

Online questionnaire report: Inquiry into Pounds in New South Wales

The purpose of the questionnaire

As part of its inquiry, Portfolio Committee No. 8—Customer Service conducted an online questionnaire to encourage public participation in an efficient and accessible way.

The questionnaire is not intended as an empirical study. The answers have been provided by individuals who chose to partake in the process. The survey should therefore be treated as an overview of the views of constituents who are particularly engaged with the issues covered by the terms of reference for this inquiry.

The questionnaire was complementary to the usual submission process. The submissions process was available to individuals and organisations who wanted to provide a more detailed response to the inquiry's terms of reference. It is likely that some individuals and organisations provided a submission and completed the questionnaire.

This report summarises the responses expressed by participants to both the quantitative and qualitative questions posed. These responses will inform the committee's views throughout the inquiry and may be used in the inquiry report.

Questions asked

The questionnaire comprised 24 questions. This included background information about the respondents such as their contact details and location. Participants were also asked in what capacity they were responding to the questionnaire (as an employee or volunteer with a pound or animal rescue organisation, a veterinarian, or as the owner of an animal from a pound).

A mix of multiple choice and open-ended questions then sought the views of respondents on a range of issues relating to the terms of reference, which can be grouped into the following themes:

- Adequacy of care provided and the root causes of overpopulation in pounds – considering the system as a whole and individual facilities
- The issues of responsibility and funding – whether the NSW Government should take more responsibility in the management of pounds and whether the current levels and means of allocating funding are appropriate
- Whether the current regulatory environment is fit for purpose
- How councils and not for profit groups interact within the current pound system
- Rates of euthanasia and the effectiveness of rehoming strategies
- The impact of cat overpopulation on the pound and rescue sectors.

The online questionnaire was open from 10 July 2023 to 18 August 2023 and received 379 responses. The average time to complete the questionnaire was 1 hour and 40 minutes. A sample of the answers and a summary of responses are provided for each question below. Answers to questions 1 to 3 are *not* included in this report, as they asked for the personal details of each of the participants.

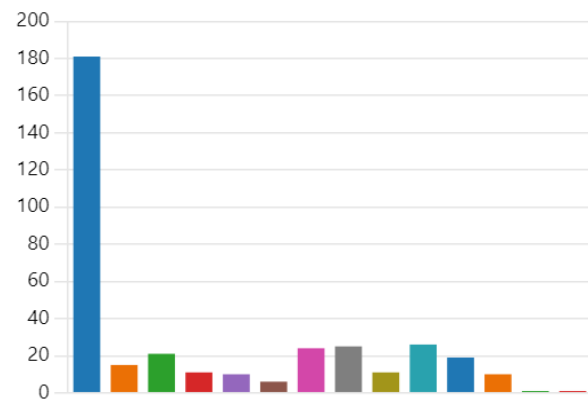
Responses to questions

Q.4 *Where in New South Wales do you live?*

There were 361 responses to question 4, with 181 respondents (48 per cent) indicating they were from Greater Sydney, 81 respondents from non-coastal regional New South Wales (Murray, Far West and Orana, Riverina, New England and North West, Central West, Capital Region, Hunter Valley - 22 per cent), 65 from coastal regions north of Sydney (Coffs Harbour-Grafton, Mid North Coast, Richmond Tweed, Newcastle and Lake Macquarie - 18 per cent) and 34 from the Illawarra and South Coast regions (Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven, Illawarra - 9 per cent). There were also 6 responses from individuals and organisations located in the Australian Capital Territory.

The graph below provides a visual representation of the geographical spread of participants:

Greater Sydney	181
Illawarra	15
Newcastle and Lake Macquarie	21
Hunter Valley excluding Newcas...	11
Richmond Tweed	10
Capital region	6
Mid North Coast	24
Central West	25
New England and North West	11
Riverina	26
Southern Highlands and Shoalh...	19
Coffs Harbour-Grafton	10
Far West and Orana	1
Murray	1



Qs. 5 and 6 *In what capacity are you completing this questionnaire?*

There were 373 responses to questions 5 and 6. Respondents indicated that they associated with the following descriptions:

	No. of responses	%
My animal came from a pound	106	28%
Local pound employee or volunteer	34	9%
Veterinarian	8	2%
Animal rescue organisation employee or volunteer	86	23%
Other	139	37%

'Other' included:

- Current and former rangers
- Council pound managers/supervisors
- Concerned members of the public
- Adopters of rescue animals from other sources
- Animal advocates.

Qs. 7 and 8 *Do you believe the housing and care provided to animals in NSW pounds meets community expectations? Additional comments?*

A total of 370 respondents provided a 'Yes/No' answer to question 7. The breakdown was 38 (10 per cent) participants answering 'Yes' and 332 (90 per cent) answering 'No':



Respondents were also given the opportunity to elaborate on their answer in a comment box in question 8. Additional comments were made by 308 respondents, with the main topics raised including:

- The key challenges facing pounds, particularly lack of funding, high demand for their services, poor quality and dated facilities.
- The stark difference in the quality of regional pounds versus metropolitan facilities.
- Specific mention was made of:
 - Restricted opening hours, limiting the ability for animals to be surrendered and adopted
 - Lack of qualified/professional staff
 - Too great a reliance on volunteers.
- Frustration at the opaque nature of the relationship between animal rescue groups and pounds (in terms of adoption processes).

