

DATE **22 May 2024**

RSPCA NSW

1. What are the minimum qualifications for RSPCA NSW inspectors, team leaders, DCI and CI?

RSPCA NSW takes great pride in its dedicated team of inspectors who play a crucial role in enforcing the state's animal welfare laws. Upon recruitment, our inspectors undergo rigorous training programs to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to carry out their responsibilities effectively, including:

- **Certificate IV in Government Investigations:** This qualification allows for the attainment of occupational-specific competencies for those working in operational roles undertaking government investigation-related functions, focusing on meeting the public service's ethical and legislative requirements. It is suitable for individuals who need to apply a broad range of specialised knowledge and skills in specific contexts within the investigations and regulatory compliance environment. The generalist qualification covers the wide range of skills required to operate without supervision in a government investigations environment where an individual must plan, initiate, conduct and finalise an investigation. The regulatory compliance specialisation covers the skills required by those responsible for ensuring statutory compliance with legislation, regulations, and organisational policy requirements. Whilst many of our Inspectors have a policing background and hold a Diploma of Policing, Senior Inspectors and Team Leaders may also gain this qualification at a Diploma Level.
- **Safe Stock Handling:** RSPCA NSW places a strong emphasis on ensuring that our inspectors possess a thorough understanding of relevant animal husbandry practices. This training encompasses livestock including cattle, sheep, pigs, alpacas, with the aim of enabling our inspectors to assess and address the diverse needs of various species. By fostering expertise in animal husbandry, we empower our inspectors to make informed decisions regarding the welfare of the animals under their care.
- **Dangerous/Aggressive Dog Handling:** This training focuses on identifying key behaviours of dogs and their anticipated reactions in a given scenario. It also covers the humane, safe capture and handling of dogs, including poling methods and loading and unloading in and out of approved vehicles. The aim of the training is to minimise harm, handling, and safety risks to both the dogs and our staff.
- **Tactical Defence Training including use of Batons and Handcuffs:** Recognising the challenges and potential risks our inspectors may encounter in the field, RSPCA NSW provides comprehensive tactical defence training. This aspect of the program focuses on equipping inspectors with the skills necessary to handle situations that may pose a threat to their safety. Through practical scenarios and theoretical instruction, our inspectors learn to employ defensive tactics responsibly and effectively.

- **Verbal Tactics:** Effective communication is paramount in the field of animal welfare, and our training program addresses this through verbal tactics training. Inspectors are taught to employ clear and assertive communication strategies to manage challenging situations, interact with animal owners, and educate the public about responsible animal care.
- **Humane Euthanasia Training:** As part of our commitment to the humane treatment of animals, RSPCA NSW ensures that inspectors are trained in humane euthanasia methods. This training is essential for situations where euthanasia is deemed necessary, ensuring that it is carried out with the utmost compassion and adherence to ethical standards.
- **Legal Training:** the RSPCA NSW Legal team provides regular and ongoing training of inspectors as to the operational and legal requirements for exercising our enforcement function under POCTAA. We engage senior and leading Barristers from the NSW Bar and provide written materials and practical training in relation to the collection of evidence, construction of briefs and giving evidence in Court.

Additionally, each inspector's appointment requires the explicit approval of the Minister for Agriculture, emphasising the gravity and importance of their role in upholding animal welfare across the state. Our commitment to ongoing training reflects our dedication to staying abreast of evolving industry standards and best practices, ensuring that our inspectors remain at the forefront of animal welfare enforcement. RSPCA NSW is grateful for the ongoing support and collaboration with the government in our shared mission to safeguard the well-being of animals throughout the region.

2. What are the legal qualifications and years of experience of RSPCA NSW employed solicitors?

The three Solicitors employed in the RSPCA NSW legal team consist of one General Counsel and two Senior Legal Officers. They each have law degrees, two have a master in laws, and General Counsel is a PhD Candidate in Law at UNSW Law and Justice on a topic relating to the judicial treatment of animal cruelty and the link with domestic violence. Each Solicitor is admitted to the Supreme Court of NSW and they have 45 years cumulative experience as Police Prosecutors, Solicitors and Lawyers and 14 years cumulative experience prosecuting on behalf of RSPCA NSW. They have prosecuted more offences of animal cruelty, individually and collectively, than any other solicitor in NSW.

3. What are the qualifications for behaviour staff at RSPCA NSW?

There are 39 people in the Behaviour and Rehabilitation Team, employed across five shelters and two rehabilitation sites. The minimum entry qualification for behaviour staff is a tertiary qualification in a relevant discipline (Science, Animal behaviour or Animal Welfare) or a vocational qualification at AQF level 4. Presently this is the Certificate IV in Animal Behaviour and Training. Staff who do not hold these qualifications are able to gain this during their employment as part of a traineeship.

The qualifications of the current staff are:

- Bachelor of Veterinary Science with memberships, by examination, of the veterinary behaviour chapter of the Australian and New Zealand College of Veterinary Scientists (1),
- Masters of Science in Companion Animal Behaviour (1),
- Post Graduate Diploma in Clinical Animal Behaviour (about to be conferred) (1),
- Advanced Diploma in Applied Animal Behaviour (Feline) (2),
- Certificate IV in Behaviour and Training (Canine) (10 qualified, 17 traineeships).
- Additionally, current staff also hold the following relevant qualifications:
- Diploma in Equitation Science

- Post Graduate Diploma Education (Adult) (1)
- Graduate Certificate in Management (1)
- Graduate Diploma Psychology (1)
- Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (6)
- Diploma in Training and Assessment (1)
- Diploma in Learning Design (1)
- Certificate IV in Leadership and Management (1)
- Diploma in Leadership and Management (1)

4. What policies do you apply to decisions about suitability for rehoming?

The RSPCA NSW Animal Assessment Policy, Animal Rehabilitation Policy and Placement Policy are applied to decision-making for animal rehoming.

The RSPCA NSW approach to animal outcome decision-making is broadly based on the principles of the Asilomar Accord where, during ongoing evaluation, animals are considered as to whether they are healthy, treatable or untreatable in relation to what care is “typically provided by reasonable and caring pet owners/guardians in the community.” For an explanation of the Asilomar Accord definitions, see <https://www.maddiesfund.org/assets/documents/No%20Kill%20Progress/A%20Guide%20to%20the%20Asilomar%20Accords%20Definitions.pdf>

RSPCA policy requires animals to be evaluated using a wide range of evidence and information. However, animals regularly come into care in varied states and circumstances, often with incomplete veterinary and behaviour histories. RSPCA NSW considers the circumstances of the animal coming into care, their individual veterinary and behaviour presentations and species when making decisions in the rehoming context. This includes a review of any medical and behavioural history prior to entering care, a veterinary examination and medical investigation as needed, daily observation and record keeping of health and behaviour and a behaviour evaluation by the behaviour and rehabilitation team. Additional information may be sought through placement with a foster carer or additional interactions such as off-site walks. Risk assessments are often conducted, as well as animal welfare assessments (using the Animal Welfare Assessment Grid). This information-gathering process is ongoing and often continues over extended periods because the animal is not initially considered either treatable/rehomeable on entry, nor is it considered untreatable at that point, and so attempts at treatment and rehabilitation occur.

The guiding principles for RSPCA NSW in outcome decision-making are consistent with the tenets of socially conscious sheltering (<https://scsheltering.org/learn-more/>), whereby there is a focus on the animal’s welfare and on public safety. To proceed with the care, treatment or rehabilitation of an animal, its welfare can only be protected if there is the capacity to meet the needs of that animal. To maximise that capacity, we have to meet complex needs, and animals with challenges may be assisted through referral for specialist veterinary treatment, support at RSPCA NSW rehabilitation sites, foster care and partnerships with rescue organisations.

Furthermore, decisions are influenced by the likely burden of care to an adopter, the long-term prognosis for the animal and a risk assessment of what harm the animal may cause a human or another animal in the community. A range of risk mitigations are considered and implemented to reduce these risks and provide options for the animals for rehoming. These mitigations may include preadoption counselling of prospective owners, full disclosure of any known issues, and veterinary and behavioural post-adoption support.

5. Mr Courtney gave evidence that RSPCA NSW does not apply a bite scale, do your policies consider a canine bite scale?

The evidence given was incorrect. The Sophia Yin bite scale is used in several RSPCA policies and procedures relating to dog assessment, rehabilitation, and rehoming and is also embedded within risk assessments. [The Sophia Yin bite scale](#) is based on the Dunbar Bite Scale. We also watch with interest the development of Cara Shannon's bite scale (incorporating detailed bite and bruising scales that separate bites to other dogs and human bites: <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/badtothebone>).

6. What is the adoption fee for animals rehomed by RSPCA NSW? Are there exceptions to this scale?

[RSPCA NSW adoption fees](#) help to cover some of the costs associated with preparing each animal for adoption. Our animals come fully vet-checked and, depending on species, desexed, microchipped and vaccinated. The cost of caring for each animal that comes through our doors far exceeds the amount we charge for each adoption, but these fees go back into caring for more abandoned, injured, neglected and sick animals. We believe that our pricing is reasonable and that our rehoming principles are ethical and in line with community expectations.

RSPCA NSW's 'Find Forever Homes' mission with \$29 adoptions took place on 3 - 5 November 2023, with adoption fees reduced to \$29 for all animals available for adoption, across the state. The goal was to rehome as many animals as possible over the three-day adoption drive. The weekend saw more than 260 animals find their forever home. We offer discounts like this, from time to time, to help rehome animals to ensure that our shelters are able to continue to operate within their capacity to care. We also run a *Seniors for Seniors* program where a 50% discount is given to senior citizens wishing to adopt senior animals.

With animals staying with us longer than ever before, adoption drives like this are a great way to help people who have been thinking about adopting, find their forever friend and are a common promotion used in animal shelters around the world.

Although during adoption promotions fees are reduced, standard adoption procedures apply to ensure each animal is matched with the right family. We also follow all of our post-adoption processes during these promotions including post-adoption calls and when required free appointments with our veterinarians or behaviour staff.

7. Do you consult externally in relation to your management of behaviour cases?

RSPCA NSW does seek external expert opinion in relation to difficult behaviour cases. A consultant veterinarian with postgraduate qualifications in clinical animal behaviour consults on challenging cases weekly. Case reviews are conducted monthly with an international Veterinary Behavioural Medicine Specialist.

