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OPINION

Political heads may roll in a few months if the Olympic Games prove the embarrassment for Greece that many are predicting, but some should be rolling already for not preventing a needless sacrifice in the name of success.

Winning the race to host the Games is a matter of great national pride for any country - and a unique opportunity to make a lot of people rich.

Greece put up a good bid for this year's event and had the extra edge of the sentimental vote for this celebration of the modern Games in its historical birthplace - but that cannot excuse what is happening as those involved seek to create the right image among the tourists and sports fans who will throng to Athens in August.

The Greek capital is famous for the number of stray dogs that roam its streets. Now it stands to become infamous for the killing that is taking place to make the streets a prettier site for the visitors. Such barbaric practices have no place in any civilised country let alone one that claims to be the birthplace of Western civilisation

Naturally, nobody in official circles is willing to admit there is any policy of deliberately poisoning the animals, but animal rights' campaigners have absolutely no doubt that it has been sanctioned at the highest level. It can be no coincidence that the death toll has risen steeply as the Games near.

The Greek Government cannot hide behind the introduction of laws demanding that local councils neuter vaccinate and microchip stray Animals before putting them back on the streets - it must find and jail the poisoners.

Only by protecting the lives of its innocent strays can it truly claim still to be civilised.