30 September 2025

**DECISION**

**GREYHOUND RACING VICTORIA**

**and**

**ROBERT WHITFORD**

**Date of Hearing:** 24 September 2025

**Date of Decision:** 24 September 2025

**Panel:** Magistrate Peter Reardon (Chairperson), Mr Des Gleeson and Dr Andrew Gould.

**Appearances:** Mr Jordan Vassis appeared on behalf of the Stewards.

Mr Robert Whitford represented himself.

**Charges:** Greyhounds Australasia Rule (“GAR”) 141(1) states:

(1) The owner, trainer or other person in charge of a greyhound:

(a) nominated to compete in an Event;

(b) presented for a satisfactory trial or such other trial as provided for by the Rules; or

(c) presented for any test or examination for the purpose of a stand-down period being varied or revoked,

must present the greyhound free of any prohibited substance.

GAR 142(1) states:

(1) An offence is committed if a person:

(a) administers, attempts to administer or causes to be administered a prohibited substance to a greyhound;

(b) aids, abets, counsels or procures the administration of or an attempt to administer a prohibited substance to a greyhound; or

(c) has prior knowledge of a prohibited substance being administered or attempted to be administered to a greyhound,

which is established in any sample taken from a greyhound presented for an Event or when subject to any other contingency pursuant to the Rules.

GAR 151(1) states:

(1) The person in charge of a greyhound must keep and retain written records detailing all vaccinations, antiparasitics and treatments administered to the greyhound:

(a) from the time the greyhound enters their care until the greyhound leaves their care; and

(b) for a minimum of two years.

**Particulars of charges: Charge 1: GAR 141(1)**

 1. You are, and were at all relevant times, a trainer licensed by Greyhound Racing Victoria and a person bound by the Greyhounds Australasia Rules.

2. You were, at all relevant times, the trainer of the greyhound “More Cake”.

3. More Cake was nominated to compete in Race 2, Sportsbet Final (VICGREYS), Maiden, conducted by the Sale Greyhound Racing Club at Sale on 4 August 2024 (the Event).

4. On 4 August 2024, you presented More Cake at the Event not free of any prohibited substance, given that:

(a) A pre-race sample of urine was taken from More Cake upon arrival to the course (the Sample);

(b) Arsenic was detected at a mass concentration of greater than 800 nanograms per millilitre in the Sample.

**Charge 2: GAR 142(1)**

1. You are, and were at all relevant times, a trainer licensed by Greyhound Racing Victoria and a person bound by the Greyhound Australasia Rules.

2. You were, at all relevant times, the trainer of the greyhound “More Cake”.

3. More Cake was presented for, and competed in, Race 2, Sportsbet Final (VICGREYS), Maiden, conducted by the Sale Greyhound Racing Club at Sale on 4 August 2024 (the Event).

4. You administered, or caused to be administered, to More Cake, a prohibited substance, being Arsenic, which was detected in a sample taken from More Cake in that:

(a) You are responsible for the feeding of, and administration of supplements to, More Cake;

(b) One (1) product containing arsenic, namely “Seaweed meal”, was identified at your kennels on 5 September 2025;

(c) You were administering one teaspoon of the product Seaweed Meal daily to More Cake in the lead-up to 4 August 2024;

(d) A pre-race sample of urine was taken from More Cake upon arrival to the course (the Sample);

(e) Arsenic was detected at a mass concentration of greater than 800 nanograms per millilitre in the Sample.

**Charge 3: GAR 151(1)**

1. You are, and were at all relevant times, a trainer licensed by Greyhound Racing Victoria and a person bound by the Greyhound Racing Victoria Rules of Racing.

2. On 5 September 2025, you failed to produce treatment records for inspection, upon request from Senior Steward Mrs Catherine Scarlett, a person authorised by the Controlling Body, for greyhounds for which you were the responsible person at the relevant time.