In addition, for the management of behavioural cases post-adoption, there are times when cases are referred to animal behaviourists or trainers for support. Noting the considerable risk associated with unaccredited dog trainers providing harmful advice, RSPCA only consults with trainers who have a minimum Certificate IV Animal Behaviour and Training and membership of an industry group such as Pet Professional Guild that undertakes due diligence on their membership and that is committed to forcing free training and an evidence-based approach. RSPCA engages behavioural consultants with a degree in animal science, behaviour and/or welfare plus an industry certification via the International Association of Animal Behaviour Consultants or a similar organisation that has a rigorous credentialing process.

8. Are there any other matters you wish to clarify in response to the inquiry and the hearing?

Mr Courtney gave evidence that RSPCA NSW euthanised over 70% of animals for behavioural reasons and over 20% for medical reasons, concluding that over 90% of animals that entered our care were euthanised. Any consideration of the RSPCA year in review (see page 23) would disclose that this is

completely incorrect, it, which makes clear a canine live release rate of 74% for and a 67% live release rate for cats.

Mr Courtney seems to be confused by the difference between 70% of 26% (the proportion of total canines euthanised) and 70% of 100% (all the dogs entering RSPCA's care). The error was reinforced after it was adopted by members of the Committee in questioning later witnesses, but no opportunity was given to RSPCA NSW witnesses to address the statistic or correct the error.

There were further assertions made that RSPCA NSW euthanises animals for convenience or based on economic considerations. This is incorrect. It is not unusual for animals to be in our care for many months (and sometimes exceeding twelve months) while we attempt to find solutions for them. There are many hours of deliberation and consideration spent on individual animals to exhaust reasonable options and many examples, every year, of animals being referred to veterinary specialists for interventions costing many thousands of dollars. The evidence given was baseless opinion that not only incorrectly reported statistics easily checked but was irresponsible in the context of veterinarians and animal care workers already having an increased risk of psychological harm without unfair and false accusations that they do not act in the interests of the animals they care for.

Other witnesses gave evidence, while sharing their opinions on how the enforcement function and animal care could be improved, that the use of foster carers can and should be considered. RSPCA NSW has, for a long time, run a large foster care program for shelter and inspectorate animals. This financial year, over 4,200 animals have been in foster care, including inspectorate animals.

Our volunteers do not deserve to have their efforts, often over decades, maligned in this way.

9. Please provide a detailed breakdown (or provide documentation) showing how the \$21.5 million funding from the NSW Government has been spent on the RSPCA inspectorate to date.

This is detailed in the funding submission, which is provided to the Committee on notice.

10. What will happen if the RSPCA NSW does not receive the additional funding it has requested for its inspectorate moving forward – how will your inspectorate and enforcement activities be affected?

If RSPCA NSW does not receive the additional funding requested for its inspectorate, several significant consequences will affect its ability to enforce animal welfare laws and perform its duties effectively, including:

- **Reduction in Workforce Capacity:** The current staffing levels will only be sustainable with recurrent funding. This will lead to the redundancy of new recruits funded by the \$20.5 million dollar grant, along with further reductions in staff across all departments to ensure the RSPCA continues to operate financially sustainably. Overall staffing levels will decrease, reducing the inspectorate's ability to effectively respond to and investigate animal cruelty complaints.
- **Decrease in Complaint Response Rate:** Given that more jobs are now performed on a 'two-out' basis, the average number of complaints handled per day has already decreased from 53.3 to 42.8. Further workforce reductions will exacerbate this decline, leading to an inability to respond to animal cruelty complaints which are increasing annually.
- **Reduced capacity to conduct proactive Inspections:** Insufficient inspector capacity will limit proactive site visits, a critical preventative measure. This will result in approximately 600 fewer formal directions to improve animal care or conditions and 7,200 fewer annual visits, reducing animal welfare education efforts.

- Impact on Other RSPCA NSW Functions: The organisation's wrap-around services, including community outreach, education programs, and reintegration training, will also need to be constrained.
- Workforce Morale: Without sufficient funding to maintain current workforce levels, the resulting redundancies will seriously reduce morale in the workplace.
- Reduced Contact Centre Hours: The contact centre may need to revert to business hours.

11. Can you confirm that RSPCA NSW inspectors now all attend jobs two at a time – including in rural and regional areas? If so, when did this commence, and is this requirement documented in any RSPCA policies or procedures?

RSPCA NSW's inspectors strategically operate in teams across the state and are assigned specific geographical areas based on demand to ensure comprehensive coverage of animal welfare concerns. While each inspector has designated areas of responsibility, our commitment to animal welfare goes beyond boundaries. However, not all jobs are attended two at a time. Routine or low-risk jobs, including, for example, attendance at sale yards, compliance checks at zoos, pet shops, or animal handling facilities, or revisits may not necessitate two officers to attend.

When urgent assistance is needed, or an extra pair of hands can make a significant impact, our inspectors collaborate and support each other across nearby regions. This collaborative approach allows us to respond more effectively to the diverse needs of animals and their owners, ensuring that our resources are deployed efficiently and where they are most needed.

This cooperative effort reflects our shared dedication to promoting the welfare of animals throughout the entire state. It demonstrates that our commitment extends beyond individual territories to create a more interconnected and responsive system of care and enforcement. RSPCA NSW is proud of the teamwork and flexibility exhibited by our inspectors, reinforcing our collective mission to protect and advocate for the well-being of animals across NSW.

12. If there are some jobs where RSPCA NSW inspectors still attend solo – please advise what kinds of jobs, and why this decision has been made?

Inspectors can sometimes investigate a cruelty complaint with a low-risk profile individually. These kinds of premises include Zoos, Council Pounds, Pet shops, and other animal handling facilities. Revisits where the person of interest is known and has previously complied with Inspectorate directions, or is amenable to working with the RSPCA may also be attended individually. RSPCA NSW has many experienced inspectors who are capable of making risk assessments as to the jobs that will require an additional Inspector, and which will not. They are also assisted by Team Leaders, the Deputy Chief Inspector (DCI) and Chief Inspector (CI) in making those determinations. Additional safety features, such as providing whereabouts to the contact centre in advance, GPS tracking of all inspectors, Body Worn Camera devices, radios, making contact with NSW Police, AWL and rangers in advance, are all well deployed strategies to be used in conjunction with two-out operations. It would be inefficient and an unnecessary use of resources to simply mandate all jobs are two-out without paying any attention to the Inspectors' own assessment of risk.

13. How many SafeWork improvement notices has RSPCA NSW been issued in the last 12 months? Please provide the Committee with a copy with these notices.

In the last 12 months, RSPCA NSW has been issued two SafeWork improvement notices:

- Improvement Notice No: 7-470979 (Issued on 05/03/2024)

- Issued regarding: Work Health and Safety Act 2011, section 19 and Work Health and Safety Regulation 2017, clause 55C.
 - Matter: Workers and others may be exposed to risks of injury or illness from workplace violence due to inadequate identification of psychological risks.
 - Remediation Requirements:
 - Provide and maintain safe systems of work related to controlling workplace violence.
 - Conduct initial risk assessments of sites prior to attendance, review incidents, and assess new employees' competency in the field.
 - Provide information, instruction, and training on identified risks and implemented control measures.
- Improvement Notice No: 7-470983 (Issued on 05/03/2024)
 - Issued regarding: Work Health and Safety Act 2011, section 19 and Work Health and Safety Regulation 2017, clause 55D.
 - Matter: Workers and others may be exposed to risks of injury or illness from workplace violence due to the business not ensuring the implementation and utilisation of identified control measures.
 - Remediation Requirements:
 - Ensure that identified control measures to eliminate psychological risks are implemented and regularly reviewed for appropriateness.
 - Provide information, instruction, and training on the identified risks and control measures.

14. What do each of these SafeWork improvement notices relate to?

Work Health and Safety Act 2011, section 19 and Work Health and Safety Regulation 2017, clause 55D, and Work Health and Safety Act 2011, section 19 and Work Health and Safety Regulation 2017, clause 55C.

15. What action has RSPCA NSW taken in response to each SafeWork improvement notice?

RSPCA NSW is working with Safework NSW to ensure measures are in place in accordance with their notices before the compliance date of 4 June 2024.

In relation to Improvement Notice No: 7-470979, consultation on a documented risk assessment procedure is underway within the inspectorate.

In relation to Improvement Notice No: 7-470983, the provision of relevant personal protective equipment along with defence training, including the use of batons and handcuffs, has been concluded. A Two-out officer jobs policy has been drafted.

16. Did Mr Coleman become aware of these SafeWork improvement notices for the first time at the Inquiry – or was he aware of them prior to the Inquiry?

Mr Coleman was aware of them prior to the Inquiry.

17. At the Inquiry, RSPCA NSW indicated there had been some “gaps” in batons and handcuffs training, and some “issues with getting handcuffs”.

a. How was this issue regarding “gaps” in training discovered – was it due to a SafeWork improvement notice?

No. The training was being implemented on an ongoing basis and risks were managed by pairing and looking at experience.

b. Prior to the discovery of these training “gaps”, how many inspectors were attending jobs without the necessary baton and handcuff training?

Prior to the discovery of these training “gaps,” up to 24 inspectors may have attended jobs without the necessary baton and handcuff training. However, note that new inspectors recruited under the 2024 funding grant were accompanied on jobs with inspectors who had baton and handcuff training.

c. How many inspectors were unable to attend jobs while this baton and handcuff training was arranged – and how long did this take?

Arrangements for the necessary training and compliance with the improvement notice were initiated promptly, and the training process was completed before the compliance period specified in the notice. All inspectors completed their annual baton and handcuff training and tactical awareness training in April 2024. The training course is conducted over three days.

d. Can you please provide more detail regarding the “issues with getting handcuffs” – including how long this has been an issue, whether it resulted in RSPCA NSW inspectors going to jobs without handcuffs, and whether the issue has been resolved?

The “issues with getting handcuffs” pertained to logistical challenges in procuring and distributing the necessary equipment to inspectors. The issue has since been addressed, with measures taken to ensure all inspectors are now equipped with the necessary handcuffs and batons, and proper training has been provided to ensure their safe use.

