

Linda Jones speech 24th March 2016 at Petition Handover at GBGB Offices

Hello, I am Linda Jones and I used to train a few dogs in my time, but now after my family the most important thing in my life is greyhound Welfare.

Thank you very much for taking the time and setting aside the money to be here today. It is very much appreciated by me, the GTA and I am sure by thousands of trainers, owners and RGT kennels across the country. Rick Holloway, the GTA Chairman, has not been so well and the GTA Committee has asked me to be Acting Chairman of GTA and say a few words today, and I speak today as Acting GTA Chairman.

I want to tell you why I believe we are all here today.

I want to tell you what we want an independent forensic investigation and audit to look into.

I want to tell you why we have concerns, and give you examples, and explain why we have requested an independent investigation.

We are here today to peacefully hand over a petition of around 1000 signatures, of big owners and small owners, of big trainers and small trainers, of kennel-hands, of welfare organisations and more.

This petition is to demand a forensic audit of the records of the GBGB & BGRF.

Why? Because as people like Rab McNair have said "Where has the money gone?"

EFRA were told TV rights payments made by BAGS had doubled to £27m per year – have owners and trainers seen any of these funds? – do you feel like you have?

We have had the 2013 Owners Survey and the 2014 Deloitte Report and countless other supposed 'reviews' of the industry, but I ask you where have you seen recommendations published, what actions actually took place and what has improved?

We understand these 'reviews' cost into 6 figures, what have they achieved? These monies could have been spent on Welfare and prize money. At the very least an independent forensic audit could look at the cost effectiveness of this spending.

So what are we asking for?

Today, we are not alleging any sinister misuse of funds. But we want an independent forensic audit to look at the standard things such an investigation looks at, which for this industry could include:

- Conflicts of Interest
 - Self Interest
 - The structure of decision making and who makes those decisions
 - The value for money gained by benchmarking supplier spending against market prices
 - Which suppliers carry out contract work and who they are
 - The adherence to the 50% / 50% grant policy
 - Whether we are getting value for money for frequently replaced tractors and what happens when they are sold 3 or 4 years down the line?
1. When the current GTA management took over in 2012 there were no records, the previous management confirmed in writing there were no records. I am proud to say the GTA is now a professionally run outfit with strong record keeping. The GTA has always been for all trainers despite the constitution being pencil altered with a new front sheet inserted at some point in time calling it the [so called] "Professional Greyhound Trainers Association".
 2. It looks most likely that sadly we will very soon lose Wimbledon and Hall Green - both GRA tracks. Why does Mr Feltham sit on the GBGB Board when it would seem the GRA actions are to close down and sell tracks wherever they can? Is that a conflict of interest? What sort of leadership is this for the industry?

I will not guess why these two matters have taken place nor dwell on the very many other things you tell me are wrong in the industry - or the recent Times article or Panorama painting our sport terribly from a Welfare perspective. EFRA has done a reasonable job of highlighting some of the problems and it would seem apparent they are not at all comfortable with the GBGB's performance in managing the industry under self-regulation.

Tom Kelly told me and 6 others (some of whom I see here today) at a private meeting in 2013 that Barry Faulkner was absolutely useless, had to be micro managed and couldn't be left to do anything on his own. Tom said at that meeting that the bookmakers did not trust the GBGB to spend the money properly.

I have no comment on Tom's words.

Rick Holloway was removed by the GBGB Board under less than tasteful circumstances. The GTA has nominated me to the Board in his place but I have been frustrated by the GBGB asking questions on information we have already supplied to them. I will give you examples of some of these questions.

"1. In general terms, how does the GTA represent trainers?"

"2. What proportion of those members are active members?"

"3. What are the criteria for being a director of the GTA?"

And so on...

As has been explained to the GBGB in writing a year ago, the GTA constitution is a public document filed at Companies House, anyone can get a copy...we have quoted GTA constitution clauses verbatim to the GBGB which provide answers to their questions but still we are stonewalled. Maurice Watkins the ex GBGB Chairman was completely comfortable with the GTA set up..but I ask you why is the current GBGB Board not comfortable?

So to the independent audit...on the back of the above if there was a clean bill of health from an independent forensic audit the industry could move forward and bookmakers could be approached in confidence asking for a fairer distribution of funds than currently. Let us not forget 1st April sees new Government legislation ensuring any person over 25 earns a minimum of £7.20 per hour – are the Bookmakers helping with this?

Let's have an independent forensic audit that checks and confirms that the governance of this industry is equal to or greater than expected of an authority regulating an industry that turns over more than £2.5billion per year.

In summary, I have spoken about why I think we are here today, why we have concerns and why we want an independent audit.

I have done my best to tell you what we want covered in an audit.

I have told you about the unorthodox altering of the former GTA constitution and there being no records under the previous administration.

I have spoken of the concerns of EFRA, of The Times, of Panorama.

I have talked about what Tom Kelly thought of the current GBGB CEO in 2013....let's not forget Tom Kelly is not the CEO..

I have said I think we need to get a fairer deal from the bookmakers and that an independent forensic audit may be a way for them to be more comfortable with giving funds, following a clean bill of health.

Finally, once again, I thank you and thousands of others should thank you for attending today, spending your own valuable time and money to be here.

I hope the GBGB and BGRF, the media and the Government will listen to your very reasonable demands and help deliver a swift independent forensic audit so that we can move forward together.

Thank you, thank you for coming, and thank you for listening.