**Pleas:** Guilty

**DECISION**

1. Mr Robert Whitford was, at all relevant times, a licensed trainer with Greyhound Racing Victoria (“GRV”) and a person bound by the Greyhounds Australasia Rules (“GAR”).
2. Mr Whitford has pleaded guilty to three charges. The first two charges relate to a presentation and administration offence pursuant to GAR 141(1) and 142(1). Both breaches of these Rules are deemed to be serious offences. The third charge is pursuant to GAR 151(1), which relates to not keeping treatment records and is not deemed to be a serious offence.
3. On 4 August 2024, Mr Whitford was the trainer of the greyhound, “More Cake”. More Cake was nominated to compete in Race 2 at Sale. A pre-race urine sample taken from the greyhound detected the presence of arsenic at a mass concentration of greater than 800 nanograms per millilitre (“ng/ml”).
4. Mr Whitford transported and kennelled the greyhound. He had no concerns about the swabbing procedures carried out.
5. The sample was properly sealed and stored. The results of the testing carried out reported that the sample was found to have contained arsenic at a mass concentration of greater than 1,600 ng/ml.
6. Arsenic is a naturally occurring trace element normally present in greyhounds at very low levels. Therefore, there is a threshold for arsenic to become a prohibited substance as defined by the Rules. If the substance is detected to be above 800 ng/ml, it is in breach of the Rules.
7. Dr Steven Karamatic, GRV Chief Veterinarian, stated in his report dated 1 October 2024, that the level of arsenic was double the permissible level allowed for a racing greyhound. His opinion was based on the mass concentration found in the sample taken from More Cake. This opinion was also supported by relevant literature and his personal expertise.
8. There is a threshold for arsenic to become a prohibited substance as defined by the Rules. If the substance is detected to be above 800 ng/ml, it is in breach of the Rules.
9. The substance, when detected above the threshold, is capable of causing, either directly or indirectly, an action or effect with one or more of the following:
10. The nervous system;
11. The cardiovascular system;
12. The digestive system;

and can fall into the category of a depressant.

