

Meeting at Horse and Jockey on Thursday 23/9/2021 @ 3.30pm

Present representing RCÉ

Mr Gerard Dollard Chief Executive Officer RCÉ
Mr Philip Peake Deputy Chief Executive Officer RCÉ
Mr Derek Frehill Director of Racing RCÉ
Mr Pat Herbert Director of Regulations RCÉ

Present representing IGOBF

Mr Damian Matthews Chairperson IGOBF
Mr Geoff Parnaby
Ms Clare Hanley (for Helen Morris Secretary IGOBF)
Ms Deirdre Leahy (for Al Hanley Treasurer IGOBF)

RCÉ: Welcome to all.

It is the final meeting with Mr Gerard Dollard CEO who departs Greyhound Racing Ireland very shortly and it is expected that the new CEO will be announced next week and will start in January 2022.

Mr Philip Peake will be Acting CEO for that period.

Thank you to the IGOBF for their valuable input and from the point of communications we have come a long way in the past few years from the stage of quite poor communication to open, frank and respectful dialogue that we have today and long may it continue.

IGOBF: We have come a long way.....and on that point.... the grassroots are asking will the new CEO be aware of the work of the IGOBF and the various GOBAs?

RCÉ: The new CEO will be very well briefed on all matters pertaining to the industry and well informed regarding all the various stakeholders.

IGOBF: That will be a helpful starting point.

1. Letter of Endorsement from RCÉ re The IGOBF chaired by Damian Matthews

RCÉ: Can we first clarify for all how many Greyhound and Owners Breeders Associations (GOBAs) there are and how many are affiliated to the IGOBF? Also what GOBAs are not affiliated?

IGOBF: There are nine GOBAs affiliated to IGOBF.

Kerry, Tipperary, Kilkenny, Wexford, Waterford, Northern , Limerick/Clare, NorthWest and Western

RCÉ: What GOBAs presently are not affiliated?

IGOBF: Cork, Mullingar and Dublin have not yet affiliated but we have many supporters in all these three areas also.

RCÉ: Are AGMs being held for the various GOBAs now with Covid restrictions lifted?

IGOBF: At present all GOBAs are notifying their members about the AGMs and those who wish to join and become members of their various GOBAs should attend the AGMs or contact members about joining. The AGMs still to be held will be advertised in the Sporting Press.

When officers have been elected at all GOBAs the Federation will hold its Annual General Meeting.

It is expected that the Annual General Meeting of the IGOBF will be held in November 2021

RCÉ: It would seem that there are some members in Cork GOBA that support the group that calls itself the *IGOBF CLG*

IGOBF: Cork GOBA have not affiliated with us but they would be more than welcome to do so. It is up to the stakeholders at Cork to attend their GOBA AGM, elect their GOBA officers and vote accordingly if they wish to affiliate with us in IGOBF.

RCÉ: It is our understanding from the evidence of membership numbers provided that **the IGOBF under the chairmanship of Damian Matthews is the representative organisation for the vast majority of the greyhound community.**

IGOBF CLG would appear to represent a small number of individuals within the greyhound community. In correspondence with the *IGOBF CLG* we have requested that they provide details of the parties they represent within the industry.

The response (as set out in their email dated 30th June 2021) indicates that they represent

“All greyhound owners and breeders whether they are members or non-members”.

IGOBF: The *IGOBF CLG* do not represent our members nor have they a mandate to speak for our members. The *IGOBF* are the vast majority of representatives within the industry. Our membership numbers are increasing and are at 1,350 presently and will likely be in excess of 1,500 members by the end of 2021.

RCÉ: They (*IGOBF CLG*) have continued to present themselves as spokespersons for the owners and breeders.

Rascaiocht Con Eireann (RCÉ) has in place a National Greyhound Consultative Forum (NGCF) which under normal circumstances meets on a quarterly basis. The Forum comprises of all stakeholders involved in the greyhound industry.

The *IGOBF CLG* has been invited to participate in meetings of the Forum but has not done so.

Many issues that have been raised in correspondence from the *IGOBF CLG* have been the subject of discussions at the Forum.

The *IGOBF CLG* has declined to participate in the NGCF which is the appropriate Forum for dealing with matters of concern.

IGOBF: Our membership numbers reflect our support with 1,350 paid up members. We are the elected representatives who speak for the members of The Irish Greyhound Owners and Breeders Federation. The nominating rights to Seanad Eireann is a separate matter to be amended at a future date.

RCÉ: It is correct to say that the *IGOBF* historically holds the nominating rights to Seanad Eireann under the relevant legislation. Any change to nominating rights is a matter for Seanad Eireann.

It is unclear how such nominating rights can be amended for any organisation under present legislation where rights of representation are disputed.

In any event, it is RCÉ's view that the holding of nominating rights to Seanad Eireann is a separate and distinct matter to the representative body for the majority of the greyhound community.

