

**Legislative Council
Hansard
Tuesday 14 April 2026**

The President, **Mr Farrell**, took the Chair at 11 a.m., acknowledged the Traditional People and read Prayers.

MOTION

Joint Standing Committee on Greyhound Racing Transition Report on its Greyhound Racing Legislation Amendments (Phasing Out Reform) Bill 2025 Inquiry - Consideration and Noting

[6.06 p.m.]

Ms WEBB (Nelson) - Thank you, Mr President. I rise to speak on this motion, the noting of the report of the Joint Standing Committee on Greyhound Racing Transition on the Greyhound Racing Legislation Amendments (Phasing Out Reforms) Bill 2025 inquiry. I'm mindful this is not a debate on the bill itself, which may well come, but a noting debate on the report of the inquiry on the bill. As a member of the Joint Standing Committee on Greyhound Racing Transition, I'm able to provide comment and reflection on the report of the inquiry, and may be in a position to provide some extra clarification on matters raised.

I would like to start, though, by firmly thanking all those who participated in the inquiry process, from all angles of this matter and from all views on this piece of legislation. It was particularly good to see a lot of engagement on it, and I certainly tried to endeavour to respect that engagement every step of the way and make sure that I was taking that into consideration. I'd also like to particularly thank the other committee members and the secretariat who helped to facilitate this inquiry as we progressed with it.

At the outset, I will note, as I did in my contribution to the debate on the motion to send the bill to the committee for inquiry in this place, that the decisions and the behaviour of the government that have landed us all in this less-than-ideal situation in many ways has likely been highly damaging to many Tasmanians and many greyhounds in Tasmania. The Rockliff government has put, I believe, animal welfare and human welfare at greater risk because of the way that it has made those decisions and the way we've then progressed from this in the context of those decisions. I maintain that, given the situation the government has thrust us into, we are left having to make the best of this situation we are in, and to proceed as carefully and respectfully as possible in this situation, while balancing the full range of interests that we have to be mindful of serving here.

Without getting too distracted by a question about how the government arrived at its decision and what it did, and I know that's something that's upset people, but this report is about a bill, and so I'm going to be focusing in on that and that's what the report focused in on. I do absolutely acknowledge, though, it's an incredibly uncomfortable position for many people at the moment on this issue in this state, and so many people are on tenterhooks in relation to what happens next here and the fate of this bill.

Given we started with a less-than-ideal circumstance for a decision-making process, this was never going to be a perfect process from that point, but let's be really clear here: we can't lose sight of the fact that the status quo of greyhound racing in Tasmania is not a perfect

circumstance right now either. We absolutely do have animal welfare issues with dogs dying and being injured here. Every week that passes puts more animals at risk in participating in this activity on tracks in Tasmania. That's a fact, and that's not a judgement on all the people involved in this industry. It's just a fact of the activity itself. It's a highly risky activity.

I believe it's important to acknowledge, though, there's no way forward in progressing from an imperfect status quo that we're in, that would actually have everybody involved being happy and feeling that things are being done 100 per cent as they would wish. It's not how progress forward on this issue will ever happen.

To pretend, for example, that there was a way to progress phasing out of greyhound racing in Tasmania with which the participants in that activity would be happy and satisfied is illusory, absolutely illusory. No matter how this plays out, participants in the industry will take issue with it because they don't want it to happen and that's understandable. I have a lot of empathy for that. I understand it and they don't want the outcome so they're not happy with the process, and will never be happy with the process. Those who are passionate participants in the activity, and I've met many people who are and I respect that they are. The passionate participants in this activity of greyhound racing, they will fight every step of the way to try to maintain it as a lawful activity. No process that we could undertake with the intent of phasing it out would be acceptable or be something that they would regard as appropriate.