18. Has there been any similar “gaps” or issues identified regarding ‘defensive tactics’ training for RSPCA inspectors? If so, please provide details, including how many inspectors it affected and for how long.

No. 19 Inspectors were recruited in September and October 2023, and an additional round of recruitment resulted in 5 Inspectors joining the team in December 2023, February, and March 2024. Tactical awareness training was conducted for all staff, including 24 new Inspectors, from 11 to 20 March 2024.

19. It has been reported that that the United Workers Union is involved in numerous complaints made by the RSPCA NSW inspectorate against senior management. Can you please advise:

a. How many complaints there are?

We have one matter on foot with the United Workers Union regarding several allegations against a single senior inspectorate manager.

b. What do the complaints involve?

The complaints raised by the UWU involve allegations of bullying.

c. What action has been taken by RSPCA NSW in response to each of the complaints?

The governance structure of RSPCA NSW is designed to ensure effective oversight, transparency, and accountability in the organisation’s operations. The overarching governance of the organisation is managed by an independent Board of ten, with five supporting key sub-committees, each with specific objectives, responsibilities and memberships.

These subcommittees are integral components of the broader governance framework, contributing to the implementation of the organisation’s strategy and operations. They are led by the Executive team, with the CEO at the helm and supported by three General Managers (Community and Engagement, Regulation and Business Services, and Animal Operations and Fundraising).

We encourage anyone who has an issue with RSPCA NSW or one of our investigations to contact us and make a formal report. Members of the public can also contact the DPI, AWL, or NSW Police if they believe a matter needs to be externally investigated.

RSPCA NSW is subject to regular Parliamentary oversight, with committees like this one ensuring that public expectations are met and that we provide the enforcement required by POCTAA. Departmental oversight from DPI also provides the NSW Government and members of the public with the assurance that RSPCA NSW acts in accordance with the relevant legislation and meets our obligations.

RSPCA NSW has had a number of interactions with the Allied Industries United Workers Union, including:

- April 5, 2024: The United Workers Union Industrial Officer emailed the RSPCA NSW CEO regarding seven allegations of bullying and harassment by senior management and requested an independent investigator handle the complaints.
- April 8, 2024: RSPCA NSW CEO responded to the United Workers Union Industrial Officer, noting the issues raised and stating that RSPCA NSW looks forward to a resolution.
- April 30, 2024: The RSPCA NSW CEO called the Allied Industries United Workers Union Executive Director and emailed him the same day.
- May 10, 2024: RSPCA NSW CEO emailed Allied Industries United Workers Union Executive Director, requesting recommendations for mid to large-sized Sydney-based employment lawyers to review RSPCA NSW’s grievance handling processes independently.

- May 10, 2024 (later the same day): Allied Industries United Workers Union Executive Director responds to Steven Coleman, apologising for the delay and recommending a firm in employment law capable of handling the independent review.
- Whilst the UWU has not provided any detail in addition to their letter dated 5 April, RSPCA NSW surmises that the reference to their member's allegation of bullying regarding senior management relates to 29 allegations of bullying by the Deputy Chief Inspector. Those 29 allegations were made by a total of 5 employees and were all against the Deputy Chief Inspector. All allegations were investigated and 3 were substantiated and 26 were unsubstantiated.

The RSPCA NSW CEO reports directly to the Board of Directors, who have and take seriously their obligations as non-executive directors of a large not for profit company with law enforcement powers. There are Board-led sub-Committees including an Animal Welfare Policy, Finance and Audit, Risk and Compliance, Committees together with a Governance Committee made up of different members of the Board and supported by the Senior Management and subject matter experts who also seek external advice. RSPCA NSW has a large and engaged membership base across NSW, thousands of members and volunteers, and over 500 staff. It is also a member of a federated RSPCA structure with a National office and State and territory member societies. It is widely overseen from a very nuanced individual engagement with a single member of the public to a State-wide parliamentary inquiry process. Its governing documents, Constitution, Code of Conduct for Directors, SOPs, policy documents and publicly facing reports are widely available.

20. What is the total number of inspectors currently employed by RSPCA NSW?

In FY22/23, 38 FTE Inspectors were deployed across the state, and after a significant recruitment drive in Q1 FY23/24, we are proud to have expanded this to 59 FTE Inspectors. This ensures our team can respond safely in the company of another officer to the approximately 15,000 increasingly complex and dangerous cruelty complaints we receive each year. We currently have 5 vacancies, with an active workforce of 54 Inspectors.

21. How many inspectors have resigned from RSPCA NSW in the past 12 months?

4 Inspectors have retired, and 6 have resigned.

22. How many inspectors have had their employment terminated by RSPCA NSW in the past 12 months?

No Inspectors were terminated.

23. Professional Dog Trainers Australia stated in their submission:

The PDTA caution against the RSPCA's exclusive promotion of "positive-only" dog training, emphasizing positive reinforcement without considering consequences or punishment.

Positive training methods have been shown to be as effective as negative/aversive training methods but without the use of fear or pain - can you explain why the RSPCA favours positive training models over punishment-based/aversive training techniques in response to comments by the PDTA?

RSPCA NSW is aware that the PDTA states a focus on results, not ideology. This is not a position RSPCA can adopt, whereby we would consider that any approach is justified to change animal behaviour. Our position is not unique amongst medical or psychological professions, whereby there is a responsibility to first do no harm and to adopt evidence-based approaches.

RSPCA is opposed to dog training methods and behaviour modification that involve aversive techniques, including physical force and fear. Our experts are very aware of the ability of aversive experiences (punishment) to suppress behaviours, but we are committed to adopting approaches that don't change

behaviour by suppressing it (making animals afraid to express it) but by changing the animal's feelings and motivations because this is the best way to improve welfare. Many of the behaviours we seek to change in the animals are symptoms of emotional distress or dysregulation which means approaching the task as a "training" exercise is inappropriate.

Our experts are also aware of the science demonstrating that punishment can be used at lower magnitudes and in ways (with predictability and control) that are likely to reduce the risk of causing significant harm. However, the research also demonstrates that the response to punishment by an individual animal is influenced by their genetics and previous experience, including the extent to which they have experienced punishment or aversive treatment previously and also whether the punishment is being used to extinguish an inherent or learned behaviour. These are variables that are not completely known about each animal that requires rehabilitation. Therefore, it is an unacceptable risk to employ techniques that could do harm.

Furthermore, the risk to the handler/owner is increased when suppressing unwanted behaviour using punishment. The sequelae of increasing pressure, force, fear or anxiety on a dog is that it may respond with repulsion behaviours such as biting, which is a reasonable response when threat is perceived. Evidence in the published literature shows that confrontational training methods increase aggressive responses in dogs.

RSPCA NSW strongly believes that an animal must have a life worth living and will, therefore, elect euthanasia where necessary, over a proposal to subject them to a life where their behaviour is controlled using force, pain or fear.

24. Professional Dog Trainers Australia stated in their submission, regarding the use of prong and shock collars:

Organisations like the RSPCA perpetuate misleading narratives about pain, fear, and injury associated with these tools, despite a lack of substantiation and cruelty charges from reputable sources.

Can you please provide a response about the concerns over the use of prong and shock collars on animals and why these should not be legal in NSW.

RSPCA NSW opposes the use of canine training devices that are designed to change behaviour by being sufficiently unpleasant to override the animal's motivation to perform the behaviour. Examples include prong and electric shock collars. This is a position also held by the Australian Veterinary Association, the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behaviour and the Pet Professional Guild of Australia.

It is conceptually obvious that the application of an electric shock to the skin's surface or the constriction/pinching of hard protrusions around the neck could be used to cause pain and could cause physical harm and injury. Physical punishment can cause varying degrees of pain, fear, stress, anxiety, hypervigilance and even long-term physiological harm/illness.

Where aversive stimuli are used, the chance of doing harm is reduced where the magnitude of the stimulus is low; there is a predictable, reliable signal associated with the stimuli, there is no delay between the behaviour and stimuli, and the individual animal has control to avoid the stimuli. Almost none of these mitigators would be reliably in place if these devices were made legal. The shock and prong collars involve the manual application of the punisher by the handler. If used in circumstances where the punishment is applied inconsistently, or with delayed timing, and/or the dog does not have the skills, knowledge or ability to choose an alternative behaviour, these devices will be applying the kind of unpredictable, unavoidable stressors that are known to cause profound harm in animals. Furthermore, as the dog fails to learn in these scenarios, would not be unusual for people to continue to increase the intensity of the punishment (the shock or neck pressure) to painful and dangerous points.

In addition to the general welfare risks and harms associated with aversive training techniques, there are specific welfare risks and harms that have been reported related to pronged collars, including stress,

aggression, lower owner satisfaction with their dogs' overall behaviour and leash walking behaviour and physical harm (acute blindness, severe swelling of the head, and inability to close the jaw, trauma and abrasions to the neck, serious puncture wounds, nerve damage, muscle injury, and laryngeal, oesophageal, thyroidal, and tracheal damage).

25. In previous annual reports, RSPCA NSW reported on euthanasia rates for each species of animal in their care, and provided a breakdown of reasons for euthanasia (e.g. medical, behavioural etc).

a. Why was this data not included in the 2023-24 annual report?

The NSW report continues to fully disclose the number of animals euthanised which was considered to be the most relevant statistic to demonstrate outcomes, with more detailed information available elsewhere.

RSPCA NSW decided to change the way they present animal outcome statistics as part of a long-term strategy to reshape the narrative around euthanasia at shelters. This decision was influenced by a review of reporting practices from American animal welfare organisations regarding live and non-live outcomes.

A shelter's success, whether at RSPCA NSW or other animal welfare organisations globally, should not be defined solely by euthanasia statistics or shelter capacity, even though these metrics often shape public perceptions of good animal welfare.

RSPCA NSW aims to move beyond outdated annual sheltering statistics to better showcase its impact and positive animal welfare outcomes. This involves evolving, and focusing more on the preventative, community outreach and rehabilitation efforts performed every day.

As detailed on page 23 of the annual report, RSPCA NSW introduced a new graph to illustrate the animal outcomes for the financial year, highlighting both live and non-live outcomes. This graph more accurately reflects the comprehensive efforts in live outcomes while transparently acknowledging non-live statistics. It also showcases the different facets of shelter operations, emphasising that effective animal welfare requires cross-collaborative support.