Many respondents elaborated on the challenges facing pounds and the effect they have on both the animals and pound staff, commonly expressing the view that local pounds were doing the best they could:

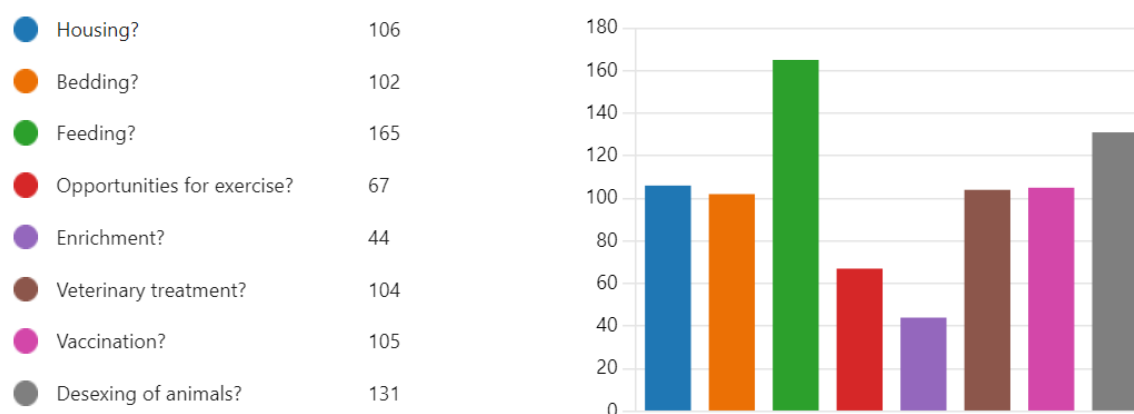
- From a Pound ranger - '[Community expectations are] not met due to financial constraints. Often we rely on donations and some costs will be personally met by staff (e.g., when infant animals come into the facility, staff will take animal home for 24 hr care and pay costs of milk powder, feeding equipment, and other costs associated until rescue can be organised).'
- From an animal rescue organisation - 'Our local pound is very old. The dog exercise yard is tiny. The cat cages are small. The rangers have time to visit only twice a day, and the rest of the time, dogs are locked in bare cells with no company or enrichment. There is no heating or cooling, although temperatures can get down to freezing, and can be very high in summer. There is no provision for caring for very young puppies or kittens. Animals which are not desexed when they arrive at the pound are adopted out without being desexed.'
- From a Council companion officer - 'I believe the community does not know the full extent to which pounds are struggling financially, and with capacity limits. There is a lack of transparency. The first time I visited our local pound I was shocked and distressed. Members of the public aren't permitted access 'behind the curtain' so they don't even know what the conditions are in NSW pounds. Staff are burnt out and compassion fatigued, not to mention undervalued. This has a run-on effect to the quality of animal care, and service delivery.'

Qs. 9 and 10 *If you are familiar with your local pound, which of the below services do you believe are being delivered adequately?*

The graph below sets out the nature of the question asked and the spread of the 379 responses to question 9. Noting that most respondents answered 'No' to question 7, the highest scoring categories, that is, those the largest number of respondents considered were being delivered adequately, were the categories relating to ensuring the basic health of animals housed in pounds (feeding, desexing, housing). The lowest scoring categories related to the individual welfare needs of animals (exercise, enrichment, bedding).

If you are familiar with your local pound, which of the below services do you believe are being delivered adequately (**only select those you believe are being delivered adequately**):

[More Details](#)



Individuals were then given an opportunity in question 10 to elaborate on the above quantitative answers in a comment box. Some of the key themes were:

- Lack of pound facilities – particularly in regional areas, but also in metropolitan Sydney.
- Overcrowding and poor-quality housing – old facilities not built to modern animal welfare standards providing sub-standard accommodation for too many animals.
- Impact of the pound environment on the ability of dogs and cats to meet behavioural standards – the stressful environment was described as not conducive to conducting the requisite behavioural assessments that provide the opportunity for adoption.
- Expense of vets – lack of resources for councils combined with the high costs of veterinary care leading to low vaccination rates and generally poor standards of care (particular issue with parvo disease).
- Education - a lack of community education and outreach such as desexing drives, animal welfare seminars.

Respondents elaborated on the extent to which services in pounds were adequate. Where services were described as inadequate, respondents provided their views on why this was so:

- Pound veterinarian - 'I am a vet at one of Sydney's pounds so I can confirm that vet treatment, vaccinations and desexing are provided, however prior to me joining the organisation this was not the case. The pound previously did not have an onsite vet; the provision of onsite vet treatment was minimal, unqualified staff were giving vaccinations and medications, and assessment of the animals' quality of life and welfare was minimal. From first-hand experience the housing, bedding, feeding, exercise and enrichment are all far below where they should be. Considering ever-increasing length of stay for these animals,

this becomes less and less acceptable. Dogs are frequently euthanised due to stress and suffering directly caused by the kennel environment.'

- Resident who adopted - 'I live in an extremely cold area and the animals are kept in concrete cages, with a simple elevated bed. Some are given a coat in winter but there are no blankets and no heating. Most nights in winter it is -10 degrees. During the day the cages would be lucky to get above 5 or 6 degrees as there is inadequate lighting and access to sunlight. The opposite is true in summer and the blistering heat where animals suffer through alone. The animals are left to fend for themselves and are not given toys and have little access to play time together or time out in the sunshine.'
- Regional council - 'Council's pound operations are facilitated in accordance with Council's budgetary allocations. While it cannot be expected that smaller rural Councils can have facilities comparable to those of large Sydney metropolitan Councils, recognition of the plight of smaller rural and regional Councils would be appreciated. We cannot provide a subsidized desexing program or free microchipping as these options are too costly for small Councils to absorb.'