Equally naturally, those who are passionate advocates for ending that high risk activity of greyhound racing because of the animal welfare implications, will fight tooth and nail to deliver that end as quickly as possible. They may well see anything that makes progress towards that end as good, regardless of whether it's good process or appropriate decision making, because they want the activity to end, so they're focused on that. I have sympathy for that attitude too, where they think this is the right way forward, it's the way that's protective of dogs and addresses clearly demonstrated welfare issues with this activity and think that we need to get to that end through any means. So, I have sympathy for both sides of this equation that it's going to be uncomfortable regardless of how any of this came about.

Given all that, I would honestly say that while we continue to find ourselves in what I think we could all agree is a less than ideal process, we must take a practical approach to it and do the best we can on the facts of it. That's the approach that I took as a committee member in the inquiry on the bill. I listened carefully to the arguments made in this place during the debate on the motion to send the bill to the committee for the inquiry, and I was mindful of ensuring that some of the concerns that were raised were addressed during the inquiry process. Front of mind for me was ensuring that and in that, the concerns raised that were probably most prominent that I wanted to make sure we looked at properly in the committee process were the following things. The concern about lack of consultation on the bill before it was tabled in the parliament and the importance of participants in the greyhound racing industry having an opportunity to raise issues and concerns about the bill in a structured way and to be heard in a structured way and have queries on specific matters in the bill dealt with in a structured way.

Those concerns that hadn't happened prior to the bill being tabled were something I took with me into this inquiry and were priorities for me in my approach to the inquiry. If people had taken the time or were inclined to read the *Hansard* of our hearings, they would probably see that fairly clearly demonstrated in my approach to things.

To be very clear though, it was, I think, absolutely the case that the referral of the bill to the committee for inquiry was not intended to be a full inquiry into the underlying policy question of the bill. That wasn't in the terms of reference that came to us. The motion for referral

from this place to the committee was that the Greyhound Racing Legislation Amendments (Phasing Out Reform) Bill 2025 be referred to the Joint Standing Committee on Greyhound Racing Transition for consideration and report.

That's pretty clear when bills go for inquiry to a committee, there's a fairly clear process that happens where you go through the bill pretty closely, and that's the focus of the inquiry and that's the focus of the reporting of the inquiry. I do realise though, and absolutely acknowledge that many people feel there should have been some form of comprehensive inquiry into greyhound racing as a precursor to the government's policy announcement to phase it out.

Ms O'Connor - We did that in 2015-16 though.

Ms WEBB - Sure, but people still felt that there hadn't been something contemporary done in that space and that would have been one potential way to arrive at a policy decision of this sort. Sometimes that's what happens. Sometimes there is a parliamentary inquiry that makes recommendations that a government of the day responds to and makes a policy decision. Sometimes that's the pathway for it. In fairness, that's not what happened this time and governments do make significant policy decisions all the time that have not been arrived at as a result of that particular parliamentary inquiry process, but through other considerations which may or may not have been something that happened as a part of a public process.

Regardless of the government's abrupt decision on the matter and any criticism we may make, and I've made them, of the circumstances of that decision, the inquiry here was not about the merits of those circumstances of decision making, nor was it about the merits of the overarching policy. That simply was not in the scope of this inquiry, and we didn't take evidence in a broad way like that.

That doesn't mean that members here in this place aren't absolutely entitled to form their own views on the merits of the overarching policy behind this bill. That is something we do in this place every sitting day when we're considering legislation. When it comes time to vote on the bill at some point, I know that some members here may well cast their votes on the basis of their view of the underlying policy to which it gives effect, and that's entirely available to them.

I hope, though, that they do that having availed themselves of full information about that policy and don't necessarily do it in a reactionary way because of valid criticisms about the government's initial process. Just because there were criticisms of that doesn't mean that we can't now eventually arrive at proper consideration of this bill in this matter, in this place.

I'd like to make some comment on the timelines within which this inquiry occurred because it has been a matter of comment and some criticism from others. I want to be really fair in my comments on this. It is accurate to say that the inquiry on this bill occurred in a relatively short time frame and I accept that some people may feel uncomfortable about that. Typically, inquiries on bills tend to be a quicker process than, say, a broad ranging inquiry on a bigger policy matter.

