

Greyhound killer faces long prison sentence

Daniel Foggo

A BUILDERS' merchant exposed by The Sunday Times for slaughtering thousands of healthy greyhounds considered too slow to race is facing a lengthy jail sentence.

David Smith pleaded guilty on Friday to illegally burying dogs on his land after killing them with a bolt gun.

Durham magistrates ruled that their powers of sentencing, which extend to ordering six months in prison or a £20,000 fine, were insufficient to punish Smith. He will now be sent to a crown court where he could receive a jail term of up to five years and an unlimited fine.

Last July The Sunday Times revealed that Smith, 57, had killed about 10,000 greyhounds over 15 years for the racing industry, charging owners £10 a time.

Smith was filmed receiving two young greyhounds from trainers before killing them and burying them on a one-acre plot behind his home in Seaham, Co Durham, with a mechanical digger.

He told an undercover reporter that it took him three years to fill the plot before simply starting over again.

Welfare campaigners had long suspected that "retired" dogs were disappearing, but had been unable to pinpoint the method of disposal.

The disclosure caused uproar in the industry, with the government warning that it was "drinking in the last-chance saloon" and its regulatory body, the National Greyhound Racing Club, describing the article as a "watershed". It is conducting an inquiry into how many trainers used Smith's services.

Two trainers, Gillian Young and Sid Fenwick, were banned for life from the sport after being filmed handing over two greyhounds for killing.

The dogs, both two years old and healthy, were unwanted after racing poorly.

The revelations have also prompted an inquiry into greyhound welfare by a parliamentary group, which is due to report this spring.

Ministers are preparing legislation that would make the killing of greyhounds by anyone other than a vet illegal.

At last Friday's hearing, counsel for Smith, who was charged with polluting the environment by burying the dogs without a licence, claimed that he had not killed as many as 10,000.

Vivian Lowe, chairman of the magistrates, said: “We are of the view that this was a commercial operation and it was going on for a considerable length of time and was escalating in recent years.

“We feel our powers of punishment are insufficient and we are committing you to the crown court for sentence.

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