All the stakeholders need to be informed that the *IGOBF CLG* have written to The Public Accounts Committee and are regularly tabling parliamentary questions for politicians which are asked in the Dail and the Minister for Agriculture then looks for detailed written replies from RCÉ.

RCÉ has recently responded to correspondence from the Committee of Public Accounts clearly stating that it is their understanding the *IGOBF* (under the chairmanship of Damian Matthews) is the representative organisation for the vast majority of the greyhound community.

IGOBF: We will make our members and all stakeholders aware of these matters. We are hopeful that everyone in the industry will come on board and unite. Unity is key. Negativity is hampering progress.

2. Discuss possibility of Private tracks Alliance.

RCÉ: The next item on the agenda is Discuss The Possibility of a Private Tracks Alliance.

IGOBF: This idea was raised at the AGM of The Tipperary GOBA on 31st August 2021 at Thurles greyhound stadium. Thurles stadium proposed an Alliance be formed between the five privately owned tracks ie Thurles, Clonmel, Kilkenny, Enniscorthy and Dundalk.

RCÉ: We have no objection to a private tracks Alliance and will work with the representatives if such an alliance can be agreed.

3. Traceability App Update

IGOBF: The next item on the agenda is The Traceability App update.

RCÉ: At the end of this month all tracks will have had visits from trained staff to help anyone with difficulties or explanations using the traceability App. Push notifications on the App are being issued and we have made significant use of the text alert system to alert owners/trainers of the need for updates. We have had very significant compliance. Change of location is now included and RCÉ have appointed Mr Geoff Griffin as full time Traceability Co-Ordinator. We are now nearing the position of being able to notify inspectors with lists of greyhounds on every premises.

We are approaching the final stages of automated suspensions for anyone who is not complying with traceability updates. Owners/trainers will receive 3 specific notifications requesting updates. The 3rd notification is the final warning before automated suspension of all entries for trials and racing. Both the owner and the trainer will receive the notification. Either can update the information. The RCÉ traceability system has been two years in development and is now moving into the final stages. At the official Sales meetings we have an official who will attend to traceability of greyhounds sold on that day.

IGOBF: The Traceability system must be in place and it must be reliable and accurate.

We need to ensure that all racing greyhounds are accounted for.

RCÉ: RCÉ is still working out one or two anomalies because of changes due to Brexit issues and transfer of data of coursing greyhounds that will be tracked separately under the ICC traceability system.

IGOBF: Solutions must be found and the company employed to develop the App must work with the ICC to solve every anomaly.

RCÉ: We are working with the ICC. A solution is being worked on and is achievable. It is critical that the message goes out that owners and trainers that have not yet engaged fully with the new traceability model will be receiving notices of suspension from trials and racing in the next few days and weeks.

IGOBF: The Traceability system must receive priority attention and any glitches ironed out.

4. Protocol re Conduct Trials for greyhounds.

IGOBF: At present there is no right to appeal if a greyhound is judged to be disqualified in a race.

There is room for improvement in the decision making.

Firstly the decision to disqualify should be taken by 3 people that are qualified in the industry.

In a sweepstake or classic competition the decision to disqualify should be unanimous.

RCÉ: There is no right to appeal at present. The control Steward will usually confer with at least two other people before a decision is made. The decision is final.

RCÉ will confer with stakeholders further to improve protocols on this matter.

5. GRI PRIZE MONEY ALLOCATION

RCÉ: Prize money has been restored 10% from 13/9/2021

More money has been allocated to SIS meetings.

By the end of 2021 there should be close to a €9 million spend on prize money.

We had a spend of €9.5 million in 2019 before Covid however with tote gone, restaurants, admissions etc gone our ability to earn income was severely restricted.

IGOBF: Can we encourage more long distance races?

Prize money is better for longer distance racing and they are very popular with the race goers.

RCÉ: The difficulty managers are reporting is filling races over the longer distances. RCÉ is committed to this issue. Track managers are in communication via WhatsApp with one another and can try to facilitate owners looking for longer distance races but it is proving hard to fill these stakes and races.

We are also getting reports of lower pools of dogs available for racing presently in certain tracks.

IGOBF: Kennel cough and sickness has affected pools of dogs available to race presently at a number of tracks.

RCÉ: We are aware of kennel cough and recently issued guidance for same on Talking Dogs.

6. Video production update Series Two #Behind The Track series

IGOBF: The target date for release of series two will be a date to be announced in November.

Series one of #Behind The Track was a huge success with hundreds of thousands of views on 'Irish Greyhounds Sunrise to Sunset' on Facebook, 'Racing Greyhounds of Ireland' on Youtube, Instagram, Twitter and Tiktok. The RGOI Youtube channel has had over one million views and over 4,600 subscribers since January 2021.

RCÉ: We are looking forward to the series and are sure it will be just as successful as the first series.