We all know in this place that I've been a member of committees of inquiry on particular matters that have gone on for some years, big broad ranging ones, but when it comes to an inquiry on a bill, you've got a fairly prescribed focus to go through the clauses and the arrangements of that bill. We would expect it to be somewhat quicker.

However, as I said, I understand that some people might feel uncomfortable about a tight time frame, and I do think it's probably not ideal. I don't accept the time frame that was

undertaken for this inquiry was inappropriate or that it resulted in flawed consideration of the bill.

As a background, I think we need to remember a few key things and will point a few out here. After the government's announcement last August that greyhound racing would be brought to an end and phased out over a period of years. We did have a situation where initially participants in the industry had refused to be part of consultation processes being established by the Racing Integrity Commissioner to inform the transition process.

Again, I make no judgement on that. They were probably pretty shell shocked by the circumstances around everything and that's understandable. It was identified though quite quickly, that legislation would need to be progressed to give effect to early requirements for a process of transition, to ensure the process could be undertaken with integrity. The bill began to be developed in consultation with the Racing Integrity Commissioner and the working group that he had established.

We had a bill first tabled on 6 November, which was passed by the House of Assembly a month later. Then on 10 December, the bill was referred by this place to the Joint Standing Committee for the inquiry. I'm very mindful that the Committee was already in place and had already been conducting hearings during November.

We had heard from the Racing Integrity Commissioner about the need for there to be some urgency about legislating certain matters very early in a transition process to ensure the welfare on two fronts. He's always been very clear in his public statements about this, the welfare of animals and the welfare of people involved in the industry, and that certain things need to be put in place urgently, at an early stage of transition so that we can mindfully look after welfare on both those fronts as effectively as possible and with integrity and accountability.

He's been very clear in evidence he provided to the Committee both in November, before this inquiry on the bill was established and then also during the inquiry on the bill. It's on the public record. It is very clear that in a situation of not putting legislative structure around the early stages of transition, we risk the welfare of people and animals and we risk an unregulated deteriorating situation that will be highly detrimental.

I was very cognizant of that clear advice to us from the Independent Racing Integrity Commissioner which then put us to mind, well, if this has been referred to us in early December, we know we have an opportunity to do potential committee work across a period of time while we're not sitting across the summer break that we would responsibly need for moving with this work.

It was a tight timeframe to get things in place before Christmas, so we did endeavour to find a way to get at least those early stages underway because the press go with those early meetings, mostly about advertising a period of consultation that people can make submissions in and then planning ahead for future work. So, the inquiry was commenced and submissions opened on the 20 December. It was a submission period of seven weeks, closing on the 6 February.

I acknowledge that it is absolutely less than ideal to do that sort of process over the holiday period, it's less than ideal, but seven weeks is a longer than usual time period for making submissions.

The bill had been in the public domain since the 6 November, so people had had that extra time to at least have an awareness of the bill.

To my mind, we did get significant quantum of submissions made to the inquiry that covered a lot of comprehensive areas. Some of them were proforma submissions, but many of them were comprehensive sorts of submissions that raised a range of issues.

One of the priority matters that I believe prompted the sending of the bill to an inquiry with the Committee was that lack of broad consultation on the bill during its development stage, including the lack of an exposure draft being put out for consultation. I believe this seven-week period for people to make submissions in essence was about trying to make sure we could fill that gap so that things that people might raise and may have raised in an exposure draft stage of legislation development could be raised during this committee of inquiry process, and it did provide an opportunity, I believe, for people to have a say and to raise issues and concerns.