Q.11 *Please tell us any concerns, issues, or positive interactions you have had with your local pound.*

There were 269 responses to question 11, which have been broken down into two categories - 'issues and concerns' and 'positive interactions':

Respondents identified a range of issues and concerns:

- Staffing – understaffing, the lack of professionalism of the staff, limited opening hours due to lack of staff, worker safety issues (particularly mental health).
- Accountability and transparency – the need for greater transparency of pound activities and clearer lines of accountability
- Poor relations between pounds and rescue groups – a number of respondents described poor interactions between pounds and other volunteer organisations because of perceptions around the role of pounds as locations setup to deal with issues of overpopulation rather than as places to facilitate rehoming.
- Quality of the facilities – failure to meet basic animal welfare standards, particularly in terms of weather proofing, sanitation, overcrowding, lack of exercise space.
- Regional/city divide – the disparity in the number and quality of facilities in Sydney versus in regional New South Wales, leading to long travel times to access pound services.
- Impact of RSPCA facility closures – a key provider of shelters in the system, many individuals expressed concerns about the withdrawal of RSPCA from the provision of services in parts of the State.
- Regulatory issues – many respondents felt that new rehoming requirements are leading to poorer animal welfare outcomes because of the length of the process, lack of regulation of desexing and roaming of cats.
- Role of vets – a perceived lack of involvement in the desexing and registration process.

Respondents – many of whom were pound employees – described the challenges of being overworked., with limited resources:

- Volunteer - 'Local Council at Bathurst does not provide the funds to allow staff to work full shifts on weekends thus resulting in animals not getting proper exercise as they are always house in small pens which does not allow the animal to have a full opportunity to stretch out or run. Their bedding consists of only raised marine board in concrete/brick boxes, which do not comply with current standards.'
- Pound employee - 'I also, as do many, have a concern for smaller rural council shelters. Most of the time there is limited funding for the smaller rural councils to have an appropriate shelter facility and/or the Ranger is a 'jack of all trades' and has numerous titles with little or no animal experience. I have also found that many of these facilities are not following legislation in their practices and processes when dealing with impounded animals.'
- Pound employee - 'We are so overloaded-we are continually full yet supervisor keeps demanding we do not close the pound and continue to allow people to drop off (dump!) dogs and cats. We have capacity indoors for 15 dogs and 14 cats, recently we have 18 cats and 16 dogs. We are getting people call from as far as Cowra and Wellington, plenty from Penrith, asking to dump their dogs with us. The situation is out of control. Operating above or at capacity all the time means so much more manual handling of animals, exposure to risk...'
- Animal rescue organisation - 'Lack of interest by majority of councillors in the past to provide anything but the bare minimum at minimum cost.'

Respondents also identified positive interactions:

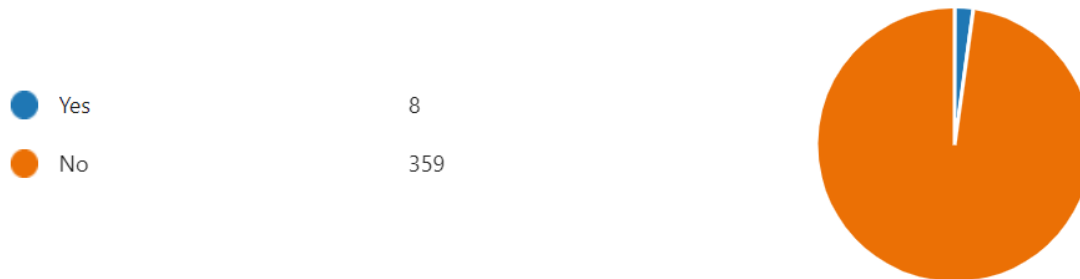
- The main positive comments related to those pounds who:
 - Actively seek to rehome animals
 - Engage positively and openly with the public
 - Foster good relationships with rescuers and volunteer organisations
 - Charge reasonable adoption fees
 - Invest in their facilities to ensure they meet basic animal welfare standards
 - Employ professional, caring staff

Respondents described the positive experiences they had had at specific local pounds, praising the work of the staff:

- From a dog owner - 'We are very fortunate to have an outstanding animal shelter operated by Port Macquarie-Hastings Council. The Port Macquarie Animal Shelter would have to be the gold standard for NSW. I have personally visited the shelter and follow their social media site and the facility is a credit to the Council and the community. They are a no-kill facility and the staff work tirelessly with rescue organisations plus go to enormous lengths to re-home animals. They have also facilitated the adoption of at least two dogs to NSW Corrective Services who were trained successfully to perform duties as detection dogs.'
- From an individual who went through the adoption process - 'We've adopted 2 dogs through Campbelltown Animal Care Facility and think they do a great job with the limited resources they are provided with by Campbelltown City Council. They are under-resourced, rely on volunteer rescue organisations to do the heavy lifting due to their lack of funding. They are unable to fundraise directly, but do accept donations of food, toys, bedding.'
- From an animal rescue organisation - 'Taree pound has an amazing reputation. It's run by Rangers who care deeply for animal welfare – they try so very hard to get homes for the pound dogs, they have heavy community involvement to make sure animals interact and have plenty of exercise.'
- From a pound volunteer - 'Council's pound is kept clean and all animals are afforded the best care possible. It would present better to the wider community for Council to be able to provide a modern and up to date impounding facility which would enable better interaction with the companion animals and provide safe and modern facilities for both the animals and their carers.'