1. On 5 September 2024, GRV Senior Steward, Ms Catherine Scarlett, attended Mr Whitford’s kennelling premises in Yarram, Victoria. On that day, she advised Mr Whitford of the positive sample More Cake had returned and the presence of arsenic above the allowable threshold. Mr Whitford immediately identified with the substance and produced a bag of “Seaweed meal” which he believed could be the source of arsenic being detected above the allowable threshold in More Cake.
2. When Mr Whitford was questioned about the use of the Seaweed meal, he stated that he feeds one tablespoon in the nightly feed and withheld it from the feed two days prior to racing.
3. During the inspection, injectable substances were located and photographed. Mr Whitford was unable to offer an explanation as to which greyhounds had been administered or when they had been used. More Cake had not been injured or treated by a veterinarian in the lead up to the relevant race at Sale.
4. An inspection of the kennels, supplements, preparation of refrigerated and non-refrigerated products were present and recorded. Photographs were taken of the same and of the kennel area.
5. Treatment records were unable to be provided as Mr Whitford advised that he had ceased training and had not kept any records since his retirement.
6. When interviewed by the Stewards on 26 October 2024, he informed them that he had been licensed with GRV for more than 20 years and that all his greyhounds were now retired. He believed that the raised arsenic levels had come from Seaweed meal located on his property. As previously stated, he included Seaweed meal in the feed and withheld it from the feed two days prior to a race. He advised that he was not aware of any GRV written warnings to industry participants about the use of this product on greyhounds.
7. Dr Karamatic concludes that, looking at what was available to Stewards at the kennel inspection, Mr Whitford’s greyhounds had more exposure to arsenic compared with the range expected of a normal greyhound.
8. Dr Karamatic was informed of Mr Whitford’s feeding regime. He expressed the opinion that the Seaweed meal could not have been withdrawn two days prior to the race, given the levels of arsenic detected. Dr Karamatic further stated that if Mr Whitford had in fact followed that regime and ceased feeding the Seaweed meal two days before the race, then there must have been an alternative source contributing to the arsenic levels detected in the sample.
9. Arsenic is not known to be required as an essential mineral in the canine diet. It is a generally tissue poison and sufficient doses of arsenic can cause highly fatal gastroenteritis or nervous signs such as convulsions.
10. The most likely explanation for the arsenic being detected at a high level in More Cake was due to the Seaweed meal contained in the feed. The Tribunal does not believe it was given to the greyhound for any nefarious purpose or to gain an unfair advantage in a race. Mr Whitford gave the product to his greyhounds through general ignorance upon receiving peer advice.
11. When Mr Whitford was informed of this positive sample, he stopped training and retired from the industry. He only has one dog as a pet and does not have any other dogs under his care. He failed to complete a national police check, being a requirement of participants in order to obtain a licence from GRV. Therefore, his licence was suspended on 7 January 2025 pending the completion of the national police check. Mr Whitford has no intention of returning to the industry and thus, will not endeavour to undertake fulfilling that requirement.
12. GRV aims to maintain a drug free and transparent industry. The integrity of greyhound racing is vital to ensure that all races are conducted on a level playing field, with fairness for all participants. Public confidence and animal welfare are also fundamental to the ongoing success and credibility of the greyhound racing industry.
13. Both general and specific deterrence are necessary to ensure that participants who attempt to undermine the system are identified and held accountable. This approach helps maintain public and participant confidence in a safe, clean, and transparent industry.
14. Nevertheless, this case does not fall into the category of an attempt to undermine the system. Mr Whitford is an elderly man, aged 88 years and is in very poor health. Participating in the industry was a hobby in his retirement years and there was no attempt on his part to gain any advantage. He is now completely retired from the industry.
15. Mr Whitford co-operated with the Stewards. He immediately informed them of the possible cause of the elevated levels of arsenic detected in the sample. He has pleaded guilty to all charges, and the Tribunal accepts that there is genuine remorse. It is unfortunate that Mr Whitford is leaving the greyhound industry due to his age and health. Mr Whitford has a relatively good record of over 20 years involvement.
16. This case is not a vehicle for general deterrence. Mr Whitford does have some recent history with this type of offending, including a six month suspension in August 2024 for presentation and administration matters. It is worth noting that the substance was arsenic.
17. GRV has submitted that if Mr Whitford were currently a licensed participant, they would have sought the Tribunal impose a suspension as an appropriate penalty. However, due to Mr Whitford being currently unlicensed, GRV have sought a 12 month warning off period for these offences.
18. A warning off is equivalent to a disqualification and carries with it significantly more serious consequences than a suspension. In these circumstances, imposing a suspension is not possible, and applying a harsher penalty solely due to the absence of a licence would not be appropriate. A warning off is typically reserved for the most serious offences and, beyond its substantial practical ramifications, it also carries a considerable stigma within the racing industry and the wider public. Such a penalty would be unnecessarily severe in this particular matter.
19. In addition, the Tribunal notes that Mr Whitford is a very frail, elderly man, who is about to turn 89 years old and is in very poor health.
20. The Tribunal considers this matter to be a unique and exceptional case, having regard to all of the factors outlined above. It is not one in which deterrence is the primary consideration. Given its distinct and uncommon circumstances, this decision should not be regarded as a precedent for future similar offences, which may ordinarily warrant, at a minimum, a period of suspension.
21. In all the circumstances, the Tribunal has reached a decision that modest fines are the appropriate penalty in this case.
22. The following penalties are imposed:

Charge 1: $200 fine.

Charge 2: $200 fine.

Charge 3: $100 fine.

The total penalty is a $500 fine.

1. In addition, More Cake is disqualified from Race 2 at Sale on 4 August 2024 and the finishing order is amended accordingly.

Kathleen Scully

Assistant Registrar, Victorian Racing Tribunal