We were then able to test those in hearings and then what we did also, and for members here who haven't necessarily had the chance to engage with the Committee's materials that are available in terms of evidence, we have the submissions, we have the hearing transcripts, but what we also did is put a very extensive, comprehensive series of Questions on Notice to the government. My focus on that - because I had gone through the submissions and made very clear notes about the areas - the specific questions and areas in the bill were that the industry participants in particular had questions about or concerns about, so I wanted to make sure we had put to the government each of those questions and concerns and got a response on them, so that set of Questions on Notice to the government and the answers they supplied back to us are really important part of the evidence of the inquiry as well.

I believe that through each of those processes or through the combination of those processes, we covered and took evidence on the full range of areas that people had raised concerns about. That process of the inquiry - again, was it ideal? No, I can understand people making criticisms of it. They're probably pretty readily available criticisms to make, but I can genuinely say that I believe the bill, which was the focus of the inquiry, was comprehensively examined through the process. Anybody who reads this inquiry report that we're noting today, you can't read this report and say that the voice and concerns of industry participants are not reflected in this report. They are absolutely the dominant voice through this report. The overwhelming representation in these pages is from industry participants covering matters that were raised by them in the evidence they put to the Committee.

While I understand criticisms of process, I think you also have to look at product at the end of the process, and if you look at the product here, it's a comprehensive look at this bill and the fact that it has come out and, as I said, to some extent function similar to an exposure draft consultation on the bill, it's resulted in the Committee making a whole series of cogent recommendations to the government about ways to make amendments to this bill that will deliver greater confidence and certainty. Primarily, that's what I characterise the thrust of the recommendations is, and the government, to its credit, has responded to that and acknowledged and endeavoured to meet those recommendations through a series of now proposed amendments that they're going to table or attempt on the bill.

The totality of that process has delivered a comprehensive and defensible examination of this bill. It's resulted in suggested adjustments to the bill, improvements to the bill, if you will. As I said, mostly I see those as being - not because the bill was flawed in the first place necessarily even, but to deliver greater certainty and clarity for anybody engaging with it. That's my comment on process.

I'll move on to a couple of other matters that have come up in the inquiry. To set the tone for things, I've always been quite clear about my view on the overarching policy matter. I do think we should bring this activity of greyhound racing to an end. I do think that that's on the basis of the fact that it's an inherently and irredeemably dangerous activity to put dogs to, primarily for the purposes of being gambled on, but the activity itself cannot be made safe, and I know that in this context, many people raise other animal welfare concerns related to the conditions in which animals are kept and housed and looked after in this industry. In some ways I find that potentially distracting because what I know about the industry and what I've learnt and had made clear to me is it's a very varied industry. There are people participating in this industry who are lovely, heartfelt people, who love their dogs, who care for them dearly, who provide good conditions and positive conditions in which they live. Then there are people in this industry too that are treating dogs terribly and there's ample evidence on that from every jurisdiction that this activity exists. They simply are. There are people in this industry who do bad things to dogs and who treat dogs very poorly.

I would put all of that aside because, and I want to be very clear about my view, even if we could make every condition that a greyhound racing dog lived in perfect, the fact that they are put to racing on a track, to run at speed around a track, it's an inherently dangerous activity that puts them at high risk and inevitably you will have dogs seriously injured and dying as a result of it. For me, that's the crux of the matter in terms of welfare. That's the crux of the matter.

Moving on from that, I'm going to talk about a couple of things in the report. I know the member for Hobart went through the finding of the recommendations. I will not do that in great detail. I do just want to reinforce a couple of things, largely matters raised in evidence to the committee that were concerns about the bill that I think were addressed. I'll put that on the record right now. When, for example, people raised issues about concerns that a welfare void might exist once racing was phased out and greyhounds were no longer under the current rules that exist for them in the racing situation that was shown to be baseless because the current rules they are in are there because they are racing animals and in the racing environment and subject to the contexts that racing puts them in. Essentially, racing puts them at a high risk. The fact that people make money out of racing and might be tempted to cut corners, puts them at high risk. We have to put strict rules around racing and the way dogs are treated in racing. That won't be necessary when dogs are no longer racing, so they will have the same protections as every other dog in the community once the phase-out period comes about. There won't be a welfare void there.