Qs. 12 and 13 *Do you believe pounds in NSW are adequately resourced and funded?*

A total of 367 respondents to question 12 chose either 'Yes/No', and then were provided the opportunity to elaborate via a comment box. Only 8 (2 per cent) of participants responded by saying that pounds in NSW are adequately funded, with 359 (98 per cent) of respondents answering 'No':



Additional observations were made by 251 respondents to question 13. Issues and topics raised in these responses included the following:

- General underfunding – overwhelming consensus amongst respondents is that pounds are underfunded, and that this has a direct impact on animal welfare standards.
- Specific need for the funding of certain activities – many responses pointed to the importance of funding education programs, advertising campaigns, desexing, and improved facilities.
- Overreliance on volunteers – many responses referred to the continued overreliance on volunteer organisations, who themselves suffer from chronic underfunding.
- Regional/City divide – consensus among responses that although Sydney pounds are under-resourced, their situation cannot be compared to the pounds that operate in regional NSW. Large catchment areas, higher numbers of animals per resident and vet shortages exacerbate the problems in regional areas.
- Funding pressures caused by legislative change/lack of regulation and enforcement – many responses described the unintended consequences of the new rehoming requirements as leading to a clogging up of the system. Multiple responses pointed to the need to deal with the overpopulation issues by better regulation and enforcement of desexing, microchipping, backyard breeding and roaming.

Pound employees and volunteers provided a large number of the responses to this question and described the issues that exist in their relationship with local government, as well as an overall lack of funding in the area:

- Pound employee - 'In my experience, pounds are generally not seen by local government as a core function. In fact, in addition to their traditional primary function of temporary animal housing, pounds can add significant value to local communities through networking and building social capital. Volunteering, friends of the pound groups, work experience and educational placement opportunities are a few examples.'
- Pound employee - 'All the laws around desexing and rehoming have made it impossible for pounds to run properly and offer the best services for pets and potential adoptees.'
- Pound employee - 'Local Councils rely upon limited budget allocation. Opportunities to commercialise pounds is dependent upon local government area size. Smaller councils do not have high enough turnover of impounded/surrendered animals to obtain profit through

sale/adoption from the pound. Funding is not adequate to desex impounded/surrendered animals - resulting in council relying upon new owners ensuring the animal is desexed.'

- Pound volunteer - 'NSW pounds are under funded, understaffed and much work in pounds is being done by volunteers. Fundraising by the community is continually needed in order to provide more food, goods and comfort for the animals. With the cost of living rising, it is getting very hard to get volunteers across all charities as people who would normally volunteer need to work longer.'

Qs. 14 and 15 Do you think the NSW Government should take more responsibility for the welfare of animals in pounds?

The 359 respondents who engaged with question 14 were asked to provide a 'Yes/No' answer. The result indicates a clear preference for the Government to take greater responsibility for the welfare of animals in pounds, with 359 (98 per cent) answering 'Yes', and 8 (2 per cent) responding 'No'.



Participants were then invited to provide further comments in question 15 with respect to the issue of responsibility for animal welfare issues, with 242 individuals providing a response. There were a number of topics raised, with the most common themes being:

- The need for common state-wide standards – responses referred to a lack of consistency in the standards that apply to the establishment and running of pounds and a corresponding lack of enforcement.
- Less reliance on non-government organisations for animal welfare compliance – respondents felt that the current system places too much reliance on the RSPCA and other organisations to ensure pound facilities are up to scratch and that owners are looking after their pets.
- Funding – the fact that local government are not in a position to be able to fund pounds to the standard expected by the community, and therefore the state government needs to step in.
- Government should take greater responsibility for preventative measures in addition to pounds – that a state-wide response to registration, microchipping, desexing, banning of backyard breeding and education is required, and that this shouldn't be left up to individual councils or individual pounds.

A sample of the comments provided include:

- Pound employee - 'The NSW State Government has decided to pass the latest bill, Animal Rehoming Bill, without providing any additional funding to local councils to offset the dramatic increase in costs this bill has had to rate payers through no fault of their own. The NSW State Government, which has directly burdened this cost onto local councils, should now annually allocate funds to assist in the running of these facilities. The funds allocated must be dollar for dollar matching the Local Councils allocated budget for pound expenditure and the money should be accountable as being spent directly on the local pounds to make sure it hasn't been swallowed up into the local government revenue bucket.'
- Local dog owner - 'This should be a state issue with coordination across LGAs - as they are experiencing similar issues. Pounds need assistance from the state government. What about a state run animal rehoming website/socials, and funding for rescues who rely on volunteers and donations? Huge funding is required to get facilities modernised.'

- Animal rescue organisation - 'Councils have inconsistent policies and standards. The demand for housing has closed local shelters relocating them on the outskirts of the city and reduced and amalgamated most.'
- Local dog owner - 'Create bigger fines for backyard breeders or make breeders require a license to stop the creation of unwanted animals. The only way to fix this is by stopping the problem at the cause and not by spending millions of dollars to better house the thousands of unwanted animals (though this will help too).'

Q. 16 Why do you think animals are ending up in New South Wales pounds, and do you have any ideas on how to stop or reduce animals ending up in pounds?