RSPCA NSW is committed to ensuring animals have a good quality of life and will continue to invest all available resources to address their medical and behavioural conditions. The RSPCA NSW euthanasia breakdown is still available on the RSPCA Australia website alongside other member societies.

b. Can you provide this data to the Committee on notice for the period of 2023-24?

This information is publicly available in the RSPCA Australia Annual Statistics.

<https://rspca.sfo2.cdn.digitaloceanspaces.com/public/Uploads/annual-statistics/RSPCA-Australia-Annual-Statistics-2022-2023.pdf>

The RSPCA Australia report gives detailed information on euthanasia rates for each species/species group at RSPCA NSW. It also includes this breakdown of euthanasia reasons for canines and felines.

Table 3: Reasons for euthanasia of dogs and cats by each RSPCA Society for the 2022-2023 financial year

	State/Territory RSPCA								Total
	ACT	Darwin ¹	NSW ²	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA	
Dogs									
Infectious	0	3	2	22	3	0	2	0	32
Medical	13	12	202	393	73	5	92	52	842
Behavioural	9	11	775	673	184	7	176	71	1,906
Legal	0	0	14	22	0	0	24	7	67
Other	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	22	28
Total dogs euthanased	22	26	993	1,116	260	12	294	152	2,875
Cats									
Infectious	4	0	423	370	13	0	96	2	908
Medical	58	7	751	808	257	132	247	46	2,306
Behavioural	81	2	781	161	451	44	624	68	2,212
Legal	0	0	0	174	1	228	0	0	403
Other	0	0	285	10	0	0	83	17	395
Total cats euthanased	143	9	2,240	1,523	722	404	1,050	133	6,224

Additionally please see the following:

REASONS FOR EUTHANASIA

	Behavioural	Fractional Feline	Infectious	Medical	Legal [†]	Organisational [‡]	TOTAL
Canines	775	0	2	202	14	0	993
Felines	488	293	423	751	0	285	2,240
Horses	1	0	0	13	0	0	14
Livestock	18	0	8	33	0	28	87
Wildlife	0	0	12	214	10	11	247
Other*	47	0	15	202	158	1	423
TOTAL	1,329	293	460	1,415	182	325	4,004

* Rodents, guinea pigs, ferrets, rabbits, birds and non-native
 † Deemed dangerous or menacing by local council
 ‡ Unweaned or too young to survive without their mother

26. RSPCA NSW was provided \$105,000 from the NSW Government to contribute towards your Lithgow Horse Care and Rehabilitation Centre. Can you please provide an update regarding this facility – is it operational, and if so, who is it being run by? If it is not yet operational, when can we expect to see this facility up and running?

RSPCA NSW gratefully received vital funding from the NSW Government in 2021 to enhance and upgrade several of our animal shelters across the state. This support underscores our shared commitment to improving the welfare of animals in our care and providing them with a safe and comfortable environment.

The \$10,500,000 provided by the NSW Government contributes towards almost \$21,000,000 worth of capital projects. We are thankful to our members, donors, and supporters, whose contributions have made these projects possible in this 50:50 partnership with the NSW Government.

Our organisation is dedicated to acting in accordance with our primary animal welfare objectives and doing so transparently and accountable. In line with this commitment, the Committee can be assured that funds received are acquitted in compliance with the NSW Government standards and overseen carefully by the issuing authority, in this case, the Office of Local Government. We are fully committed to meeting and exceeding the standards set by their rigorous guidelines and funding agreements.

These enhancements to our shelters prioritise the well-being of the animals and exceed industry standards. This includes improvements to shelter facilities, veterinary care, and overall living conditions for the animals under our protection. We believe strongly in the importance of responsible stewardship of public funds and are confident that the allocated resources are being used efficiently and effectively.

As part of this, RSPCA NSW has been provided \$105,000 from the NSW Government to contribute towards \$145,000 of capital works at our Lithgow Horse Care and Rehabilitation Centre, which has been prioritised accordingly. This project delivers a horse agistment facility that will help us meet the ongoing and increasing demands of the Inspectorate and shelter with respect to horse seizures and surrenders.

We are grateful for the support from the government and remain dedicated to our mission of promoting and protecting the welfare of animals. Our ongoing collaboration with the Department of Primary Industry and the Office of Local Government exemplifies our commitment to maintaining the highest animal care and shelter management standards. We look forward to keeping the public informed about the progress of these upgrades and the positive impact they will have on the lives of the animals in our care.

27. It is public record that RSPCA NSW seized many horses from Kim Hollingsworth as part of animal cruelty proceedings. Can you provide, on notice, how many horses were seized and what happened to each horse – for example, were they euthanised, or rehomed (and if so where) or are still in the care of RSPCA?

This question covers seizures related to hundreds of horses over 13 charged matters and some 15 years of enforcement activity. RSPCA NSW does not have the capacity in the two weeks over which this request is made to answer the scope of such a large question. Given the current inquiry relates to the 2022/2023 financial year, and no matters with respect to this defendant investigated, prosecuted or finalised in that financial year, it is not immediately apparent how this question can come within the terms of reference.

28. It has been reported that RSPCA NSW recently “pulled out” of the contract to operate pounds at Wollongong and Shellharbour. Can you please provide some more detail about what has occurred here, including how much notice RSPCA gave to the Councils about their decision to end the contract?

a. It has been suggested that, after providing notice to Wollongong Council that RSPCA NSW would no longer run the pound, the RSPCA NSW then changed their mind and had agreed to renew the contract, only to pull out again soon after. This caused the Council to lose an option of a new contractor to operate its facility who had been turned down to allow RSPCA to renew. Is this correct? If not, what do you say occurred between RSPCA NSW and Wollongong Council regarding this pound contract?

b. At any point in the last 12 months did RSCPA NSW indicate to Wollongong or Shellharbour Council that they may consider renewing the pound contract into 2024 and beyond? If so, please provide details of when and what this communication was.

There are 128 local councils in NSW that are each responsible for managing animals and providing a local pound.

Over the years, we have sought to partner with councils in areas of need to operate their pounds and assist with local companion animal management strategies. This work with councils has sometimes come at the cost of our mission due to stray animals consuming much of our resources.

Whilst this work was aligned with our organisation's strategic plan then, as we have evolved as an organisation and the needs of the animals and the communities have changed and increased, over time, this work - whilst still an important part of the animal welfare puzzle – has become less aligned with our core mission. Animal Welfare is an exceptionally large and complex industry, and many organisations and agencies must play a role if it is to be supported properly. It is too big for any one organisation to service on their own. We are uniquely positioned as an organisation to deliver a comprehensive and wholistic enforcement division alongside a critical and very relevant community support program, so focusing our future efforts on preventing animal cruelty and ensuring that we can accommodate the animals most in need, the mistreated animals, the neglected animals and the animals suffering from hardship and crisis alongside their committed owners in our shelter network is and should always be our priority.

Despite the move away from impound work, it is important to us that we continue working closely with the local government sector, there are still many proactive areas of animal welfare that we can partner on. We have had incredible success in reducing pound operational costs through our targeted high-intensity cat desexing programs that target low-income households and areas that have challenges with cat population numbers delivering positive returns on investment following the implementation of these strategies. We have repeatedly extended an open invitation to all Council's pound facilities to contact us before euthanising any rehoming animal they cannot continue providing care for.

We can't serve two masters. RSPCA NSW operates the country's largest animal welfare enforcement agency on behalf of the NSW Government. This leads to vast volumes of animals being seized from cruel owners and in our care at a moment's notice. It creates an impossible situation to manage this while also having to accept, care for, and rehabilitate animals seized by councils. We're determined to prioritise the most needy animals, and we don't shy away from the difficult decision not to renew any council pound management contracts, but we are confident in the knowledge that this is the best decision for the animals of NSW.

Many councils have benefited from the RSPCA subsidising their pound operations for decades and want that to continue. But our generous supporters and members have made it clear to the organisation that they don't want their donations used to help a council with more than a hundred million dollars in annual revenue over rescuing and rehabilitating animals who've been victims of cruelty, abuse and neglect.

RSPCA NSW is uniquely placed to deliver the best animal crime enforcement unit in the world. By focusing our efforts on this, we will take more significant strides towards achieving our goal of preventing animal cruelty. To do this, we are in the process of finalising the cessation of all council pound management contracts across the state. To support all councils across the state, the better use of our donations is expanding the prevention and community programs we already run.

While a difficult decision, it means that our organisation can prioritise the animals most in need - those who've been victims of criminal levels of animal cruelty.

In August 2021, RSPCA NSW notified both Wollongong City Council and Shellharbour City Council of our decision not to renew our animal shelter services contract. This decision allows RSPCA NSW to focus on our primary mission of preventing animal cruelty. The councils were given until December 2023 to establish alternative arrangements, with three subsequent extensions granted, the last of which concluded on 2 April 2024.

As of 29 March 2024, Wollongong City Council has launched its Animal Care and Impounding Service, designed to reunite lost pets with their owners and find new homes for abandoned pets.

This service marks a transition from the traditional model previously facilitated by RSPCA NSW, adapting to a network-based approach without a bricks-and-mortar facility. Instead, the Council is collaborating with local veterinary services and regional kennelling facilities to provide these services. The new Council service operates through their website and a dedicated phone line, offering assistance for lost, found, or stray animals, and manages the adoption process for unclaimed pets. They also provide guidance for updating

microchip information and procedures for surrendering pets, ensuring continued community support in managing lost and stray animals.

Support for all NSW Councils

We know that capacity constraints can put a lot of pressure on a pound and always appreciate the opportunity to give animals a second chance if a council has yet to be able to rehome it during the enforced holding times under the Act. So much so that we invested in a portal to streamline the transfer of animals from the Council's pound facilities, where council staff can complete a quick questionnaire about the animal and submit it to RSPCA NSW for intake consideration.

The portal has been live since July 1, 2022.

In FY22/23, we dedicated \$30,347,000 to programs directly supporting NSW councils. These costs exclude central on-costs for HR, payroll, IT, finance, and property services, as well as fundraising costs. They also don't account for the valuable contributions made by volunteers.