We believe there is a very exciting video planned in Enniscorthy.

IGOBF: All is going to plan and will be revealed in due course.

7. Christmas programme at tracks post Covid

IGOBF: As it is looking very positive re restrictions being lifted will there be additional race meetings added in December?

RCÉ: We will be adding additional meetings as bookings fill.

We must also ensure we have sufficient dogs available for racing in the pools before extra meetings can be added. It is important to get the entries in from owners and trainers so our racing pools are strong coming up to Christmas at all the tracks.

IGOBF: We have a suggestion to run a memorial night to remember those loved ones lost in the difficult times we have been through.

RCE: November would be a good month to stage a memorial night at the various tracks. This proposal is something we will work on with the track management. We will be announcing the dates for racing post Christmas/New Year also.

8. Folen's Publication.

RCÉ: At present we do not have an update to report.

The Department of Education have stated that they do not have an input into the textbooks that are published by publishers.

We are waiting for the CEO of Folens to come back to us with a response. We are open to working with them to find one.

9. Tracks update ie Clonmel, Lifford, Galway and Waterford.

RCÉ: Clonmel are back to one nights racing.

When compliant with the terms of the recent agreement we will look at granting a second night of racing. Liffords reopening date has been pushed out to March 2022 as October 2021 was just not realistic.

RCÉ had a recent meeting with Galway GOBA and it was a constructive meeting with all sides working towards solutions to reconcile race nights lost to rugby matches.

In Waterford track a lot of work had been carried out between the 1st and 2nd bend to correct drainage issues. The reports so far are that the works are successful and they will be closely monitoring it during winter conditions.

IGOBF: Reverting to one nights racing at Clonmel punishes the owners and trainers and they are at a loss of racing and income.

RCÉ: Clonmel is a private track run by a board of directors. We accept that the owners and trainers are losing out and we are prepared to allow tracks e.g. Waterford and Thurles to run some additional races for Clonmel dogs if the Clonmel Dogs are entered in their racing pools.

IGOBF: Is there a difficulty with Clonmel because it is a privately run track?

RCÉ: We would have to commend the way most private tracks are being run. Most private tracks are doing excellent work. Clonmel track must be compliant with the terms of their agreement.

10. Appearance and Presentation of Industry Representatives

RCÉ: We have proposals for uniforms which include all ground staff, racing managers and a uniform jacket for the Control Steward which makes all staff clearly identifiable.

IGOBF: Following on from practices learned from Covid and in keeping with improved presentation we believe all owners/trainers should have their own personal uniform parade coat which can be worn and purchased at tracks.

RCÉ could use the opportunity to promote the IRGT by using a logo on the industry standard parade coats worn by the owner/trainer/handler in the parade ring.

11. Survey re improvements to IRGT

RCÉ: This survey is available on the RCÉ website and is open to all participants. We appreciate the submissions made already by your members and there will be further communication and consultations with IGOBF representatives from the company employed to undertake the report.

OKS Consultants are working on developing a new strategy with the IRGT.

IGOBF: Would RCÉ look at the possibility of including an online shop on menus and race cards whereby profits on products eg hats, snoods, mugs etc would go towards extra funding for the IRGT?

(Noted)

12. Any Other Business

RCÉ: The Code of Practice on The Care and Welfare of Greyhounds is gone to the Minister of Agriculture for final sign off.

There have been 25 applications for 3 positions on the Board of Greyhound Racing Ireland.

The Minister for Agriculture is responsible for choosing the three appointments.

The final candidate for the post of CEO has been selected and will be announced next week.

IGOBF: Can we have clarification that due to Brexit vat may be payable by the buyer on greyhounds sold to the UK from Ireland in January 2022?

RCÉ: We have had no communication from the Department of Agriculture yet as to any changes but we will come back to you on this matter.

IGOBF: We are seeking clarification re back grading of dogs in sprints.

RCÉ: To be back graded in sprint races the greyhound must run over the sprint distance and the same applies over the standard distance. Sprint races are not as popular with punters as races over the standard distance and asking for more sprints on a race card is not a policy we wish to encourage.

We need to get away from 5 or 6 sprint races on a night's racing.

RCÉ: Budget 2022 is important for RCÉ and the future of our industry.

The Power Economic Report 2021 is a positive and powerful statement about the economic significance of The Irish greyhound industry. RCÉ will also be considering doing a separate regulation for the euthanasia of racing greyhounds. The Department of Agriculture advice is that RCÉ has sufficient powers under The Greyhound Racing Act of 2019 and the Welfare of Greyhounds Act of 2011 to enact regulation on this matter.

A word of Thanks

IGOBF: On behalf of IGOBF thank you Mr Dollard for your co-operation and commitment.

Many matters have moved on a long way and there have been improvements and better communication with stakeholders.

Best wishes in your new role.

The meeting concluded at 5.33pm

Helen Morris
Secretary IGOBF