20 May 2025

**DECISION**

**GREYHOUND RACING VICTORIA**

**and**

**MICHAEL KATSIRIS**

**Date of Hearing:** 12 May 2025

**Date of Decision:** 12 May 2025

**Panel:** Judge Marilyn Harbison (Deputy Chairperson), Ms Amanda Dickens and Dr Andrew Gould.

**Appearances:** Ms Amara Hughes, instructed by Ms Yana Podolskaya, appeared on behalf of the Stewards.

Mr Michael Katsiris represented himself.

 Ms Sofie Sword appeared as a witness.

**Charges and particulars:**

**Charge No.  1 of 2**

Greyhounds Australasia Rule **21(1)(d)** reads as follows:

***21 Proper care for and welfare of greyhounds***

*(1) A person must ensure that any greyhound in the person's care or custody, is at all times provided with:*

*(d) veterinary attention when necessary;*

**Particulars of the Charge being**:

1. You were, at all relevant times, a trainer registered with Greyhound Racing Victoria (**GRV**) (Member No. 323924) and a person bound by the Greyhounds Australasia Rules and Local Racing Rules.

1. From 1 February 2022 until 11 October 2022, you were the owner of greyhound ZIPPING MALIBU (NIAPC).

1. From 4 April 2022 until 30 September 2022, you had the care or custody of ZIPPING MALIBU.

1. Whilst ZIPPING MALIBU was in your care or custody you were aware the greyhound had an injured right rear hock, which you failed to seek veterinary attention for until 18 May 2022.

1. Between 4 April and 18 May 2022, you failed to ensure that Zipping Malibu, which was in your care or custody at these times, was provided with veterinary care when necessary.

**Charge No.  2 of 2**

Greyhounds Australasia Rule **21(2)** reads as follows:

***21 Proper care for and welfare of greyhounds***

*(1) A person must ensure that any greyhound in the person's care or custody, is at all times provided with:*

*(2) A person must exercise the care and supervision necessary to prevent a greyhound under the person's care or custody from being subjected to unnecessary pain or suffering, or from anything which is likely to lead to unnecessary pain or suffering.*

**Particulars of the Charge being**:

1. You were, at all relevant times, a trainer registered with Greyhound Racing Victoria (**GRV**) (Member No. 323924) and a person bound by the Greyhounds Australasia Rules and Local Racing Rules.

1. From 1 February 2022 until 11 October 2022, you were the owner of greyhound ZIPPING MALIBU (NIAPC).

1. From 4 April 2022 until 30 September 2022, you had the care or custody of ZIPPING MALIBU.

1. Whilst ZIPPING MALIBU was in your care or custody you were aware the greyhound had an injured right rear hock, which you failed to seek any veterinary attention for.

1. On 18 May 2022 ZIPPING MALIBU was examined by a veterinarian and found to have suffered a chronic hock fracture.

1. On 4 October 2022 ZIPPING MALIBU was examined by another veterinarian which confirmed the hock fracture, with pain relief provided and surgery conducted.

1. You failed to prevent the greyhound ZIPPING MALIBU, which was in your care or custody at the relevant times, from being subjected to unnecessary pain or suffering, or from anything which is likely to lead to unnecessary pain or suffering.