Programs offered by the RSPCA NSW play a crucial role in supporting local councils in NSW by addressing various community needs related to pet ownership. Each program contributes to the well-being of both pets and their owners while benefiting local councils. RSPCA NSW's programs provide essential services that directly impact the welfare of pets and their owners, ultimately contributing to the well-being of communities. By addressing specific challenges faced by vulnerable populations, these programs indirectly relieve pressure on local councils and services, promoting responsible pet ownership and community welfare.

- Aged Care Program:
 - Objective:
 - The Aged Care program aims to support elderly pet owners, senior Indigenous pet owners, and palliative care patients by keeping them and their pets together for as long as possible.
 - Services Provided:
 - Temporary foster accommodation and emergency pet boarding during the owner's medical treatment or respite.
 - Assistance with veterinary treatment to ensure the pet's health.
 - Home visits to assist with basic pet care, grooming, and transportation to local veterinarians.
 - Impact on Local Councils:
 - Reduces the likelihood of elderly pet owners relinquishing their pets to shelters due to health challenges.
 - Addresses potential concerns related to the welfare of pets belonging to vulnerable populations.

- Community Domestic Violence Program:
 - Objective:
 - This program aims to provide practical solutions for pet owners leaving domestic violence situations by offering safe housing and care for their pets.
 - Services Provided:
 - Temporary foster accommodation and emergency pet boarding.
 - Financial assistance for veterinary treatment, impound fees, and transport fees.
 - Impact on Local Councils:
 - Mitigates challenges faced by individuals leaving violent relationships, reducing the burden on local shelters and services.
 - Promotes the safety and well-being of both human and animal victims of domestic violence.

- Community Homelessness Program:
 - Objective:
 - Addresses the emotional, mental, and physical benefits of the relationships between homeless individuals and their pets.
 - Services Provided:
 - Temporary foster accommodation and emergency pet boarding.
 - Financial assistance for veterinary treatment and impound fees.
 - Impact on Local Councils:
 - Alleviates distress for homeless pet owners, preventing them from surrendering their pets due to hardship.
 - Supports the mental well-being of homeless individuals and indirectly contributes to community welfare.

- Outreach Animal Assistance Programs:
 - Objective:
 - Targets overpopulation of unwanted companion animals and provides core veterinary services, reducing the number of animals entering pounds and shelters.
 - Services Provided:
 - Subsidised desexing, microchipping, and vaccinations through schemes like CAWS and Community Vaccination Days.
 - Education campaigns to raise awareness about responsible pet ownership.
 - Impact on Local Councils:
 - Collaborative efforts with local councils reduce the burden on council-run shelters and veterinary services.
 - Contributes to community awareness, leading to a decrease in stray animals and associated issues.

- Indigenous Community Companion Animal Health Program:
 - Objective:
 - Improves the health and safety of Aboriginal children and families in remote communities by addressing the health and welfare of companion animals.
 - Services Provided:
 - Veterinary services and education on animal and human health, well-being, and responsible pet ownership.
 - Impact on Local Councils:
 - Reduces the prevalence of stray dogs, lowering the risk of disease spread and other issues in remote communities.
 - Enhances the overall health and welfare of both animals and humans in Indigenous communities.

- Disaster Relief and Support Program:
 - Objective:
 - Provides support to communities following natural disasters, caring for pets when people lose their homes and supplying essentials for pet owners who have lost their homes.
 - Services Provided:
 - Emergency care for pets affected by natural disasters, including temporary accommodation and essentials for pet owners who lost their homes.
 - Impact on Local Councils:
 - Prevents an influx of displaced animals relying on the local council pound, thereby alleviating strain on local animal services.
 - Supports community recovery efforts by addressing the specific needs of pet owners affected by natural disasters.

- School Education Program:
 - Objective:
 - RSPCA NSW invests in the future through education programs, school visits, and resources for teachers to teach generations to come kindness and compassion towards all animals, and how to responsibly care for them.
 - Services Provided:
 - Education programs for primary and secondary students and professional development for teachers and early childhood educators.
 - Programs in the school holidays for children aged eight to 17 years and family fun events on weekends.
 - Partnerships with the NSW Government and Councils to promote campaigns like “Adopt Don’t Shop” through school engagement.
 - Impact on Local Councils:
 - Promotes responsible pet ownership and compassion towards animals from an early age, reducing future instances of neglect or abandonment.
 - Strengthens partnerships with local communities and councils to build a culture of animal welfare awareness.

- Keeping Cats Safe at Home Program:
 - Objective:
 - The "Keeping Cats Safe at Home" project is run by RSPCA NSW thanks to a \$2.5 million grant from the NSW Government Environmental Trust.
 - This 4-year behaviour change project aims to improve care for pet cats through responsible cat ownership and to protect wildlife from cat predation.
 - Keeping Cats Safe at Home aims to encourage and support cat owners to prevent their cats from roaming away from their properties both to keep cats safe and to protect native wildlife.
 - Services Provided:
 - Encouraging pet owners to keep cats within the boundaries of their property to prevent harm from accidents, diseases, and attacks from other animals.
 - Collaborating with 11 local councils across NSW, consulting with local stakeholders, including veterinarians, wildlife organisations, and the general community.
 - Impact on Local Councils:
 - Alleviates concerns related to the impact of domestic cats on local wildlife, promoting responsible cat ownership and reducing the need for local wildlife management.
 - Fosters collaboration between RSPCA NSW and local councils to address issues related to cat predation and wildlife protection.
 - The project has created tailored toolkits for 11 partner council areas across NSW as well as resources to equip cat lovers everywhere with the knowledge and skills to help their cats live their best lives at home.
 - Social science and ecology research monitors the effectiveness of the campaign so we can apply what we learn in other locations in NSW and further afield.

- Rehoming and Community Support Program:
 - Objective:
 - RSPCA NSW operates an ongoing Rehoming and Community Support Program dedicated to the continuous rehoming of animals in the community, including those that are stray or surrendered.
 - This initiative aims to find loving homes for animals while assisting local councils in managing their populations.
 - Services Provided:

- Ongoing rehabilitation and rehoming efforts for animals, with a focus on finding suitable and caring homes for strays and surrendered pets.
- Impact on Local Councils:
 - It helps alleviate the burden on local council pounds by actively engaging in rehoming efforts and reducing the number of animals within council facilities.
 - Collaborative initiatives ensure a smoother process for local councils in managing stray and surrendered animals, fostering a shared responsibility for the welfare of these pets.
 - The Rehoming and Community Support Program offers ongoing support to councils in managing their responsibilities while ensuring that animals, whether stray or surrendered, find loving and permanent homes within the community.
 - Around 50% of our capacity is used by stray and surrendered animals across the state. These thousands of animals would otherwise need to be cared for by the local council pound.

Steve Coleman, CEO, RSPCA NSW

1. Does Sarah Cruickshank have an insurmountable conflict in her occupation and her position on the RSPCA NSW Board?

No. Our Directors, including Ms Cruickshank, oversee governance, risk, budgets, and strategy. Operations are the responsibility of Management. Ms Cruickshank also completes the requisite disclosures with her employer annually.

2. What is Steve Coleman's employment history (years of experience and qualifications) with RSPCA NSW?

Steve Coleman has been employed with RSPCA NSW since 1991, amassing over 30 years of experience within the organisation. He has held various positions during his tenure, including Inspector, Deputy Chief Inspector, Chief Inspector, Deputy CEO, and CEO. Steve Coleman holds a Graduate Diploma in Investigations Management and a Master's Degree in Business Administration and is a Graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

3. The committee heard allegations of bullying and nepotism in recruitment and HR investigations. How do you respond to those criticisms?

RSPCA NSW takes any allegations of bullying and nepotism very seriously. We have stringent policies and procedures to ensure all recruitment and HR activities are conducted fairly and transparently. Any complaints or allegations are investigated thoroughly, and appropriate actions are taken based on the findings.

4. When were Beaumont Group engaged by RSPCA NSW, for what purpose and what, if any, outcomes did you implement in HR?

Beaumont Group have been engaged since 2013 to provide short term contract staff for administrative roles.

5. What happened in relation to an investigation about a pig owned by a former staff member?

There was no investigation into this matter.

6. Is there any record of Karen Davies reporting any complaint to the RSPCA NSW Board of Directors or on her HR file?

We maintain confidential records of all complaints and their outcomes in accordance with regulatory obligations.

7. AWL were asked about their branch involvement, can you provide some indication about your branch and shelter coverage across NSW and what they are proactively engaged in in rural or regional NSW?

RSPCA NSW has a branch network of 18 across NSW, comprised of 7 branches and 11 Supporter Groups. Each group plays a vital role in supporting communities through desexing programs, fundraising initiatives and more depending on their member and volunteer capacity. Many offer emergency vet assistance programs alongside their desexing programs and host 'People and Pet' days in their local communities where services such as free microchipping, flea and tick and worming products are supplied to those members of the community most in need.

In times of emergencies, our Branches and Supporter Groups will, where possible, assist at emergency relief points. This was evident in both the 2019/20 bushfires and the 2022 floods, where several regional groups manned pop-up relief points, assisting with handing out food and other pet products to people who had been displaced.

In FY 22/23 the Branches and Supporter Groups contributed \$197,185.24 to desexing programs in their communities. They spent \$98, 293.71 on emergency vet assistance.

The location of our branches and supporter groups across the state include Albury, Bathurst, Blue Mountains, Broken Hill, New England, Snowy Monaro, Central West, Eurobodalla, Glen Innes, Goulburn, Hunter, Illawarra, Inverell, Shoalhaven, Orange, Port Macquarie, Sydney, and Taree.

In 2022 we launched a new model of volunteering- Community Volunteer Groups (CVGs). Similar to branches and Supporter Groups, we aim to expand our reach across NSW to further extend our desexing, veterinary assistance, education and fundraising programs. The difference with this model is that they are not member-based, offering a more flexible opportunity for volunteering.

In addition to the work of our branches, RSPCA NSW are an active contributor in communities right across New South Wales. RSPCA NSW's combined totals from both the Community Programs (Domestic Violence Program, Aged Care Program, Homelessness, Pet Emergency Treatment and Mental Health and Emergency Boarding Program; and the Community Outreach programs (Community Animal Wellbeing Scheme (CAWS), Healthy Pet Days, and the Indigenous Community Companion Animal Health Program (ICCAHP) are summarised to show an incredible output.

