

Minister hounded about racing dogs sent to Macau

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May 1 2016, 12:01am,
The Sunday Times



Coveney has been warned it is impossible to monitor the welfare of greyhounds in Macau
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DIRECTORS of the ISPCA, Dogs Trust and the Irish Blue Cross have written to Simon Coveney to demand he hear their concerns over the export of Irish greyhounds to race in Macau, which has China’s only legal dog racing track.

The animal welfare organisations requested a meeting with the agriculture minister after The Sunday Times revealed that three greyhounds registered to Irish owners were transported to Macau in March and had trial runs at the Yat Yuen Canidrome. The greyhounds were still listed on Friday as having Irish owners on the website run by the Irish Greyhound Board (IGB), also known as Bord na gCon.

Greyhounds at the Chinese track that are injured or deemed too slow are killed at a rate of 30 a month, according to the Society for the Protection of Animals (Macau), also known as Anima. The society will join animal rights organisations from the US and Australia in a demonstration outside the Department of Agriculture on June 2, where greyhound advocates will present a petition that has so far gathered almost 250,000 signatures worldwide. Protests are also planned this week at the Irish embassies in London and Milan.

The three organisations told Coveney that monitoring the welfare of Irish dogs sent to Macau was “impossible” because the Chinese stadium “has a well-documented and deplorable record in the welfare of racing greyhounds. The idea of sending greyhounds to Macau stands in stark contrast to the letter and spirit of the Welfare of Greyhounds Act 2011”.

Mark Beazley, executive director of Dogs Trust, said the charity also planned to lobby any airline transporting greyhounds to China from Ireland. As The Sunday Times revealed last month, Irish greyhounds are being sent to race at Yat Yuen Canidrome in a trial to determine whether they can fill the vacuum created when Qantas agreed in December to no longer transport Australian greyhounds to China.

Anima claims six more Irish greyhounds arrived in shipping crates in Macau in mid-April. It filmed three of the dogs being unloaded from a boat from Hong Kong but their country of origin has not yet been confirmed. The charity said Yat Yuen sells the greyhounds to gamblers at auction and rents them for racing for €120 a month. But the greyhounds never leave the stadium and are killed if they do not place in the top three in five consecutive races.

The Department of Agriculture said the IGB had advised all owners to export only to destinations that provided the expected care as defined in the code of practice for the welfare of greyhounds.

Maureen O’Sullivan, an independent TD, asked Coveney about the issue in the Dail on April 21. Coveney said the IGB was making inquiries to determine if a racing code of conduct was breached or an offence had been committed.

“Once appropriate animal health and welfare certification requirements are met, dogs, including greyhounds, may be exported internationally, including to China,” he said at the time.