People had questions and some confusion about the dogs going interstate or being able to breed dogs here to send interstate or what if we had people in Tasmania who co-owned dogs interstate. If you engage with the evidence in the inquiry, you will see that those questions are answered and there is clarity there under this bill and I think, over time, people will see that there's clarity there. I know that there's quite a bit of panic about it at the moment.

One of the things we do have up our sleeve, is that this is just the beginning of a lengthy transition period. It's interesting to consider New Zealand because I was just reading news reports from New Zealand about the recent vote that they had there on greyhound racing. It's funny because some of the news reports reference the fact that in New Zealand there's some consternation because they're only giving people from the time they announced it there to the time it's going to finish, they only had 20 months for the transition. In some of these news reports, it references the fact that Tasmania's announcement gives the industry 47 months and that's a positive compared to what they're facing in New Zealand, so they've compared us

favourably in terms of a timeframe for transition.

I find it interesting, too, that I hadn't properly clocked the matters relating to compensation in New Zealand. I know the dollar figures from New Zealand have been put forward as comparing unfavourably with what's been put forward so far from the government on compensation, but in fact when you actually look into it in New Zealand, they're not providing compensation at all. The dollar figures that they're talking about are what will be spent to transition.

The news reports I was reading, there are people up in arms about the fact that the 1055 people who have jobs in that industry in that country won't be getting compensation at all from the government in New Zealand. They'll get transition assistance to transition their dogs out and to potentially transition themselves out, but they won't get compensation per se from what's been announced in New Zealand, so there's a lot of consternation there.

We have the great benefit of having a very generous period of time, if we get on with it, to undertake a transition period, and that's what came out through this inquiry into the bill, because this bill has to be the starting point for that. If this isn't the starting point, we could end up being in a situation a bit like the consternation that's being experienced in New Zealand, where people feel that things are falling apart a bit around the edges because of a shorter timeframe and because their legislation has come late in the piece in that sense.

Certainly, the Racing Commissioner has been very clear in his evidence to the inquiry in the importance of this legislation passing to begin an orderly process and to look after welfare. If people look to the *Hansard*, some of which is in the report, but also if you just look to the *Hansard* more broadly from the commissioner to the inquiry process, you will see he makes comments, and I'll just quote a couple of things from him. This is from our hearing on the 11 February for the inquiry and the commissioner appearing, Mr Sean Carroll. Some of the things he said:

From that perspective, incremental reform is no longer adequate. We cannot rely solely on voluntary compliance or internal regulation to address systemic risk. We cannot continue to expand an industry without the capacity to protect animal welfare and we cannot ignore the widening gap between community expectations and industry practice.

For these reasons, the phase-out legislation is necessary. However, legislation alone is not sufficient. A strong, detailed and enforceable transition plan is essential. The bill proposes that I'd be responsible for developing that plan consistent with my statutory mandate to uphold integrity, enforceable standards and ensure fairness.

A bit later in his evidence, he says,

Since the announcement of the government's decision, uncertainty with the industry has intensified. In some cases, heightened emotion has contributed to conduct that has fallen outside the accepted standards and at times breached the rules of racing in the law.

A little bit further on, he says, 'from the perspective of integrity, enforceability and risk management, the conclusion is clear. The legislation is not only desirable, it's necessary.' The commissioner was clear with us in his evidence about the necessity of this legislation to get

things on track for an appropriate, careful and safe transition.

One of the things that I was particularly interested in looking at was this matter of the closure plan that's in the legislation and how we could introduce into the legislation greater certainty about, and confidence in, the closure plan. More detail into the legislation. Detail that, in a non-exhaustive way, outlined some expected areas to be covered in that closure plan. Setting up an expectation in legislation that it would be tabled in parliament. Setting up an expectation in the legislation that the closure plan would involve consultation. Putting those things in there, not because they necessarily changed the process of how that closure plan might be developed, because the commissioner was very clear he was going to undertake a comprehensive and consultative process for it, but it puts it into the legislation and the government's responded with some suggested amendments to give effect to some of that inclusion of greater detail and certainty and confidence in that part of the legislation. I was pleased that there was a receptivity to do that.