8. Can you describe the potential psychological toll that erroneous and false criticisms about your care for animals has on your staff? For example, allegations that you euthanise animals for convenience or cost.

The potential psychological toll of erroneous and false criticisms on the staff of RSPCA NSW can be significant. Allegations such as those claiming the organisation euthanises animals for convenience or cost can have a profound impact on the mental health and well-being of staff who are dedicated to animal care.

- Emotional and Psychological Stress: Staff members and volunteers at animal welfare organisations like RSPCA NSW are often deeply committed to their work and the animals they care for. False accusations can lead to feelings of frustration, helplessness, and demoralisation. The psychological burden is cumbersome when the accusations question their work's core values and ethics, which they are passionate about.
- Increased Anxiety and Burnout: Such criticisms can contribute to heightened levels of anxiety and stress among staff. Constantly defending their practices and dealing with public scrutiny can lead to burnout, a condition characterised by emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment. This is particularly prevalent among those in caregiving professions who deal with emotionally charged situations regularly.
- Compassion Fatigue: Compassion fatigue is another significant issue arising from the continuous demand for empathy and compassion in their roles. When faced with false accusations, staff may experience a diminished capacity for empathy, adversely affecting their ability to perform their duties effectively. This condition is exacerbated by the emotional labour of caring for animals, particularly in distressing circumstances.
- Impact on Job Satisfaction and Retention: False criticisms can lead to lower job satisfaction and higher turnover rates. Employees who feel unsupported or unfairly judged are more likely to leave their positions, leading to instability and increased recruitment and training costs for the organisation. Ensuring a supportive work environment and addressing these criticisms constructively is crucial for maintaining a stable workforce.

To mitigate these impacts, RSPCA NSW implements several measures, including:

- **Providing Support and Counselling:** Offering staff access to professional mental health support and counselling services.
- **Training in Stress Management:** Regular training sessions on managing stress and recognising the symptoms of burnout and compassion fatigue.
- **Promoting Open Dialogue:** Encouraging open discussions about the impact of false criticisms and ways to cope with them.
- **Creating Clear Communication Strategies:** Clear communication strategies are used to address public misconceptions and provide accurate information about the organisation's practices.

While the work of RSPCA NSW staff is gratifying, it is not without its psychological challenges, especially in the face of false and damaging criticisms.

9. Has RSPCA NSW undertaken any staff satisfaction and engagement surveys recently, can you provide any details if so?

RSPCA NSW is committed to maintaining a positive work environment and regularly implements feedback from surveys to enhance our workplace practices.

RSPCA NSW has an employee engagement platform that connects staff to communication and chat channels, current workplace events, and a Knowledge Library that contains a vast amount of information, including policies and procedures, standard operating procedures, and business templates.

The results of our engagement surveys for 2022 and 2023 were positive, with employees' aggregate ratings ranging from satisfactory to very satisfactory.

Will Beerden, General Manager of Regulation and Business Services, RSPCA NSW

1. What were the safe work performance notices? What is the outcome of those? Have they been rectified?

In the last 12 months, RSPCA NSW has been issued two SafeWork improvement notices. Here are the details of the notices:

Improvement Notice No: 7-470979 (Issued on 05/03/2024)

- Issued regarding:
 - Work Health and Safety Act 2011, section 19 and Work Health and Safety Regulation 2017, clause 55C.
- Matter:
 - Workers and others may be exposed to risks of injury or illness from workplace violence due to inadequate identification of psychological risks.
- Remediation Requirements:
 - Provide and maintain safe systems of work related to controlling workplace violence.
 - Conduct initial risk assessments of sites prior to attendance, review incidents, and assess new employees' competency in the field.
 - Provide information, instruction, and training on identified risks and implemented control measures.

In relation to Improvement Notice No: 7-470979, consultation on a documented risk assessment procedure is underway within the inspectorate.

Improvement Notice No: 7-470983 (Issued on 05/03/2024)

- Issued regarding:
 - Work Health and Safety Act 2011, section 19 and Work Health and Safety Regulation 2017, clause 55D.
- Matter:
 - Workers and others may be exposed to risks of injury or illness from workplace violence due to the business not ensuring the implementation and utilisation of identified control measures.
- Remediation Requirements:
 - Ensure identified control measures to eliminate psychological risks are implemented and regularly reviewed for appropriateness.

Provide information, instruction, and training on the identified risks and control measures.

In relation to Improvement Notice No: 7-470983, the provision of relevant personal protective equipment along with defence training, including the use of batons and handcuffs, has been concluded. A Two-out officer jobs policy has been drafted and consultation with the inspectorate has commenced.

RSPCA NSW is working with Safework NSW to ensure measures are in place in accordance with their notices before the compliance date of 4 June 2024.

2. What are Scott Meyer's qualifications?

Mr Meyers holds a Diploma in Management, Certificates 3 and 4 and a Diploma in Government Investigations and is currently enrolled in a Master of Business Administration and has certificate qualifications from the University of Auckland in relation to Equine reproduction. Mr Meyers commenced employment in June 2007 and has held the positions of Shelter Supervisor, Shelter Manager, Inspector, Team Leader, Deputy Chief and Chief Inspector since December 2018.

3. On what basis was Megan Richards recruited and promoted?

Megan Richards was recruited and promoted to the RSPCA NSW Deputy Chief Inspector position based on merit after an internal recruitment process. At RSPCA NSW, we our HR recruitment procedures ensure we identify and employ the best candidates for each role.

The criteria for the DCI position recruitment and Ms Richards promotion included:

- **Qualifications:** Ms Richards holds extensive qualifications relevant to animal welfare, law enforcement, and leadership, which are critical for the role of Deputy Chief Inspector.
- **Experience:** She has a robust background in animal protection and law enforcement, demonstrating her capability through years of dedicated service and consistent performance in various roles within and outside RSPCA NSW.
- **Attitude and Personal Attributes:** Ms Richards embodies RSPCA NSW's core values and mission. Her commitment, integrity, and passion for animal welfare have been evident throughout her career. She consistently demonstrates a positive attitude and strong leadership qualities, essential for guiding and inspiring her team.
- **Performance:** Ms Richards' track record of excellence, including her ability to handle complex cases, her strategic thinking, and her practical management skills, has significantly contributed to her advancement within the organisation.
- **Continuous Improvement and Development:** Ms Richards is committed to continuous learning and professional development, always seeking to enhance her skills and knowledge to better serve the organisation and the community.

In relation to Megan Richards' appointment:

- All team leaders in RSPCA NSW were sent an expression of interest to apply for the Deputy Chief Inspector position.
- 2 Applicants applied.
- The alternate applicant withdrew their application for reasons they conveyed to the recruitment panel
- Ms Richards was interviewed by a recruitment panel convened consisting of the Chief Inspector and the HR Manager. Ms Richards' extensive 21 years of front-line operational police service in the NSW Police Force, including 11 years as a full-time Team Leader of operational police in both Sydney metropolitan and regional areas, were considered in appointing Ms Richards to the role. Upon leaving the NSW Police Force, Ms Richards held the Highest rank of Sergeant and was a qualified Duty Officer/Inspector. Since leaving the NSWPF in 2011, Ms Richards had extensive Trainer experience through working at a Registered Training Organisation. Since 2019 and prior to filling the DCI role, Ms Richards was employed by RSPCA NSW as a full-time operational Regional Inspector and then became Team Leader for the Central Regional area.
- The role of DCI is a 12-month secondment which expires in October 2024.

At RSPCA NSW, we ensure that our recruitment and promotion decisions are fair, transparent, and based on a holistic evaluation of each candidate's qualifications, experience, and personal attributes. Megan Richards' recruitment and subsequent promotion reflect her exceptional suitability for the role and unwavering dedication to animal welfare.

4. Are horses agisted with family members of Inspectorate staff, if so on what basis?

On occasion and in certain circumstances and where alternative agistment has either been unavailable at short notice or was significantly more expensive for the same service. This situation occurred when, in October 2016, RSPCA NSW seized 6 horses and sought agistment to handle the horses at short notice. Quotes for agistment from external providers were very high, and the initial agistment cost RSPCA NSW was paying \$45 per day per horse. Consequently, Mr Meyers, then North Region Team Leader, informed his direct report manager about his sister-in-law's offer to provide agistment for \$10 per day per month.

The horses were subsequently relocated, and costs were recovered via court order having been approved by Mr Meyer's direct report.

The period over which horses were agisted with Mr Meyers' sister-in-law was between 2016 and 2020, during which NSW experienced record levels of drought. The effect of the drought resulted in the cost of agistment skyrocketing, particularly due to high feed prices. It also made securing agistment at short notice very difficult. 32 horses were agisted with Mr Meyers' sister-in-law during this time at a cost of between \$10 and \$15 per day per horse, which was a significant cost reduction from the market price which was typically up to \$45 per horse per day. As a charity seeking to best expend funds, as the conflict was declared, and horses involved in court matters are typically agisted for prolonged periods, this was a reasonable and financially prudent decision. No horses have ever been purchased / adopted / transferred or sold to CI Meyer's sister-in-law.

5. Was a conflict of interest raised and how was it managed or mitigated?

Yes, a conflict of interest was raised by CI Meyers. At the time, he identified a potential conflict of interest and brought it to his direct manager's attention, the then Chief Inspector and Chief Operations Officer's. To manage and mitigate this conflict, CI Meyers removed himself from the decision-making process regarding the agistment of the horses with his sister-in-law's business. Furthermore he did not direct any staff to deliver horses for agistment to his sister-in-law, nor did he approve any invoices. This ensured that the decision was made impartially and without any undue influence.

6. Have any RSPCA NSW horses agisted with a third party?

Yes, RSPCA NSW has regularly had horses agisted with third parties, including with veterinarians where required for the provision of veterinary treatment, commercial agistment providers, and foster carers, in some cases foster carers have been used for many years whilst court matters are being resolved, including for example one lovely veterinary nurse who cared for a pony for years whilst a court matter finished. The nurse applied to adopt the pony at the conclusion of proceedings and the pony got to remain in the loving home with their paddock mate. In the particular instance mentioned, the agistment was sought from external providers before considering the offer from Mr Meyers' sister-in-law due to the high costs quoted by those providers. Therefore, agisting with third parties is a practice followed by RSPCA NSW when necessary, and decisions are always taken with a view to improving the welfare of the horses seized and awarded to RSPCA NSW.

