

**OPENING STATEMENT OF FRANK NYHAN, CHAIRMAN BORD NA gCON TO
THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE FOOD AND THE MARINE**

Tuesday 23rd October 2018

Chairman, Members,

Thank you for the invitation to attend before you today. As you are aware, I was appointed Chairman of the Irish Greyhound Board on the 6th September 2018.

I am a solicitor by profession and I am currently the State Solicitor for Cork City. I am a fellow of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators and an Accredited Mediator. I have served as a Vice Chairman of the Employment Appeals Tribunal. I am a member of the panel of Chairpersons of the Mental Health Tribunals and am also a Statutory Arbitrator appointed pursuant to Section 23 of the Animal Health and Welfare (Bovine Tuberculosis) Regulations 2015.

I live in Mallow, County Cork and am from Clonmel, Co Tipperary. I have served as a President of the North and East Cork Bar Association, President of the Mallow Chamber of Commerce, President of the Rotary Club in Mallow and Chairman of Mallow GAA Club and Mallow Rugby Club. I remain Chairman of the Management Committee of the Mallow GAA Complex which I understand remains the largest GAA Complex constructed outside of Dublin.

My interest in greyhounds is primarily through my father Sean Nyhan and also the fact that I come from Clonmel which regards itself as the true home of the greyhound industry in Ireland. We were a traditional two greyhound family which we raced in the local Clonmel track with very occasional trips further afield when merited. At a later stage I was a member of a syndicate that owned a number of greyhounds that raced in Cork and Tralee with very limited success.

I have served for the last three years as a member of the Irish Greyhound Board.

It is fair to say that the greyhound industry has experienced challenging times and continues to do so, but I am satisfied that we are making progress.

Greyhound racing has a long history and is part of the culture and social fabric of the entire community. It has a strong rural base particularly associated with the farming community and also enjoys strong support from the urban areas where the stadia are located.

The Board, prompted by this committee, commissioned Jim Power Economics in 2017 to undertake an assessment of the financial and economic impact of the Irish Greyhound Industry. This study was a follow-up to the previous assessment undertaken by the same group in April 2011. The published report demonstrates that while there has been a downturn in the overall industry since

2011, the greyhound industry remains a very significant and strong industry supporting 5,058 direct and indirect jobs with 7,313 owners, and delivers an economic impact of the order of €300 million euro to the national economy. This level of impact cannot be underestimated particularly in rural areas and the industry remains an important contributor to sustained rural development which is a stated objective for Semi-State Bodies.

Members of this committee will be aware that various studies have been undertaken on our industry in recent years cumulating with your report in January 2016.

We in Bord na gCon have addressed the cumulative recommendations of these reports and we have assigned the necessary resources for implementation.

I had the pleasure earlier this year with Dr. Colm Gaynor of appearing before you on the pre-legislative scrutiny of the Greyhound Industry Bill which has just been published. It is clear that an updating of the 1958 Greyhound Industry Act is very much needed to provide a modern and legislative framework for the industry.

The new Bill will strengthen proper governance and give statutory effect to the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. It will give greater

specificity and enhance the existing regulatory powers in the areas of sales, training and racing of greyhounds and particularly as regards doping. It contains provisions to enable Bord na gCon to develop a real time traceability system either alone or in cooperation with others, for racing greyhounds so as to identify those in possession of greyhounds and attribute accountability to them. The new Act will also place the Control Committee and the Appeals Committee on a Statutory basis and will include measures to improve enforcement of penalties.

During 2017, the Board spent a considerable amount of time in formulating a new Strategic Plan for the industry for the period 2018 to 2022. This plan was the subject of an industry wide consultation process and also had regard to the studies already undertaken. The plan focuses on seven key pillars of activity comprising three areas of growth: growing owners and breeders, growing tote and wagering activity and growing attendances. These three growth areas are underpinned by four foundation pillars namely integrity and regulation, high welfare standards, organisational structures and information technology. This plan was approved by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and since its publication in March 2018, we have begun to progress the many actions required under the plan.

Provided we can achieve our funding targets annually, we would, with the implementation of the initiatives set out in the Strategic Plan, be running a fair, transparent and highly regulated sport, offering a top class experience across all our stadia supported by a single committed and innovative Irish Greyhound Board team, where the greyhound always comes first.

The sale of the Harold's Cross Greyhound Stadium finalised in May of this year, has enabled the Board to deal with long term debt issues and for the first time in many years, we have some funding for investment in track infrastructure and the wider industry. The surplus proceeds from the sale amounted to approximately €6million and these have been subject to a detailed business plan approved by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. The plan provides for a €3million investment in Shelbourne Park to bring the facility up to the expectation of the modern users and customers, with lesser sums to be expended on Curraheen Park and other stadia improvements and a possible redevelopment in Kilkenny together with €1million for significant upgrades in information technology. One of the key areas for attention within the Strategic Plan is a systematic review of the industry footprint. The Board is committed to conducting a strategic review of all stadia to determine the industry footprint for the future. I am pleased to advise the tender process to appoint an independent party to undertake this review has commenced. The review of necessity will involve

extensive consultation with Stakeholders and we would expect a final report by March 2019.

Communication within and outside the industry has long been identified as a challenge for Bord na gCon. The National Greyhound Consultative Forum was established under my predecessor Phil Meaney in 2016 with the aim of engagement with representatives of the wider industry and this forum now meets on a quarterly basis. It provides an invaluable mechanism for the Board to consult with Stakeholders and proposals for change within the industry. It also allows Stakeholders to raise concerns directly with the Board and the Executive. A range of issues has been dealt with through this forum to date including the Greyhound Grading System, Welfare issues and the Fixture and Events Calendar.

The Board has also put in place a communication arrangement with Oireachtas members and briefings have taken place in November 2017 and May of this year. It is our intention to continue this information and dialogue.

We have recognised Brexit as a key challenge for us as the United Kingdom represents the principal market for greyhound sales. There is also ongoing transportation of greyhounds to participate in competitions in the UK or for English based greyhounds to participate in competitions in Ireland. As recently

as the 26th September 2018, we considered this issue in detail at the National Greyhound Consultant Forum and we were fortunate to have a presentation from an officer of the Brexit section of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. Following from same, we will arrange for affected sections of our industry to engage with the Department so that the final shape of any Brexit arrangement can satisfactorily meet the needs in the industry.

I have some personal priorities for the next five years. By the end of my term, I would expect that the Greyhound Industry Act would be fully operational, that greyhound welfare would be a priority throughout the industry and I want to have improved the cohesion amongst the stakeholders so that attendances at all our stadia have increased significantly. A colleague recently reminded me of the words of Henry Ford

“Coming together is beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.”

In conclusion Chairman, I wish to acknowledge the work of this Committee on matters relating to the Irish Greyhound Industry and your ongoing support in relation to resourcing and improving same. I thank you for the invitation to attend here today and I am happy to continue to work with this Committee and its members in progressing and addressing the issues affecting the Irish

Greyhound Industry. I am now happy to deal as best I can with any queries you may have.