

# **Report to Minister of State Mr Michael Ring T.D.**

## **Ballinagar, Co Offaly Coursing Club**

### **Ballinagar, Co Offaly Coursing meeting**

This coursing meeting took place on 28 and 29 October 2016 and was monitored by officials of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of the Department – report at Appendix 1. On both days NPWS officials noticed that some hares were unable to find the escape. This caused some hares to be chased for extended periods and caused the hares to do a u-turn and run back down to where they had been slipped. On all occasions the hares were eventually ushered by coursing club members back to the escape safe area.

There was a particular incident on the first day of the meeting, as reported by NPWS officials, when one hare was hit hard and mauled by two dogs. The hare eventually ran to the escape hatch after its mauling and it appeared to be still fit to run. The following day on enquiring about the hare both the club official and the Irish Coursing Club steward confirmed that the hare was fine.

### **Irish Coursing Club (ICC) Report**

In response to a request by the Department for its views of the meeting the ICC stated in their letter (Appendix 2) that 57 hares were caught for the meeting and the same number were released back into the wild at the end of meeting under the supervision of NPWS officials. Their veterinary surgeon employed by the club confirmed that no hares were certified injured. In relation to the fact that NPWS officials reported that some hares were unable to find the escape, the ICC state that the ICC Steward attending the meeting did confirm that 3 hares “provided the greyhounds an extended hunt” but that these hares eventually found the escape. The ICC contend that this is an unusual occurrence.

The ICC did not comment on the video posted by ICABS purporting to be of the Ballinagar meeting which appears to show a hare being mauled by two greyhounds prior to being rescued by club officials.

### **NPWS Review**

The conditions attached to the licences issued to the ICC do not contain explicit conditions relating to the training of hares for use at coursing meetings. There are conditions relating to hare welfare issues such as the fact that injured, sick or pregnant hares should not be coursed and that hares should only be coursed once a day.

However, condition 20 of the licence issued to the ICC on behalf of its affiliated clubs, to capture live hares by means of nets, provides

*“In all matters relating to the capture, keeping in captivity, tagging, marking, coursing and release of hares, and the muzzling of greyhounds, there shall be full compliance with the Directives, Instructions and Guidance Notes issued by the Executive Committee of the Irish Coursing Club.”*

The ICC have published a document which is circulated to all coursing clubs entitled “Code of Practice for Hare & Greyhound Welfare” which includes guidance on the capturing and netting of hares, layout of enclosures, feeding of hares and how hares are to be trained.

**Recommendation**

The Department is of the view that Ballinagar Coursing Club did not contravene the conditions of the licences issued to the ICC. However it is considered that if the hares were properly/better trained, as per the ICC document, it is likely that the problem relating to the hares unable to find the escapes may have been avoided. It is, therefore, recommended that a meeting should be scheduled with the coursing club/ICC to discuss the training of hares in advance of any possible future meetings of the club.

**National Parks and Wildlife Service****Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs****January, 2017**