7. What conflict of interest or third party benefit policies does RSPCA NSW have?

RSPCA NSW has stringent policies to manage conflicts of interest and third-party benefits. These policies include:

- Declaration of conflicts of interest is an essential term in RSPCA NSW employment contracts. Employees are contractually obligated to act in the best interest of RSPCA NSW.
- A conflict of interest policy – this requires employees to act in the best interest of RSPCA NSW
- Disclosure of Conflicts: Staff members must disclose any potential conflicts of interest to their supervisors or direct report managers.
- Related Parties Policy. If a conflict of interest is identified, the staff member must disclose the conflict.

Recusal from Decision-Making: If a conflict of interest is identified, the involved staff member must recuse themselves from any related decision-making processes.

These measures ensure that all decisions are made in the best interest of the organisation and the animals under its care, upholding the highest standards of ethical conduct.

Kathryn Jurd, General Counsel, RSPCA NSW

1. Karen Davies asserted that enforcement of POCTAA is determined or influenced by board and/or management. Is this true?

This is not true. I have never met Ms Davies, so any version given by her does not reflect at least the last seven years of RSPCA NSW prosecutorial function. I have inquired and do not believe that she had individual access to RSPCA NSW inspectorate or prosecutorial decision making even at the time of her employment, now some 9 years ago.

RSPCA NSW has independence policies with respect both the investigations function and the prosecutions function. We adopted the NSW ODPP Prosecution Guidelines over a decade ago and continue to apply those guidelines to decisions made every day in the legal team.

a. How are investigations and prosecutions conducted or determined?

This process was first provided in a submission to the NSW Select Committee in late 2018. It has been inquired into at least three times since then. There has never been a finding by any court or Parliamentary Committee that RSPCA NSW has failed to exercise its enforcement function independently.

The Act provides for a range of compliance and enforcement mechanisms, allowing Inspectors to respond in an appropriate and graduated manner to complaints and, where detected, to any alleged offence according to the severity of the offence and the impact on animal welfare.

In any given case, an Inspector may take one or more of the following steps short of recommending prosecution of an offence:

- **Informal action:** In investigating a complaint, an Inspector may liaise with the alleged offender, attend the location of any animals concerned and record relevant information. Inspectors can, in appropriate cases, offer advice and make requests regarding the treatment of the animals in question and follow up to monitor progress. If the alleged offender complies with the advice given and any requests made by the Inspector, the Inspector might then consider it appropriate to close the matter.
- **Written Directions pursuant to section 24N of the Act:** If an Inspector is satisfied on reasonable grounds that a person is contravening a provision of the Act or the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Regulation 2012* (NSW) (the regulations), he or she is empowered to give the alleged offender a written direction pursuant to s 24N of the Act, requiring that they take specified action regarding animal care (for example, presenting the animal to a registered veterinarian for examination within a specified period of time). Failure to comply with such a notice without reasonable excuse is an offence under the Act.
- **Official caution:** In appropriate circumstances, where an Inspector believes on reasonable grounds that a person has committed an offence for which a penalty notice could be issued, he or she may liaise with the Chief Inspector to give an official caution,¹ as an alternative to seeking an immediate penalty. Official cautions can be issued where a minor breach of the legislation or regulations has occurred, but where the animal welfare outcomes were not so egregious as to require more serious action to be taken. For example, an animal that was not provided veterinary treatment as quickly as was necessary given the situation, but ultimately the owner attended to the animal's needs appropriately. An offence of failing to provide veterinary treatment can be proved in those circumstances but, because of the outcome for the animal, a caution may be considered the more appropriate regulatory response.

¹ Pursuant to *Fines Act 1996* (NSW) s 19A.

- **Penalty Infringement Notice:** Inspectors are also empowered to issue Penalty Infringement Notices for prescribed offences under the Act and the regulations. Depending on the circumstances of the commission of an offence, the outcome to the animal and discretionary factors (for example, the response of persons in charge to directions issued, or their longstanding and otherwise untarnished record of animal ownership), it may be considered appropriate for an Inspector to issue a Penalty Infringement Notice, rather than to commence proceedings for the offence.
- **Prosecution:** where the above are insufficient to deal with the alleged animal cruelty, or as determined by POCTAA (see s24J for example), then Inspectors may determine to refer the brief to the RSPCA NSW Brief Checker for review and a recommendation. If a determination is made that there may be insufficient evidence, the brief will be referred for legal advice and assigned to a solicitor to assist. Where the brief checker considers there is evidence capable of proving a charge or charges to the criminal standard, he submits a recommendation to the Chief Inspector who authorises the commencement of proceedings via the laying, serving and filing of court attendance notices in the NSW Local Court. Complex matters including, interim disposal applications, mental health applications, sentence proceedings, defended hearings and appeals are allocated to a solicitor or where necessary briefed to Counsel. RSPCA NSW utilise the assistance of private criminal law firms, and barristers from several chambers to ensure the equitable briefing of matters and appropriate independence of advice is received.

2. Ms Davies also gave evidence that RSPCA NSW did not investigate or prosecute hoarder premises because of cost, is this true?

No, it is not true, and again this evidence must be some decade out of date.

RSPCA NSW utilises many methods for dealing with hoarded populations of animals, and in the last couple of years that has included thousands of horses and other stock animals, dogs, cats, birds, poultry (including cockfighting roosters) and pocket pets. RSPCA NSW will attempt to work with hoarders to reduce populations via staged surrenders. There are also many and complex mental health disorders associated with animal hoarding, and RSPCA NSW advocates for a level of respect and empathy for people experiencing poor mental health which impacts on their animals. However, where necessary RSPCA NSW regularly executes search warrants, seizes animals, issues s24N written directions, issues PINS and commences proceedings (in order to get custody and protective orders rather than punitive penalties) as appropriate.

3. The ACA witnesses refer to a prosecution with a Great Dane:

a. Had the owner taken the dog to the vet?

No, the dog hadn't seen a vet since 2019.

b. Did you make inquiries with the vet?

Yes, the Inspector called the vet from the scene.

c. When was that prosecution?

December 2021.

d. What was the outcome of the prosecution?

The defendant entered a plea of guilty to a charge that he failed to provide veterinary treatment to the Great Dane for multiple veterinary conditions. The Magistrate convicted him, fined him \$5000 and awarded s30A veterinary treatment and shelter costs of \$1462.98. The defendant was disqualified from purchasing, acquiring, taking possession or custody of any additional animals for a period of two years.

In relation to evidence given before the Committee, and notwithstanding the protection afforded by parliamentary privilege, there was evidence given to this Committee which must have been obtained in

contravention of the Harman Undertaking. In addition, the evidence that was given was incorrect and related to a different dog, not the dog the subject of these proceedings. The evidence is sourced from documents produced in the criminal proceedings under cover of a subpoena to the NSW Police Commissioner. The witnesses not being a party to those proceedings and having not sought a waiver of the undertaking by the Commissioner, ought not have disclosed the evidence, and should have told the Committee the source of their information.

4. What is the role RSPCA NSW plays in providing animal welfare or legal advice to NSW Government departments, committees and inquiries?

RSPCA NSW provides animal welfare, veterinary, legal and policy advice to all levels of government (national, state and local) on a regular and ongoing basis. Experts review documents, sometimes at quite short notice, and in respect of varied aspects of our operations all of the time, including at the request of individual parliamentarians, departments and individuals. We regularly provide advice as to interpretation, practical effects and policy implications possibly on a weekly basis.

RSPCA NSW reports to the NSW Parliament via submission and evidence before inquiries and various of the portfolio committees. We also regularly participate in animal welfare targeted inquiries, relevantly including:

- a. 2023 – Inquiry into the operation of the approved charitable organisations under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979* (Portfolio Committee No 4 – Regional NSW – annual and ongoing)
- b. 2023-2024 – Proposed aerial shooting of brumbies in Kosciuszko National Park (Animal Welfare Committee)
- c. 2023 – 2024 – Pounds in NSW (Portfolio Committee No 8 – Customer Service)
- d. 2023 – Veterinary workforce shortage in NSW (Portfolio Committee No 4 – Regional NSW)
- e. 2022 – Puppy farm inquiry
- f. 2022 – Inquiry into Animal Welfare Policy in NSW
- g. 2020 – Animal Cruelty Legislative Council Standing Committee Inquiry

Senior staff have participated in, and currently sit on, multiple Committees and reference groups including:

- a. Office of Local Government’s Responsible pet ownership reference group
- b. GWIC Animal Welfare Committee
- c. Animal Research Review Panel
- d. Exhibited Animals Advisory Committee
- e. Kangaroo Management Advisory Panel
- f. Vet Ministerial Advisory Committee
- g. Wildlife Licensing Committee

5. Can you respond to an allegation that RSPCA NSW has prosecuted or declined to prosecute rescue groups because of a personal association with the organisation?

See answer to question one. If Ms Davies has direct examples, they might be provided so we can respond with some precision.

Generally, however RSPCA NSW has prosecuted various rescue organisations usually via proceedings commenced directly against manager / directors, or by penalty infringement notice against the company or individuals. We have also prosecuted members of various industry associations, issue with which has previously been taken for example by witnesses on behalf of Animal Care Australia. It appears that various witnesses take issue both with RSPCA NSW exercising functions under the Act, and not exercising functions under the Act in respect of the same cruelty complaint. It is clearly the case that as an independent enforcement agency sometimes the interests of justice require one or more parties to be dissatisfied with the determination made in individual instances.

6. ACA gave evidence about a large bird seizure:

a. How many birds?

ACA have given evidence about this matter in previous inquiries. It is difficult to know which matter is being referenced by the evidence given at hearing, however it seems from references to this case previously, that the evidence refers to a prosecution from early 2022 in respect of 50 birds kept in a western Sydney apartment. Nineteen bird cages were found inside the apartment, which was filled with debris, in some places stacked to the ceiling. The cages were extremely overcrowded, with 50 living birds forced to share enclosures with 42 deceased, decomposing birds. The matter was reported on via an RSPCA NSW blog post [available here](#).

b. What was the outcome for the birds?

