

1. INTRODUCTION

I would like to thank the Chairman and Committee for inviting me here today on behalf of the Irish Coursing Club as a follow up to presentation delivered on July 9 last on issues concerning the greyhound industry in Ireland. I propose to deal with traceability, prohibited substances testing and illegal hunting as part of the follow up as requested.

2. TRACEABILITY MODEL (TM)

2.1 The committee is aware that the IGB has commenced a tender process to secure a full IT supported traceability system with a closing date of December 18th. The ICC met with the IGB since our attendance before the JOC last July and attended the DAFM traceability facility in Clonakilty to receive a comprehensive review of that system.

2.2 There are differences between the objectives and requirements of both the cattle and greyhound systems but there are learnings that can be applied from the former. The cattle tracking system was developed with disease prevention and management as the main driver with limited movement of animals during its lifecycle. The greyhound system is concerned with full knowledge as to location and status of any individual greyhound in an environment where there is significant movement during its lifecycle.

2.3 The specification of the Traceability Model (TM) is all encompassing and robust in terms of tracking every life event of a greyhound and will require significant input from participants and management from regulators. The ICC is committed to supporting the IGB traceability model and has significant capability to offer to ensure the industry as a whole provides an appropriate solution to the knowledge gap that prevails currently that must be remedied. As the committee is aware, the ICC operate the Irish Greyhound Stud Book on an All-Ireland basis and has developed strong information links with the Greyhound Board of Great Britain which will assist in supporting the TM.

The ICC stud book record pedigrees, matings and transfer of ownership and has never purported to be a traceability. The ICC has significant information available to it as it records all matings, births, namings, transfers of ownership and issues identity cards for all thoroughbred greyhounds on the island of Ireland.

2.4 Currently, all litters are inspected, tattooed and microchipped via ICC control stewards (*also act as authorised welfare officers under the WOGA 2011*). The ICC issues greyhound breeding establishment licenses as per the Welfare of Greyhounds Act 2011. The information required for a functioning traceability system is paramount and as the tender process concludes, the ICC will provide support and expertise to ensure the systems are effective in delivering the desired outcomes. The ICC consider the inclusion of Northern Ireland as necessary given movement of greyhounds between the ROI and NI in terms of traceability and this comes under its remit.

3. ICC PROHIBITED SUBSTANCE TESTING

3.1 The ICC has enhanced its testing regime over the last of number of years following a complete review of all processes, sanctions and scope. The cases are pleaded before an Independent Hearing Committee adjudicating upon by an administrative body that is subject to judicial review albeit while not a court of law it is required to act lawfully.

3.2 Its members include a solicitor, veterinary surgeon and one other and all decisions are subject to appeal. The sanctions available to the independent hearing committee include financial penalties with a maximum permissible fine in the sum of €13,000 and exclusion orders. In 2018/19 season a total of 149 tests took place and 98% reported negative.

A total of 3 cases proved positive and the greyhounds suspended in each case for a period of 6 months during a coursing season and fines of €4000 levied on responsible persons (*one case outstanding scheduled to be heard in January 2020*).

3.3 The purpose of testing and the associated penalties is: to protect the welfare of the greyhound; to protect the integrity of coursing; to maintain public confidence in coursing; to maintain proper standards for all coursing participants; and to bring about a positive behavioral change. A sanction may be accompanied by an advisory notice to point out what changes in behavior or attitude is required.

3.4 The ICC operate a code of practice for the hare and the greyhound and this is supported by the code of practice that operates under the WOGA 2011. As with any code, it is the heightened standard the industry expects of participants while observing the legal statutory provisions as per the WOGA 2011, Animal Health & Welfare Act 2013 and rules of ICC.

4. ILLEGAL HUNTING

4.1 At the last JOC meeting of July 9, the Whiddy Island footage portrayed as illegal on the Prime Time programme and coloured with footage from some third- party event. This matter is the subject of legal correspondence and therefore I do not propose to comment on this matter today.

4.2 In terms of the act of illegal hunting, this activity is on-going throughout the country and is very easily identifiable from a lay-man's perspective. The perpetrators typically travel in gangs with unmuzzled dogs. They enter lands uninsured without landowner permission, with the intent of killing the hare or multiple hares any time of the year. They use this opportunity to conduct criminal acts such as theft, trespass and assault.

4.3 The Gardaí, NPWS and interested parties such as the IFA & ICC are working diligently on this issue. Coursing clubs provide support in terms of intelligence and monitoring of hare habitat. There have been a number of convictions recently by the authorities.

5. RE-HOMING

5.1 The ICC provide administrative support to the Irish Retired Greyhound Trust (IRGT) and other homing agencies by way of transfer of ownerships and microchip cert re-issuance FOC. We deal with numerous queries relating to rehoming and ensure all matters are dealt with in a professional manner. The IRGT has homed coursing greyhounds and the ICC met with the committee of the IRGT recently to discuss how the ICC can contribute on a more formal basis by identifying new homing opportunities and providing financial support. It is unrealistic and inefficient to establish a separate trust and structure to home coursing greyhounds versus track greyhounds solely given the high level of cross-over of people that partake in both codes. A new feature will be to note when a greyhound is homed on the registration system, so it will be evident when a greyhound is homed. The ICC has established a sub- committee to progress welfare and proposes funding measures to include prize money deductions, fundraising events, sponsorship and legacies to assist the IRGT in its work. All the foregoing to be further agreed with IRGT. Given the staggered start and restricted meetings this season due to RHD2 virus surveillance and monitoring, it was not possible to introduce the prizemoney deduction initiative this season but a fundraiser will take place at the national meeting 2020 in support of homing initiatives and such events will become an annual feature.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 The ICC recognise the importance of a working traceability system with all responsible parties playing their part to ensure the industry can withstand scrutiny from any quarter regardless of agenda. The IGB has released the Indecon report which has significant implications for the overall industry, in particular the proposed closure of four tracks.

These changes will contract the industry in terms of the number of participants and breeders overall and the long- term implications of this strategy require comprehensive analysis by both codes and stakeholders when settling the detail of an overall industry welfare strategy.

In any event, the ICC will always do what is required to ensure the future of the industry albeit we do not have a statutory role per se or receive state funding.