With respect to why animals are ending up in NSW pounds, a total of 351 responses were received to question 16. The most common reasons offered by participants were:

- Rental crisis and cost of living – respondents observed that the already difficult situation for renters with pets has only been exacerbated post-COVID by the high costs of housing and the general costs of owning a pet, leading to many pets being abandoned or handed to pounds.
- Poor desexing and registration programs – a common theme throughout the survey was the lack of enforcement of desexing, registration and microchipping. Responses identified this as leading to exponential growth in the numbers of stray animals and reducing the ability of pounds to reunite lost pets.
- Backyard breeders – another constant theme in the responses was the lack of regulation of backyard breeders and puppy farms, and the large numbers of dogs with health issues due to inbreeding.
- Poor pet owner education – many responses also pointed to the lack of personal responsibility taken by pet owners, and the lack of education provided by pounds and councils to those who adopt or purchase pets.
- The lack of owner screening – many responses indicated argued that it is too easy to get a pet in NSW, and that there should be more regulation of who can adopt or purchase a pet in the state.
- High cost of veterinary care – lack of mandatory health insurance means a lot of individuals give up their pets due to the high cost of health care. Responses also suggested that this problem is exacerbated by the high rates of inbreeding in the puppy farm and backyard breeding industries.

Responses to this question included anecdotes from respondents who had left abusive relationships, as well as evidence from council workers, who described the lack of information provided to councils:

- Dog owner - 'I left a DV relationship and had to rent a property in a hurry. A year later the owner decided to sell and I had to look for another rental with my 2 mini dachshunds. Due to them being inside dogs I wasn't able to secure a property for the first time in my life. I have a Government job, earn a very good wage and have an A+ tenant record but no one would rent to me.'
- Council animal welfare manager - 'Presently, animal welfare organisations such as RSPCA are the organisations that deal with licensing and breeders. However there is no information provided to Councils as to which properties are registered breeders in their local area. Information should be shared between these agencies to ensure all animals being sold are microchipped and registered.'
- Animal rights activist - 'There seems to be an array of issues as to why pounds are constantly meeting capacity. With rising cost-of-living pressures, strict rental-laws and expensive veterinary bills all factoring into a large systemic issue that dominoes onto the people and organisations trying to help the animals that are needlessly being killed.'
- Pound employee - 'Backyard breeders. People who don't research a breed before they get one (especially working dogs in suburban homes). People not being able to afford to get their animals desexed thus creating an over population within our pounds and on the streets. People who don't understand the responsibility of owning an animal and the time you have to put in to ensure they are socialised and trained properly.'

The most common ideas put forward to reduce the number of animals ending up in pounds included:

- Backyard breeding ban – a large number of responses calling for a crackdown on backyard breeders, and the ability of people to advertise pets for sale online.
- Mandatory desexing – that all cats and dogs should be desexed sooner post registration, and if up for adoption, prior to being adopted out to new owners.
- Better enforcement of animal welfare standards – a lack of proper enforcement of animal welfare standards when it comes to pet owners.
- Low-cost registration and microchipping with mandatory ID requirements – to improve registration rates and microchipping rates, there should be low-cost options for people from a low socio-economic status, and all individuals should be required to provide valid ID to adopt or purchase a pet to improve tracking.
- Moratorium on new breeding licences – with pounds and shelters already full to overflowing, there should be a temporary cessation in the issuing of new breeding licences.

Particular quotes included:

- Pet owner - 'Cost of living pressures and the high percentage of uninsured animals requiring veterinary care not being affordable for many pet owners. Use the \$900 million in GST collected each year from dog and cat owners to subsidise veterinary care including medications i.e. a Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme for pets.'
- Concerned citizen - 'Too many people don't take animal ownership seriously. They get a dog on a whim, then surrender it later. They need to know that a companion animal is for life, so perhaps a good education campaign focusing on that.'
- Animal rescue volunteer - 'Rental crisis, homelessness, financial stress. Puppy farmers/backyard breeders are inadequately investigated and prosecuted.'
- Animal welfare advocate - 'I think that council should subsidise the cost of desexing for both cats and dogs but cats in particular.'
- Animal welfare officer - 'There is also no way to locate an owner if they choose not to identify their animals. for any Cat or Dog sold in NSW you should have to provide ID so that the transaction can be recorded.'

Qs. 17 and 18 There are currently no specific legislative requirements about what a behavioural assessment for an animal in a pound should entail. Do you believe this needs to change?

A total of 362 responses were received to question 17, with 317 respondents (88 per cent) indicating that specific legislative requirements for behavioural assessments are needed, and 45 respondents (12 per cent) responding 'No':



Respondents to question 18 were then asked to explain the reason for their answers, of which 292 did. The general themes of the comments provided are captured below:

- Those who answered 'Yes':
 - The need for consistent standards – consistent standards and training should be provided and applied across New South Wales to ensure that cats and dogs are properly assessed before being handed to new owners.
 - Breaking the cycle of adoption to pound – lack of proper assessment processes are leading to adopted pets later ending up back in pounds because of their behavioural issues.
 - Example assessment tools already available – there are already a range of behavioural assessment tools used by various bodies which could be transformed into some form of regulatory standard.
- Those who answered 'No':
 - Uncertainty around the scientific basis – there were a number of individuals working as vets or pound employees who questioned the usefulness/accuracy of behavioural assessments, particularly when conducted in the pound setting.
 - The workability and unintended consequences – by requiring behavioural assessments to be done by accredited assessors, respondents suggested that there will undoubtedly be further delays to the adoption process, leading to even greater pressures on the number of animals that can be processed by pound facilities. Particular concerns were expressed by those in regional areas with respect to the availability of assessors.
 - The cost – responses noted that performing these assessments would result in an additional cost for pounds, which are already incredibly under resourced.

