oversight of the problem, stating that the IGB's current sampling strategy was "too routine" with a perception of "no element of surprise" and that the existing functions of the control committee were "seriously hampered".

The RTE Primetime programme cited a number of high profile cases of doping, and demonstrated how easy it was for cheating dog owners to buy performance enhancing drugs online. It's the unfortunate greyhounds that suffer, having hard core drugs pumped into them, which can have long-lasting detrimental effects on their health.

And it seems Britain, who import a huge number of dogs from Ireland, view Ireland as the doping capital of the world when it comes to greyhounds.

EXPORTS OF GREYHOUNDS

There are also growing concerns about the export of greyhounds to destinations with low standards of animal welfare, and little or no enforcement of whatever weak legislation is in place.

It emerged last year that Irish greyhounds were being exported to the Canidrome track in Macau, the only region of China where gambling is legal, with racing five nights a week on a track that is deemed by animal welfarists as too hard, resulting in injuries to dogs.

If a greyhound does not finish in the top three in five races in a row, it is destroyed. It is reported that around 400 dogs are killed by lethal injection each year and every greyhound arriving at the track is dead within three years, according to animal welfare groups on the ground there.

There are also grave concerns about the export of Irish greyhounds to other Asian countries, including Pakistan, a country where horrendous animal cruelty takes place, and greyhounds are raced in tremendous heat. We have compiled a list of 200 Irish dogs now in Pakistan and we suspect there are many more.

There are also fears for Irish greyhounds exported to Spain, where greyhounds or galgos are used to hunt hares in the countryside. At the end of the hunting season, when they are no longer needed, they are abandoned, released onto busy motorways, hung from trees, thrown down wells and even burned to death or left with broken bones to starve to death

Deputy Tommy Broughan has recently introduced a Private Member's Amendment Bill to prevent the export of greyhounds to destinations

with poor animal welfare legislation and standards, and it is to be hoped that this will be addressed in the Greyhound Industry Bill 2017.

CONCLUSION

It simply cannot be denied that cruelty is inherent and endemic in the greyhound racing and coursing industry, with a racing greyhound's life cut short, the killing and abandonment of greyhounds that have outlived their usefulness, the doping of greyhounds, hares used as live bait in coursing, and the use of live animals to blood greyhounds. We believe that it is an industry that cannot be cleaned up or rehabilitated.

We don't believe that the proposed Greyhound Industry Bill 2017 will see any improvements for the welfare of greyhounds and hares. The cruelty will continue, as will the cheating, but at the very least, there should be complete transparency and accountability in terms of what becomes of an unwanted greyhound, once it is no longer winning on the track or the coursing field. In fact, the entire life of a greyhound bred for the greyhound industry should be tracked from birth to death, including where it is exported to.

Also, at present, in hare coursing, there is no ease of access to positive drug results, apart from the random publishing of same in the Irish Coursing Club's newspaper. The Irish Coursing Club should again, at the very least, be required to publish these results on their website, as is the case with the Irish Greyhound Board.

And we strongly contend that greyhound racing should not be funded by the people of Ireland, the majority of whom are opposed to the abuse and exploitation of defenceless animals. Instead, that considerable funding should be redirected to the hard pressed and underfunded animal rescue groups, most of whom are getting literally crumbs from the table in grants from the Department of Agriculture.