**Pleas:** Guilty to both Charges

**DECISION**

1. Mr Michael Katsiris is a registered greyhound owner and trainer. He is facing two charges relating to Zipping Malibu, owned by him. The first charge is of failing to provide veterinary attention to that dog. The second charge is of having failed to exercise necessary care to prevent unnecessary pain and suffering to that dog.
2. He has pleaded guilty to each of these charges.
3. In early February of 2022, Zipping Malibu was transferred into Mr Katsiris’ name as owner. Mr Katsiris then kennelled the dog with another registered trainer, Mr Sargon Kando.
4. During the course of a trial at the Meadows in late February or early March 2022, whilst in Mr Kando’s care, the dog suffered a fractured hock. Mr Kando contacted Mr Katsiris’ father and told him of the injury. Mr Michael Katsiris collected Zipping Malibu from Mr Kando on 4 April 2022 and by that time was well aware of the injury to the greyhound. He told us in this hearing that he could see when he collected the dog that the dog was hurt and realised that it would not be able to race again. Up to that time, while under Mr Kando’s care, the dog had received no veterinary treatment or medication of any sort for its injury and Mr Katsiris knew that this was the case.
5. The dog remained in Mr Katsiris’ care until 30 September 2022 and in that time also received no medication for its injury.
6. At the hearing before us, Mr Katsiris told us that, although the dog was registered in his name, it had been purchased for his father. His father had a long history of training greyhounds, but was unable at this time to be registered in his own name as he could not provide GRV with a police check. Mr Katsiris unwisely agreed to register the dog in his own name on the understanding that his father would care for it.
7. This arrangement is contrary to the rules of racing and should not have been contemplated. The person to whom a dog is registered has the absolute responsibility for that dog and cannot come before this Tribunal seeking to deflect responsibility for such an arrangement.
8. On 18 May 2022 Mr Katsiris and his father took Zipping Malibu to a veterinary surgeon, Dr Ray Ferguson. At that time, Dr Ferguson noticed that the dog walked with a limp. Mr Katsiris’ father asked Dr Ferguson to euthanise the dog, but he refused, explaining that GRV would need to be notified before any euthanasia took place. He told both men that the dog needed surgery or other medical treatment, with the details to be determined after x-rays had taken place.
9. Mr Katsiris and his father left with the dog and did not return. Oddly, no pain management program for the dog was suggested by Dr Ferguson on that occasion. The reason he gave when questioned by the Stewards was that he thought that Mr Katsiris would bring the dog back for treatment later or that the dog would be euthanised once the GRV processes had been utilised.
10. Mr Katsiris gave the dog up to “Racing to Rehome” on 30 September 2022, having made an application in respect of the dog some months before. When he left it with Racing to Rehome staff, he told them that he knew that the dog had a broken hock and that it limped. He said that the injury had happened about 6 months before and that he had waited for the swelling to go down. He had then rehabilitated the dog by putting him on a “very slow” walker. At the time the dog was surrendered, staff noticed that the dog was not putting weight on the leg. Immediate pain relief was prescribed and a veterinary appointment made. Four days later the injury was diagnosed and corrective surgery was undertaken prior to the dog being rehomed in January of 2023.
11. Mr Katsiris had the dog in his care knowing that it was suffering a significant injury to its hock from 4 April to 30 September 2022 without providing it with any pain relief.
12. Mr Katsiris was interviewed by the Stewards about these matters in late 2022. He told the Stewards that he did not think that the dog was in pain and that it had gained weight over that time. He appeared not understand the gravity of the situation. However, given that he had joined with his father in requesting euthanasia in May 2022, there can be no doubt that he understood the seriousness of the injury.
13. In sentencing for this offence, a most significant consideration is general deterrence. Owners must promptly treat their dogs after any injury. This dog suffered in pain for many months because of this owner’s neglect. Such behaviour must be eradicated from the industry or the future of greyhound racing itself is grim. It is particularly concerning that Mr Katsiris was prepared to join with his father in asking for the dog to be euthanised, but was not prepared to give it pain relief. The veterinary evidence before us demonstrated that the dog would have been in significant pain over this period.
14. We have received a medical certificate on Mr Katsiris’ behalf. He suffers from several long-standing medical conditions and also from anxiety and depression. His doctor believes that Mr Katsiris involvement in greyhound racing brings many health benefits, including improvement in his mental health. We accept this evidence and have taken it into account in framing our sentence today.