Responses from those either working as pound employees, veterinarians or with the local council who answered 'Yes' emphasised the need for state-wide behavioural assessment standards to ensure consistency:

- Pound employee - 'Pound dogs and cats are in an environment that is not 'real life', the current 'she seems ok, you can adopt her' is woefully inadequate and is in no way preventing a family from adopting an unsuitable animal. The liability for ensuring the animal is suitable for rehoming lies with the government and should be met with state-wide standards.'

- Veterinarian - 'My area of expertise as a vet is animal behaviour...I believe behaviour assessments within a pound are a waste of time and resources. Years and years have been spent trying to create a BA that reliably predicts what the animals' behaviour will be in a home, with no success. The RSPCA spent years creating a comprehensive BA, which has since been proven to be ineffective...'
- Council staff - 'There is a legislative requirement for a breed and temperament assessor to hold certain qualifications to be able to assess restricted breeds. To create consistency there should also be the requirement for a certain level or qualification to complete any other type of behavioural assessment.'

Those who responded 'No' raised the need for legislators to give due consideration to the practical consequences of legislating standards:

- Pound employee - 'Pound staff and rangers who work with animals every day know a good animal when they see one. The time it would take to organise an assessor may take days if not weeks, thus resulting in the animals being stressed, and presenting an unacceptable risk to staff.'
- A rural pound employee - 'Pound staff and rescue organizations perform behavioural assessments. Due to our rural location the closest professional assessor is a number of hours away. If pounds had to book a professional assessor and pay fees for travel and assessments to be done I believe this would be impossible to achieve.'

Q. 19 If you are familiar with the relevant laws and codes of practice regulating pounds, and the current enforcement, compliance and oversight regime for pounds – do you believe it is currently adequate? If not, what changes do you believe should be made?

Of the 217 participants who answered question 19, most indicated their dissatisfaction with the current laws and codes of practice. There were a range of different responses pointing to a variety of issues, which are summarised below:

- Lack of accountability in the system – the lack of direct lines of authority (pounds, councils, not for profits, vets, the Minister for Agriculture, the Minister for Local Government are all involved) has led to a vacuum of responsibility.
- The need for consistency in housing and welfare standards – there is currently no mandatory guidelines for the building/maintenance/upgrading of pound facilities to ensure they meet basic animal welfare standards, meaning that conditions in pounds across New South Wales vary greatly.
- Failure to enforce current requirements – many expressed their displeasure at the reliance on non-government organisations to conduct checks on pound facilities in New South Wales, when they are also incredibly underfunded and have to cooperate with pounds as part of the rehoming process.
- The need to finish the draft 2014 guidelines – many responses indicated frustration at the 'stop start' approach to policy making in this space, with individuals pointing to the good work that was done in 2014 to create draft guidelines for pounds that was never finalised.
- Unintended consequences of the current legislative framework – there were also a number of pound employees who wrote about the impact of the current rehoming requirements on pounds, stating that the mandatory steps that must be undertaken are costly and lengthy, leading to the clogging up of local pounds.

In terms of changes that could be adopted, many of the responses reiterated responses to previous questions, with some of the suggested changes including:

- The establishment of an independent oversight body to inspect and enforce standards.
- Mandatory desexing.
- Creating an ownership register that prevents owners that have previously abandoned pets from being able to adopt or buy others in the future.
- Reduce the fees charged for registration, microchipping and to be able to pick-up a pet that has been impounded.
- Mandating a no euthanasia approach to the running of pounds.
- Banning backyard breeding.

Examples of responses from respondents who identified as being familiar with the current laws and codes of practice included:

- Pound employee: 'The regulatory framework for pounds is absolutely inadequate. Whilst there are [Department of Primary Industries] guidelines for boarding establishments, these are woefully inadequate and do not reflect the operational requirements for pounds. The industry is still waiting on the development of pound standards and guidelines that were drafted in 2014. The industry is also waiting on the outcomes of the review into the implementation of companion animal (rehoming animals) amendment.'
- Pound volunteer - 'New rehoming amendments have made it more difficult and put pressure on our facility. Our pound has been committed to rehoming for years and the new legislation

has put pressure on rehoming organizations and resulted in our facility holding animals for much longer waiting for vacancies in rehoming organizations and putting stress on the animals being housed for so long, and putting stress on pound staff having to deal with issues of housing animals for months at a time and therefore struggling with the pound at capacity due to this.'

- Animal rescue organisation - 'Council pounds need to be given the authority to investigate and prosecute back yard breeders. The registration fees need to be reduced, the ridiculous fee for cats over 4 months needs to be removed. Generally the legislation regarding cats unowned needs to be revised.'
- Animal rescue organisation - 'The majority of pounds don't follow the guidelines [especially] the smaller out of the way ones who don't get inspected. If pound conditions improved and caring staff were employed and they can push for changes instead of being ignored and leaving out of despair. Regular inspections and attention to complaints need to occur.'

