23 June 2025

**DECISION**

**GREYHOUND RACING VICTORIA**

**and**

**BRUCE STIRLING**

**Date of hearing:** 10 June 2025

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**Panel:** Judge John Bowman (Chairperson) and Ms Melissa Mahady.

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

 Mr Bruce Stirling represented himself.

**Charge:**

Greyhounds Australasia Rule ***GAR 156 (x)***,reads as follows:

**156 General offences**

An offence is committed if a person (including an official):

*(x) – being a registered person or person associated with greyhound racing, associates with a disqualified or warned off person for the purposes of greyhound racing;*

**Particulars of the Charge being**:

1. You were, at all relevant times, a trainer registered with Greyhound Racing Victoria (**GRV**) (Member No. 318529) and a person bound by the Greyhounds Australasia Rules and Local Racing Rules.
2. On 26 October 2023, you attended the Ballarat Greyhound Racing Club in company with disqualified participant, Peter GAVIN (152538) for the purposes of trialling greyhounds.
3. Peter GAVIN was disqualified for a period of three (3) years and nine (9) months by the Victorian Racing Tribunal on 5 October 2023.

**Plea:** Guilty

**DECISION**

Mr Bruce Stirling, you are pleading guilty to one charge of a breach of Greyhounds Australasia Rule (“GAR”) 156(x). The Charge is in essence one of associating with a disqualified person for the purposes of greyhound racing. The disqualified person in question is Mr Peter Gavin, a previously licensed person by whom you have been employed. You worked for him and his partner, his wife Ms Kathleen Boyle, also a licensed person. Mr Gavin was disqualified for a lengthy period which commenced in early October 2023.

The Charge arises out of your attendance at the Ballarat Greyhound Racing track where trials were being conducted. This attendance was on 26 October 2023. The disqualified person, Mr Gavin, was also in attendance. A number of greyhounds trained by his wife were taken to the trials. We accept that you did not travel to the trials in a vehicle with Mr Gavin. You made your own way there. Upon arrival at Ballarat, you saw that Mr Gavin was there with a vehicle towing a large 20 dog trailer. Also present was Mr James McGee, also a licensed person, earlier employed by Mr Gavin and who had evidently travelled with him. Mr Gavin took the keys to the car you had driven and went off on some other business. We accept that you went into the track and trialled the greyhounds, which were ten in number. Thus, you knew that Mr Gavin was in attendance, that the greyhounds to be trialled were trained by his wife and that he and his vehicle and trailer had taken part in the transportation of the greyhounds. You were part of what took place.

Thus, you are pleading guilty to the breach of the relevant Rule. We accept that you did not immediately plead guilty when interviewed, but ultimately you did and continued so to plead in this hearing.

A breach of this Rule is serious matter. Mr Gavin had been recently disqualified for three years and three months when your offence occurred.

Your situation is that you are effectively a single man of age 61 years. You have been associated with greyhounds all your working life, although this was interrupted for a considerable period when you were living Western Australia. You resumed training and became relicensed in Victoria in approximately 2019. You have a very good, if not excellent record, with no history of any major offences and apparently only one minor offence of an administrative nature.

You are now employed by Mr Michael Chilcott, a comparatively large-scale trainer, and live on his property at Heathcote.

Thus, you have a long, interrupted, history in the industry. Your involvement is continuing and is your full-time employment.

We take all these matters, including your plea of guilty, and the provision by you to the Stewards of quite a lengthy and detailed statement, into account.

You have submitted that the appropriate penalty is one of an order of six months suspension which is in turn fully suspended.

We appreciate that this is your livelihood, that you have a very good record and that you have provided a lengthy statement to the Stewards. However, this is an offence of some gravity.

In all the circumstances, we are not of the view that a disqualification is warranted. However, we are of the opinion that a penalty of suspension is appropriate. We do not accept that this should be fully suspended. We bear in mind your cooperation with the Stewards, your provision of a statement and your record. However, we are not in agreement with the proposition of total suspension of the penalty.

It seems to us that a penalty similar to that imposed on Mr McGee is warranted. That penalty is suspension for six months, with four months of that penalty in turn suspended for twelve months. Should you commit a relevant offence during that period, the suspended penalty would be activated. There is an initial period of suspension for two months.

We repeat that the penalty is suspension of your license for six months, with four months of that suspended for 12 months, that being reactivated should you commit a relevant offence during that period.

Paige Macdonald

A/Assistant Registrar, Victorian Racing Tribunal