15. We also note that he has pleaded guilty to this charge and that this plea is to be taken into account in his favour.
16. We have been provided with details of his prior offences and note that they are all of a minor nature and do not involve any animal welfare issues.
17. The most significant matters advanced by Mr Katsiris were as follows. He said that he was under significant pressure from his father which had prevented him from acting in respect of this injury to the dog. He told us that he usually treats all his dogs with great care and this was confirmed by a reference provided by Dr Michael Bell, a veterinarian surgeon at the Craigieburn Animal Hospital. Dr Bell described him as always presenting his dogs in good condition and being very prompt in seeking an appointment.
18. We accept this evidence, although to some extent the detail in the reference is at odds with the information Mr Katsiris gave to us in the hearing. Dr Bell describes Mr Katsiris as having been a client of his for at least 30 years. Mr Katsiris told us that he was involved in greyhound racing for a time in the past, but that his recent involvement in this industry commenced only in the year 2020, after a period of absence from the industry of about 30 years. At the time of these events, he had been registered for only a short time.
19. We also heard character evidence from Mr Katsiris sister, Ms Sophie Sword, who told us that their father exercised enormous control over Mr Katsiris. She also confirmed Mr Katsiris evidence that he has put himself and his sister into significant financial difficulties as a result of borrowing money from her to purchase greyhounds to establish his kennels.
20. This Tribunal has previously dealt with Mr Kando, the trainer, for his failure to provide veterinary attention for this dog. He has been disqualified for nine months. In sentencing Mr Katsiris, we need to ensure parity between his sentence and that of Mr Kando. Mr Kando is a trainer with 30 years’ experience. Mr Katsiris argued that, being at that time relatively inexperienced, was justified in relying upon the experience of Mr Kando, who had not indicated that any veterinary treatment was necessary and had suggested that the injury would heal itself.
21. Although taking the influence of Mr Kando into account, we do not accept that an owner can simply rely upon the advice of a trainer in order to diminish his own responsibility. In any event, Mr Katsiris had the dog from April to September 2022, a very long period of time for the dog not receiving veterinary treatment when it was clearly limping.
22. Mr Katsiris showed little insight into the unsatisfactory nature of the arrangement with his father. During the hearing, he spoke of Zipping Malibu as if it was his father’s responsibility, not his, saying that the dog was his “in name only”. At one point he exclaimed, “I don’t even know why I am here”. He had to be reminded that registration of a dog is not just a mere formality, but involves the acceptance of responsibility for the welfare of each dog so registered.
23. We note his assurance to us that he now gives close attention to all his dogs. We also note that disqualification will most likely affect his mental health and will certainly affect his financial situation.
24. In our view, the most significant mitigatory factor is the amount of time it has taken for this matter to have come before the Tribunal. Mr Katsiris was first interviewed by the Stewards about these matters in late 2022. He then heard nothing at all about the matter until the charges were served upon him in January 2025. Believing that the matter was not to proceed to a hearing, he has established his kennels, purchasing up to 60 dogs and entering into significant financial responsibilities. A very significant discount should be given to the sentence we would otherwise have imposed because of the unnecessary delay.
25. Mr Katsiris is 64 years of age. He previously worked as a cleaner, but has given up this occupation in order to care for his dogs full time. He lives at his father's house where his kennels are situated. He presently has 10 greyhounds. He has devoted so much time to his greyhounds that his marriage has broken up. He suffers from significant strain because of the influence of his father, who has a long history of conflict within the family.
26. Taking all these circumstances into account, the penalties which we impose are as follows.
27. On Charge 1, failing to obtain veterinary attention, when necessary, the penalty we impose is disqualification for five months.
28. On Charge 2, failing to provide necessary care and attention, the penalty we impose is disqualification for five months.
29. We recognise that each of the charges arise out of the same fact situation and order that each of the periods of disqualification be served concurrently.
30. In imposing these sentences, we wish to record that we have discounted each sentence to reflect the long period of delay in bringing these charges. Had this delay not occurred, the sentence we would have imposed on each of these charges would have been a sentence of eight months disqualification, with the disqualification on each charge being served concurrently.

Mark Howard

Registrar, Victorian Racing Tribunal