Q. 20 *If you are involved with an animal rescue organisation, how does the pound system impact the work you do? Please tell us any concerns, issues, or positive interactions with your local pound below.*

186 respondents who identified as being involved with an animal rescue organisation answered question 20, with most writing positively about the relationships between their organisations and the pound system. A number of points were raised, which can be summarised as follows:

- Everyone is doing what they can – the overwhelming sentiment was one of understanding, with pound employees and rescue groups all expressing their concern for the stresses their colleagues have to face in running these operations with so little funding.
- The reliance of pounds on rescue groups – a large number of pound and rescue organisation volunteers indicated that the entire system is dependent on the unpaid work of volunteer groups, with pounds unable to keep up with demand on their own.
- Lack of regulation of rescue groups – a number of pound employees expressed dismay at the lack of regulation regarding the establishment and functioning of rescue groups, leading to situations where poor advice is given or poor conditions at these other facilities are allowed to go on unchecked.
- More funding for rescue groups so they can assist pounds – as a way to alleviate the burden on council-run pounds, suggestions were made in many of the responses for more funding to be targeted to volunteer and not for profit groups who assist in taking in and adopting out animals.
- Perceived approaches to animal welfare – a number of rescue group volunteers indicated that they believed their approach differed to that of pound staff, with their focus on animal welfare and the focus of pound staff on dealing with capacity constraints.

A sample of the quotes from rescue organisation volunteers and pound volunteers expressed is contained below, reflecting the difference in views across the sector:

- Animal rescue volunteer - 'Most pound staff do all they can to care for animals within grossly inadequate resources. They try and involve rescue groups to save them but need help to promote the animals for adoption or who are lost e.g. social media, local papers. More sharing across shelters would help.'
- Pound volunteer - 'Rescues are held to no standards. The local government approved list is a joke. No rescue has ever been removed. there are rescues that have been investigated by the RSPCA and prosecuted and still on the 'Approved rehoming Organisation' list. There are no rescue organisations with decent records that reflect the animals coming in and out, let alone updating the register appropriately.'
- Animal rescue group - 'We are overwhelmed with requests from pounds to assist - constantly. Our intake is predominantly pound assistance. Pounds contact us when kittens or adults are critically sick or long term as they do not have the resources and am do not want to see them being put to sleep. Staff are lovely and compassion fatigue is a huge problem.'
- Animal rescue volunteer - 'We work predominantly with pounds. The sad fact is pounds rely heavily on rescue to help. They are overflowing with animals and rescue is often the only option for the shy, the sick and the young who will go downhill very quickly in a shelter environment. Whilst some pounds are excellent and absolutely go above and beyond - other pounds are no more than tin shacks and seemingly have little interest in animal welfare. They can even be staffed by rangers with seemingly no adequate training.'

Q. 21 *In 2021-22, the Office of Local Government recorded that over 6500 animals were euthanised in NSW pounds. Do you feel the NSW Government is doing enough to reduce euthanasia rates?*

Question 21 was a 'Yes/No' question to which 357 participants responded. Of these, 22 (6 per cent) thought the NSW Government was doing enough to reduce euthanasia rates, while 335 respondents (94 per cent) thought too little was being done.

● Yes	22
● No	335



Q. 22 *What more can be done to reduce euthanasia in NSW?*

There were 325 responses to question 22. The key themes of most common responses were:

- Address the root cause of animals ending up in pounds – most of the responses pointed to the need to address the root causes for animals ending up in pounds in the first place. Touched on elsewhere in this report, the main strategies suggested included: mandatory desexing, free microchipping and registration, prevention of cat roaming, more selective approval process for pet ownership, wider education campaigns, and address the rights of tenants to keep pets.
- Standardised animal behaviour assessments – many dogs and cats get put down because of poorly developed and applied animal behaviour assessments. Responses argued that there should be a standard assessment process that takes into consideration the environment in which the dog or cat is being assessed.
- Improve facilities – linked with the above, so that animals have a better chance of passing animal behavioural assessments, cats and dogs should be in facilities that do not actively cause distress.
- More funding for rescue groups – to prevent cats and dogs from ending up in pounds where they may face the prospect of euthanasia, more money should be targeted at rescue groups whose mission is to provide alternatives to euthanasia.
- Better enforcement of rehoming standards – currently there is a lack of enforcement of the legislation in place to mandate certain steps be taken before the decision to euthanise is allowed.
- More onerous reporting requirements for councils – many respondents said that euthanasia statistics should be made publicly available as part of all councils general reporting requirements.
- Ban on backyard breeding – that the Government should take steps to ban the ability of non-registered individuals to be able to breed and advertise dogs, as they are overrepresented in the population of pets that end up being euthanised.

Selected quotes from participants identified many of the ways euthanasia could be reduced:

- Animal rescue organisation - 'Build more pens and staff the pounds properly so that the animals impounded do not suffer from 'pound stress' and become un-adoptable! Pounds such as Port Macquarie Animal Shelter are a shining light! Their animals are adequately housed/exercised and promoted for adoption. The Council/shelter staff work incredibly hard to find homes/rescue for all the animals in their care! '
- Animal rescue volunteer - 'Government funded initiatives to desex dogs and cats. Change laws relating to Tennant's rights to have pets in rental properties. make backyard breeding illegal.'
- Pound employee - 'Stop people dumping animals, desexing programs, and stop back yard breeders. It's not the Pounds fault that we have to euthanise - it's the people who breed them or just don't want them anymore. People don't get that an animal is for life.'
- Animal rescue employee - "I feel there is an absolute need to euthanasia animals that cannot be properly cared for, and while this incredibly heart wrenching and devastating experience to perform it must be done. the NSW Government needs to focus on the overwhelming production, sale, transfer and ownership of animals. Bottom line is there are many that find it so easy to obtain an animal and then cannot properly care for the animal and either have to surrender, abandon, or simply relinquish ownership. The focus should be on the initial

adoption in the first place to make sure that anyone and everyone that thinks it is a good idea can't simply find one and not have any prior evaluation.'