We also need to understand that the closure plan may be an evolving document. There were discussions during the inquiry about whether it could be adjusted or amended or reviewed at different stages as it played out because of changing circumstances or needs arising, and it was clarified that, yes, it could be and that that would be outlined in the closure plan itself - that it could and how it would happen. The commissioner in his evidence to us, laid out a comprehensive list of matters that were already part of the discussion about inclusion in the closure plan. That was a recommended improvement to the bill in terms of delivering that confidence and certainty, so I was pleased to see it.

There were lots of questions during the inquiry about the breeding arrangements and most of those questions are answered in the evidence, if people go to look at it. There are elements that people will object to because they don't want the outcome that this is working towards and, as I said, I understand that. So, of course, there are still going to be things that people find problematic or hiccups.

It's funny, we had some circular discussions or consideration of whether compensation should or shouldn't be in legislation. I think there absolutely should be reference to compensation in the legislation and that's one of the things I was interested to see put in as an expected aspect of a closure plan, so that the expectation is set up in the legislation and that that can be pointed to confidently. But, what was clear, particularly in talking to the commissioner about a plan for compensation is that we definitely should not rush headlong into quantifying it exhaustively in legislation because the specific arrangements will need to be carefully figured out. It's a complex, varied industry. There are different tiers or levels of participants in terms of the degree to which they're financially reliant on or involved in the industry. So, compensation plans and how we work our way towards a model for that, it's definitely not a legislative matter. It should be guaranteed through legislation and referred to in legislation, in my view, but not put in in detail. That was clarified at various times in evidence given to the committee and the discussions had. I think, for anybody to demand that we should have outlined or that the bill should have some form of specific detailed outline of a compensation model, is probably a little bit reckless, actually, particularly at this stage of things. I think if we were to rush to do that now in order to legislate it in some way, we would be doing the industry participants a serious disservice. I think it's unlikely we could design something in that way that would fit into a legislative model of things that would be sufficiently nuanced and comprehensive and mindful of circumstances in the industry.

Those were the sorts of things that I just wanted to pick out as some of the areas that are contemplated in the inquiry report. Noting that the member for Hobart has more comprehensively gone through the very full list of findings and recommendations, I do think

that we are in an interesting situation here. As I said, this is a noting debate on the inquiry on the bill and the report that we've presented as a result of that inquiry.

I understand that there will continue to be potential criticisms and issues that people might have on process about this whole thing. We were sort of set on that path, in some sense, at the very outset by the way the government has gone about it. My view is we take a practical approach at ensuring our best efforts, that at each stage we undertake the job that's needed to properly consider what's before us in this place and the matters presented to us. I think that's what's been done in the committee process and report and I do stand by that.

I know that we will have further discussion on the bill and in its detail, potentially, at a different stage here. I won't go further into that. I'm also not going to go further into discussion about the overarching policy at this stage either, having alluded to it fairly lightly in my contribution today. I note the report from the committee and I hope that members are able to engage with it genuinely and the evidence sits around it.

There's a lot of really important, valuable information in the evidence of the inquiry. We all know that not all evidence makes it into a report of every inquiry. You have to go through a process of narrowing it down for presentation. For those who are particularly interested in specific matters to do with the bill, there's quite a valuable trove of evidence there as part of the records of the inquiry. I definitely point people towards it. I absolutely put on the record here that I appreciate the involvement of everybody who took part in the inquiry. I've tried to make sure that I've listened carefully at every stage of the process and genuinely took on board things that were raised and sought to ensure that we could consider and address them in some sense as part of the process. I note the report.