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23 January 2024

The Hon. Emma Hurst MLC
Chair
Portfolio Committee No. 8 – Customer Service
Inquiry into Pounds in New South Wales

By email: portfoliocommittee8@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Chair

Thank you for the opportunity for representatives of Local Government NSW (LGNSW) to appear before the Inquiry into Pounds in New South Wales on 15 December 2024.

Please see below responses to questions taken on notice during that hearing.

1. *The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: I asked about the information sharing across companion animal management as well. What additional information should councils, pounds and rehoming facilities be required to provide which would help with that better sector-wide approach to pound management? How can we make this a better approach for everyone?*

LGNSW response

Our LGNSW submission recommended supporting opportunities for greater information sharing, communication and collaboration among organisations involved in companion animal regulation (Recommendation 8). Improving information flow and fostering partnership approaches between organisations involved in companion animal management is necessary for improved animal welfare outcomes.

An example of this is improving information sharing and feedback between animal welfare enforcement and companion animal management organisations. When councils refer animal welfare matters to enforcement organisations such as the RSPCA, they often do not receive feedback on the outcome and it is

acknowledged this is likely due to enforcement resources being stretched very thin. However, if councils did receive feedback there are situations where they could assist with follow-ups or work with owners to prevent them becoming repeat offenders.

Councils have also noted that being able to access information about an animal that routinely escapes or has behavioural issues can assist them to proactively engage with owners. For example, if a dog regularly escapes, staff can speak with owners about fencing or investigate if there are underlying issues, and also consider issuing warnings or taking regulatory action.

In order for companion animals to be returned to owners quickly and avoid impoundment, it is imperative that the registration (owner) details are entered into the register correctly and comprehensively, and then updated in a timely way. Sometimes those registering animals are pressed for time and some details are left for owners to fill in later, or owners do not update their address when they move. Support is needed to make the register easier to use and also to support those doing data entry. (For example, the register could be improved by streamlining the process for multiple registrations to the same owner such as when registering litters.)

2. *The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: In terms of animal registration fees now, could you talk in any detail about the sorts of perverse incentives that exist there with those animal registration fees?*

LGNSW response

The registration fee for an un-desexed dog older than 6 months is the same as the fee for an un-desexed puppy, therefore there is no incentive for owners to desex the dog after the age of 6 months. This is a particular problem for larger breeds where it is not recommended to desex the dog before 6 months of age (and sometimes up to 18 months) for health reasons. If the objective is to desex dogs wherever possible to reduce unintended litters then this regulatory setting is ineffective.

Councils would like to see desexing of animals incentivised by enabling the 'desexed' registration fee (\$29 instead of \$370) to be paid if a dog is desexed within (say) 2 weeks of registration. Currently the legislation does not provide any leeway for the lower registration fee to be applied if the dog will be desexed soon after.

Another disincentive occurs if an un-desexed animal is impounded. Councils report that the biggest factor preventing owners from picking up their animals is

the high registration fee for a non-desexed animal that is payable for the animal to be released.

3. *The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I'm looking at page 6 in terms of a response to section (a) in the submission. The reference is low collection rates by owners, and you're citing a metropolitan council pound advising the collection rate for dogs has dropped from 50 per cent to 26 per cent. And the increased stays in pounds—I'm just wondering if you might be able to elaborate a little bit on that.*

DAMIAN THOMAS: Sure. As part of developing this submission we consulted with a range of councils and held a workshop as well, online, so that all councils were able to provide input. We received significant contributions from councils across the State. That is quite an incredible statistic provided by that one metro council—that the collection rate for dogs had dropped from 50 per cent to 26 per cent in recent years—but also with the majority of dogs being around three years old, many of which were not desexed or microchipped.

I suppose that three-year-old age perhaps correlates with the boom in pet ownership during the COVID pandemic, and then subsequently the cost-of-living pressures and rising costs and, I guess, unanticipated costs of pet ownership that many people have realised exist. But we can take on notice if there's further detail on that to provide.

LGNSW response

Community perception about what breeds are desirable or suit higher density living/lifestyles is also a factor influencing the type of dog, number of animals and length of stay in pounds. With smaller residences there is a trend towards puppies or small-to-medium dogs. Some pounds report larger dog breeds such as American staffies (Staffordshire Terriers) make up more than half the animals in care, often with long stay times of more than three months, as there is little adoption demand for them.

Societal trends can also influence the type of dog people look to buy/adopt until they realise the pet ownership might require more exercise or grooming than expected, or other behavioural issues emerge that the owner is not able to cope with. For example, feedback suggests the television program Games of Thrones popularised the idea of having a husky, but there was a corresponding increase in surrenders of this breed in the ensuing period.



Thank you again for the opportunity to provide evidence to this inquiry. For further information, the committee secretariat is welcome to contact LGNSW Director Advocacy

Yours sincerely

Cr Darriea Turley AM
President