- Pet owner - 'Provide free of charge desexing at the point of adoption or sale. Lower the costs of rescuing an animal from a shelter. Hold families to account if they purchase and then discard their companion animals through a registration system.'

Q. 23 *A significant number of animals euthanised in pounds are cats. What strategies could be put in place to reduce the number of cats ending up in pounds?*

There were 332 responses to question 23, with many of the responses containing the same kinds of suggestions put forward in answer to the previous question. The general themes discussed can be grouped into the below categories:

- Registration and desexing – that the desexing of cats should be made mandatory, and that it should be heavily subsidised to improve compliance. Also, that registration should be made mandatory, and that databases should be kept up to date.
- Regulatory change – that councils should be given greater powers with regard to cat management practices.
- Curfews, roaming and education – linked to the above, that curfews should be put in place, a ban on roaming implemented, and a public awareness campaign on the issue of feral cats dispersed.

Desexing and curfews were referred to in a number of the sample quotes below:

- Senior Ranger – 'Desexing programs or subsidised desexing for people in lower socioeconomic areas. Changing laws to put more responsibility on cat owners to keep their cats either indoors or confined to their yards, RSPCA run a good program to give people tools and ideas to start bringing their cats indoors.'
- Community rescue volunteer - 'More education required for desexing programs, especially in lower socio-economic communities. Maybe have religious group leaders, trusted community people to encourage/educate communities about desexing their cats. Have subsidized desexing programs for everyone not just pensioners.'
- Pound employee - 'Make requirements to identify and register cats clearer in regards to microchipping and registration and education on the importance of collars and tags. Provide reduced (sic) desexing programs for cats.'
- Animal came from a pound - 'As above. Desex all animals. I understand this has been commonplace for all pounds but there has to be some way to encourage people. The cost is a huge issue. I know a lot of people who don't. It cost me close to \$1000 to have all 3 of mine done. Very very out of reach for the majority of the population. All vet bills in general. I don't understand how vet costs can't be standardised through legislation- more free desexing offered to lower socioeconomic people. And far, far more advertising on TV. Somehow get through to people that breeding isn't ok.'

Q. 24 ***Do you have any other comments you wish to share with the committee?***

There were 219 responses to question 24. Calls for appropriate regulation featured prominently, as did comparisons between facilities in rural and regional New South Wales and those in Sydney. The main themes contained in the responses have been grouped below:

- Complete system re-design required – many responses suggested that the system as it currently stands is broken and requires a complete overhaul.
- Greater enforcement of current laws – other individuals and organisations believed that the problems with the current system can largely be addressed through better enforcement of the current regulatory framework, with some adjustments (to do more with respect to cats, for instance).
- The problems caused by impractical legislation – a number of responses suggested that the way in which the current legislation functions in practice, although well intentioned, is leading to unintended poor animal welfare outcomes because of the time required to comply and the pressure compliance requirements place on staff, as well as the space available to the animals being cared for.
- Put animal welfare at the heart of the legislation and regulations – many of those responding from animal rescue groups, or who are owners of pets, indicated that they believed that too little attention is given to the actual needs of the animals in the system.
- Funding – consensus amongst the many people who responded that there is too little government funding going into the system, and that this lack of funding has a direct correlation to the poor animal welfare outcomes.
- Collection and publication of statistics – a number of participants suggested that more attention should be given to the need to more actively collect and publish statistics on the state of the pounds system, to improve accountability and identify the issues.
- The importance of desexing – over and over again, participants commented on the importance of desexing and the abolition of backyard breeding to addressing the challenges faced by pounds and animal rescue groups.
- Personal responsibility – individuals who own pets ought to be held responsible for the decision they take to purchase or adopt.

A small selection of the responses provided are contained below, reflecting the key themes identified above:

- Ranger - 'The new rehoming amendments have caused a lot of stress on all staff. As we have been a facility focused on rehoming all suitable animals, the blockages this legislation has caused among rehoming agencies has put serious pressure on our facility and staff due to long term housing of animals and overcrowding. This is the first time our staff have had to consider euthanasia due to our facility being at capacity. This causes issues with owners being able to surrender animals when we do not have space.'
- Animal rescue volunteer - 'The rescue groups, volunteers and shelter staff are completely overwhelmed. They can't manage or cope with the sheer volume. The distress caused by euthanising healthy animals is heartbreaking and resulting in resignations at all levels and severe emotional, physical and mental health issues for all concerned. The public needs more awareness that surrendering an animal is more likely to result in their death than them being rehomed.'
- Animal rescue volunteer - 'The problem is not just the pounds, it is one of responsibility of the public to care properly for their animals.'

- Cat carer - "Please please please take this seriously and try to make real change. Myself and so many others are tired of seeing cats run over on the streets, being euthanised in pounds, struggling on the streets and doing whatever they can to survive because they have nowhere to go. It is a problem that truly can be improved so so easily through desexing these poor cats and giving them a real chance.'
- General member of the public - 'I think that the level of care of animals in pounds should reflect the values of the community and at present this is clearly not the case.'
- Pound employee - "The problem in pounds and shelters across NSW is systemic and will not change without forced change from the government. Nothing will improve without legislation in place that regulates the number of animals bred.'
- Former pound manager - 'Serious work needs to be done in this space and it needs to be done now. It's all well and good to say that the pounds are the problem here but the reality is that every person that owns an animal is the problem. We need serious reform, we need to take the problems seriously and we need to listen to the people that work in these facilities. Ask the staff what they need to get to a level of adequate care for these animals and then give them the resourcing to do it.'