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GRASSROOTS PRIZE MONEY PROTECTED AS GREYHOUND BOARD WEATHERS STORM

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The Irish Greyhound Board has released attendance and financial figures for the year ended December 31st 2009. They show a decline in attendance and a reduction in the annual surplus from EUR5 million to EUR1 million. They also indicate however that the worst of the decline may be over.

The reduction in the surplus from a 2008 high of EUR5 million is down largely to the reduction in the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund by EUR1.6 million and redundancy costs associated with restructuring of the Board's operations at a cost of EUR1.4 million. Profits drawn from the commercial operations of the Irish Greyhound Board have also been hit by the substantial reduction in consumer spending which has been felt throughout the economy.

Attendance figures at the sport throughout the year were down by 21 per cent though the fall in numbers stabilised during the year and restaurant bookings actually increased in August and October.

There was a EUR3.9 million profit from Tote betting operations, down 15 per cent on 2008.

In 2009 the Irish Greyhound Board paid out EUR7.9 million in prize money grants, matching the record figure achieved in 2008. Prize money grants allow the sport to be maintained at a local level throughout the country. The total value to the local economy of keeping the current number of greyhounds in training each year is EUR257 million and this also supports a very significant level of employment in rural areas.

“This has been a difficult past twelve months across every sector of Irish society and our industry has borne the brunt of the general reduction in consumer spending,” said Adrian Neilan, Chief Executive of the Irish Greyhound Board.

“There is no question that 2010 will be another difficult year but we take heart from the fact that the decline in attendance was less in the second half of 2009 than in the first six months. We have taken action to protect our grassroots prize money structure and that has been welcomed by the industry. There are reductions in the contributions to prize money at the upper end of the scale, as well as further cost savings in the operating structure of the sport. These are prudent measures in order to manage our reduced income in a manner which will leave us secure for the future.”

“The reduction of 13 per cent in central funding from the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund, announced in the December budget, was a very serious blow. The severity of the cutback means that nearly 25% has been cut from this essential funding in the last three budgets.”

“The funding contribution for 2010 will now be substantially below that which was made in 2002. We cannot take any further reduction in central funding without it having long lasting negative implications for the industry.”

“We are heartened that at a recent cross-party meeting of members of the houses of the Oireachtas there was unanimous support for our industry. We need to ensure that support translates into a level of funding in 2011 that can ensure this industry survives. At current levels of funding the Government is effectively getting this industry for free as well as enjoying the benefit of nearly 11,000 jobs.”

“This level of employment in any other area would draw substantial levels of direct Government support, and we must press home the benefits of a strong industry as well as the threat to rural areas in particular of failing to support what has been created.”

Irish Press Releases

“During 2009 the Irish Greyhound Board has absorbed over EUR2 million in cost savings through staff redundancy and a deep seated review of process and efficiency. This was a painful process but necessary for the future security of the industry. This is an area that we will continue to pursue in 2010 to ensure we are as efficient as possible whilst allowing this industry to progress.”

“As well as the reduction in prize money grants at the top end in 2010, we have also reviewed the distribution of sprint and middle distance grants, and the contributions to sponsorship from the Tote and the Board. Our aim is to keep the individual race grants at the same level as 2009, so protecting the base line of prize money.”

“We have also implemented a reduction in race nights in the quieter, early months of the year and will review other areas of operations in order to make total savings that will account for the reduction in the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund and the commercial pressures which every business is facing in the current climate. There is a review of elements of the private track support structure especially in facilities where the Board has made significant capital investment, and at other areas of how the sport is managed and promoted.”

“There have been high points through the year. We saw record attendance throughout an exceptional Irish Derby campaign and we look forward to welcoming a brand new sponsor of this, our blue riband event of the year.”

“The formation of the Welfare Committee brings together different strands of the industry to ensure that welfare of our greyhounds continues to be given the highest priority.”

“We have also expanded the international coverage of our racing, largely through the online channel which will deliver new revenue streams in years to come.”

“Finally work has progressed well on the new Limerick Greyhound Stadium which will be a flagship for sport throughout the south west and, in terms of confidence, on a national level. We have received a significant level of interest in the naming rights to this stadium and we look forward to selecting a strong brand that will be appropriate for this development, and which will gain enormously from association with the Stadium.

“We have faith that the sport will survive as it has done through a century and more. Ours is an industry that is rooted in the fabric of rural Ireland. We face great challenges but we will meet them with purpose and conviction and deliver a strong future for the people involved at every level.”