

Our ref: A886793

Contact: Brett Whitworth

The Chair
Inquiry into Pounds in New South Wales
Portfolio Committee 8
Legislative Council
NSW Parliament
SYDNEY NSW 2000

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

Response to inquiry – questions taken on notice from 15 December 2023

Dear Chair

Please find enclosed my response to the questions taken on notice at the recent hearing into Pounds in New South Wales, held on 15 December 2023.

Should you need to discuss this further, I can be contacted via email

Yours sincerely

Brett Whitworth
Deputy Secretary, Office of Local Government

Office of Local Government - answers to questions taken on notice

Inquiry into Pounds in NSW – 15 December 2023

Pages 8 – 9

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Given the shortage, we're finding – and it's been indicated to us – that it's impacting on a whole range of services and causing distress to a number of veterinarians. Could you take it on notice and see if you could maybe ask around for us?

KIM FILMER: I can, but it might be better if the councils were able to provide that information. Is Mr Whitworth able to get that information? Because I don't think I'll have access to that data.

BRETT WHITWORTH: I don't know that there is data per se, but I think the issue of the direct interface between veterinarians and the operation of pounds comes in either the receipt of animals that are abandoned – so people will quite often leave them with a vet and then a vet has to take them to a pound. That in itself is an element of concern. The other element is when vets are called upon to provide services to ensure the welfare of the animals in the pound. The third element is when there need to be decisions made about euthanasia and the processes by which that occurs. I did give evidence with Mr Hansen to the veterinary shortage inquiry, and I think these were points that we made at that time.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I just thought it might be an issue of concern. Do you have any documents indicating the key learnings from other States about how best to manage animals in pounds and what arrangements there are? This has come up a couple of times, but I would imagine somewhere in the bureaucracy there would be someone putting together a document that says this is how things work better in Victoria, for example, as compared to New South Wales. Is there such a document around?

BRETT WHITWORTH: The bureaucracy is probably not as big as what people anticipate, but we did have the Rehoming Practices Review, as part of that – and the draft of that document is available. It was prepared by CIE – so independent consultants. It would have looked at other jurisdictions as well. Whether from an animal welfare perspective – Dr Filmer, I don't know whether there's a comparison across other States. I will say, when I meet with my colleagues from other jurisdictions – my local government colleagues – not everyone has responsibility for animals. In Victoria, for example, companion animals are entirely within their department of primary industries' control. We don't necessarily compare notes on that.

KIM FILMER: I've probably got nothing further to add to that.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Can we get a copy of that report?

BRETT WHITWORTH: It's publicly available on the website.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: So there is nothing else [audio malfunction].

BRETT WHITWORTH: Nothing – sorry?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: No-one has a table indicating what good things other States have done that might be worthwhile looking at in New South Wales?

BRETT WHITWORTH: I can take that on notice and ask whether we do have that. It's possible that someone has looked at that, but I don't believe that's necessarily – again, it comes down to are we talking about operations from how do councils operate their pounds? Or are we talking about animal welfare standards and standards for pounds in other States, which, as I said, does bridge the jurisdictional divide between Office of Local Government and DPI. But I will take that on notice and see whether we do have such a document.

Answer:

There is no document comparing the management of council pounds in NSW with other Australian states or territories. Assessing NSW pound operations with other jurisdictions is challenging as the regulatory and operational frameworks differ between states and territories. There is also limited data available across other jurisdictions to make comparisons.

The Office of Local Government (OLG) commissioned a Rehoming Practices Review in 2022, with the aim of examining rehoming practices and factors driving euthanasia rates in NSW. Part of this review included a brief overview of companion animal management approaches of other Australian states and territories. This highlighted the significantly different approaches and policy variations for each jurisdiction. A copy of the draft report, 'Rehoming of Companion Animals in NSW', is available on the [OLG website](#), with a summary of the arrangements in other jurisdictions on page 19 of the draft report.

The NSW Government has committed to reviewing the companion animals legislative framework and an analysis of companion animal strategies across jurisdictions will be included in this review.

Pages 9 – 10

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: In terms of the legislation and associated regulation and codes and standards that you spoke about, do you think those standards and regulations and codes adequately protect the welfare of animals in pounds?

BRETT WHITWORTH: That's a challenging question because our understanding of what an appropriate level of care for an animal is has also changed over time. Some of those pounds that were built many years ago probably don't have more contemporary concepts around protection of animals from heat or from cold. That said, I'm now straying into space that's not Office of Local Government because I'm straying into the space that is around the prevention of cruelty to animals. I do think that's an area that I'd probably prefer other people to provide advice on in terms of do they think that the existing standards, controls, enforcement mechanisms and investigatory powers they have – and in this I'm talking about the police, RSPCA, Animal Welfare League – are sufficient for them to address any concerns they're seeing coming out. I do feel like we need to address this issue of standards and what we are designing pounds to be built to. We need to clarify that because I feel that's a degree of uncertainty that is enabling people to say, "We're not quite sure whose responsibility it is."

The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL: Recommendation 8 says there should be greater information sharing across companion animal management. What additional information should councils, pounds and rehoming facilities be required to provide that would help in that better sector-wide approach to pound management?

BRETT WHITWORTH: I would like to take that on notice because I'd like to provide a more fulsome answer because I think that's an important question and it goes partly to why we're investing time and money in the Pet Registry as well. I'm firmly of the belief that we don't have enough data to help us guide policy outcomes here. We have a lot of data but we don't have enough data, and we don't have enough data on the basis that that data can be shared across different jurisdictions and across different agencies.

Answer:

Improving data collection in relation to companion animal management is crucial to ensuring better outcomes for surrendered and impounded companion animals.

The draft report, 'Rehoming of Companion Animals in NSW', identified that evidence from other jurisdictions that would enable useful comparisons is scant, as other jurisdictions do not collect data to the same degree as NSW. For example, reporting on euthanasia of companion animals is only currently required in NSW and Western Australia. The report found that NSW has the most comprehensive data reporting of Australian states and territories for outcomes from pounds.

OLG collects pound data quarterly from NSW pound operators which includes all incoming and outgoing companion animals, those returned to owners, the number sold or rehomed as well as those euthanised and the reasons for this. These statistics are published on the OLG website.

More specific data can be used to further address companion animal policy challenges. Some potential additional data reporting on animals entering the pound system could include the number that are microchipped, reasons for entering the facility, the breed, the desexed status, and separate reporting for approved rehoming organisations. This could help to develop policies that address the number of companion animals needing to be rehomed and provide for more effective rehoming strategies.

The development of a new NSW Pet Registry and the forthcoming review of the *Companion Animals Act 1998* will provide an opportunity to examine additional data requirements and better information sharing to advance our policy agenda. This review will incorporate the findings and recommendations of this inquiry as well as the upcoming inquiry into cat management, the Rehoming Practices Review, and various coronial inquiries into dog attacks.