A total of 50 live birds and 42 deceased birds were seized from the location. All surviving birds were medically assessed by veterinarians. A certificate of expert evidence from a specialist avian veterinarian

- All birds were treated with anti-parasitic medications for lice and intestinal worms as per normal RSPCA intake procedure.
- All birds were provided species appropriate diets and fresh water
- All birds were placed in clean, well-ventilated cages
- All birds were given an intramuscular antibiotic injection for treatment of *Chlamydia psittaci*
- All birds were given in water multivitamin supplementation
- All birds were given in water anti-coccidial treatment
- 0734944 was moved into an isolation hospital ward for intensive treatment, including fluid therapy, support feeding and thermal support in a humidicrib.

Sadly 49 out of the 50 birds were euthanised as they were suffering from the zoonotic disease psittacosis. The mortality rate of psittacosis can reach upwards of 50% in birds. However, this percentage depends on such factors as the species and health of the affected bird and how early the disease is caught and treated. If psittacosis is caught early and treated properly, the prognosis may actually be quite good. Treatment involves administration of an antibiotic for approximately 45 days. Stressful conditions or simultaneous infections may result in more severe disease and a worse outcome. It should also be noted that although treatment may make the bird feel better, the bird may remain a carrier of *Chlamydia psittaci*. This means the bird could become sick with psittacosis and spread it to other birds and humans at some point in the future. It was determined to be an unacceptable risk to rehome birds that may be carriers for a serious zoonotic disease.

One sulphur - crested cockatoo was medically cleared and was adopted.

c. What was the court outcome, including costs awarded?

The Court convicted two defendants of offences relating to failure to provide veterinary treatment to 12 emaciated birds, 5 birds with various eye conditions, and failing to provide appropriate housing for the 50 living birds. The Magistrate fined each defendant \$6000 and imposed a 2-year Community Corrections Order. In addition, the defendants were disqualified for two years from owning animals. The male defendant was ordered to pay \$12,027.85 in veterinary care and shelter costs, and the female defendant was ordered to pay \$6,728.43 in costs, expenses incurred by RSPCA NSW in caring for the birds the subject of these charges.

7. Does RSPCA NSW try to educate people when investigating animal cruelty complaints? How and what is the evidence of that?

RSPCA NSW Inspectors encounter different causes of animal cruelty and neglect in the community. Often, cruelty or neglect is attended by ignorance, either of the law or of the suffering of animals in a person's care. There are also people in the community who, through no fault of their making, are unable to properly care for their animals, for instance, because of mental health issues, poverty, or homelessness. In these cases, RSPCA NSW provides education and support, working to address the very many preventable cases

of cruelty in which small amounts of knowledge and support can make a considerable difference. In other cases, the cause is apathy; people who know what they should be doing but nonetheless neglect to do it. This often requires a combination of education, the use of other statutory powers (for example, a legally enforceable direction to the owner to undertake certain action) and, ultimately, the threat of enforcement action. Finally, RSPCA NSW Inspectors encounter cases of cruelty or neglect for commercial gain or with malicious intent. These can only be dealt with by the use of statutory powers and enforcement action.

The RSPCA NSW Community team encompasses Volunteer Support Services, Foster Care, Education & Training, and Outreach Programs.

The Community (Education) team delivers community-based education and outreach programs to a wide range of community organisations (such as Headspace, Scouts/Guides and Youth Off The Streets) and provides courses in schools from pre-school to tertiary level.

RSPCA NSW is also the only non-university-based provider contracted by the University of Sydney to teach animal handling courses for veterinary students. It also provides nationally accredited courses as a Registered Training Organisation (RTO), including Certificate II in Animal Studies, Microchipping Cats and Dogs and Basic First Aid for Animals.

RSPCA NSW Inspectors work closely with the Community (Education) and (Programs) teams and, in appropriate circumstances, Inspectorate matters are referred to Programs for the provision of outreach assistance in lieu of enforcement action. These include matters where, for example, the animal owners and/or persons in charge need specialised support in the context of domestic violence, homelessness, social isolation or ill-health (whether physically or mentally). In other cases, an Inspector may identify that an owner needs help in better understanding how to care for an animal/animals or how to access assistance, and the Community team may provide them with educational material – for example, copies of DPI publications regarding animal welfare codes, drought relief packages or community and education resources on matters such as safe animal handling practices or routine animal husbandry.

The Community (Programs) team provides community-based outreach support services in a variety of areas in the NSW community, including to the aged, the homeless and victims of domestic violence. These support services include, for example, low/no cost access to veterinary treatment, boarding, vaccinations and de-sexing procedures.

8. What appeal processes exist for POCTAA offences?

For charged matters the normal criminal appeal processes operate pursuant to the *Crimes (Appeal and Review) Act 2001* (NSW). Very few matters proceed to appeal and reflect less than 10% of all matters finalised in the NSW Local Court. However, this avenue of appeal as of right following conviction and sentence, does operate as a check on the proceedings in the NSW Local Court. Whilst individual charges (not in the last FY) have been overturned on appeal, no prosecution has been the subject of a successful District Court or Supreme Court appeal (noting the initially successful Brighton appeal was overturned by the Court of Appeal).

DATE 22 May 2024

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: *Thank you. Organisations—it's about people and money, so I'll go to the money question first. You mentioned in your opening statement about the \$20.5 million. Can you detail how that recent inspectorate funding has been utilised to improve animal welfare and safety across New South Wales.*

STEVEN COLEMAN: *If I may, I might defer to Mr Beerden, who's got the breakdown.*

WILLIAM BEERDEN: *Thank you. In terms of how we've contributed, the funding provided for 37 full-time staff, ranging from inspectors; digital intelligence officers; a 24-hour call centre, which we've implemented; and some capital funding as well, for motor vehicles, for example, and equipment. The majority of those additional uplifting inspectors have been employed, albeit, like any organisation, we experience turnover, so we've got some vacancies at the moment. But, at the moment, we've got 53 inspectors, with 33 of those being deployed in regional areas and 18 in the metropolitan areas. We've also got the chief inspector and the deputy chief inspector in place at the moment. In terms of just some metrics or outcomes, I've got some year-to-date outcomes. If you bear with me for a moment, I can go to those and give you some detail about that.*

The Hon. WES FANG: *Happy if you want to table them as well.*

WILLIAM BEERDEN: *Yes. No problem. Just by way of comparison in terms of last year, last financial year we had 18,680 inspections. Up until the end of the March quarter—for the first nine months—we've had 17,749. So we expect another 3,000 or so. That'll exceed last year's numbers. Similarly with the complaints received, last financial year we had 14,420. Up until the March quarter, we've had 13,061. Similar to the evidence given by the Animal Welfare League, we've seen an increase in complaints coming in and the number of visits as a result of those complaints. Last year, we did 18,680. Up until the end of the March quarter, we've done 17,749. There's been a significant uplift in not only the number of complaints but the number of matters attended to.*

This is detailed in the supplementary questions and the budget submission supplied on notice.

The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: *On the prevention side and the community engagement aspect of your operation, can you tell us about or expand a little bit more on that type of outreach program that you are doing and how these programs contribute to your mission?*

STEVEN COLEMAN: *We can table some information about that, but it's fair to say that the direction of our organisation for some years already has been about continued investment in prevention. That led to a significant decision-making process in our exiting council pound contracts. It is imperative that we have capacity for the animals that the inspectors need to bring in, together with capacity to accommodate all those additional programs that we run. For a period of time we've had to say no to some of those programs because we simply didn't have the kennel space available, and that is a tragic set of circumstances for those people. Any additional funding going forward that can assist us in continuing to invest in the prevention side of community work is the direction that we have taken.*

RSPCA NSW are an active contributor in communities right across New South Wales. RSPCA NSW's combined totals from both the Community Programs (Domestic Violence Program, Aged Care Program, Homelessness, Pet Emergency Treatment and Mental Health and Emergency Boarding Program; and the Community Outreach programs (Community Animal Wellbeing Scheme (CAWS), Healthy Pet Days, and the

Indigenous Community Companion Animal Health Program (ICCAHP) are summarised to show an incredible output.

RSPCA NSW Total Community Summary by Financial Year

- FY2020/2021
 - Community Programs Total: 608 clients and 1139 animals helped.
 - Community Outreach Total: 2005 clients and 2443 animals helped.
 - Overall Total: 2613 clients and 3582 animals helped.
- FY2021/2022
 - Community Programs Total: 426 clients and 523 animals helped.
 - Community Outreach Total: 1796 clients and 2361 animals helped.
 - Overall Total: 2222 clients and 2884 animals helped.
- FY2022/2023
 - Community Programs Total: 462 clients and 628 animals helped.
 - Community Outreach Total: 2206 clients and 2959 animals helped.
 - Overall Total: 2528 clients and 3447 animals helped.

These figures highlight the extensive efforts and reach of RSPCA NSW's Community Programs and Outreach Programs combined. They reflect our organisation's significant role in supporting and serving various clients and animals across New South Wales.

We believe that financial circumstances alone are not a reliable indicator of a person's capacity to love and care for a companion animal, and strong bonds between people and their pets make for stronger communities.

Sadly, several factors, including financial hardship, natural disasters, mental illness, housing insecurity, homelessness, domestic violence, and poor health, can result in even the most devoted pet owner having to relinquish a beloved pet to a local rescue group or shelter.

However, keeping pets and people together is often the best outcome for the pets, their owners, and the community, and this is what RSPCA NSW strives to achieve.

Community Programs Team Summary by Financial Year:

- FY2020/2021
 - Domestic Violence Program: 134 clients and 220 animals helped.
 - Aged Care Program: 215 clients and 292 animals helped.
 - Mental Health and Emergency Boarding Program: 189 clients and 533 animals helped.
 - Homelessness Program: 70 clients and 94 animals helped.
 - Total: 608 clients and 1139 animals helped.
- FY2021/2022
 - Domestic Violence Program: 105 clients and 139 animals helped.
 - Aged Care Program: 141 clients and 140 animals helped.
 - Mental Health and Emergency Boarding Program: 157 clients and 221 animals helped.
 - Homelessness Program: 23 clients and 23 animals helped.
 - Total: 426 clients and 523 animals helped.
- FY2022/2023
 - Domestic Violence Program: 64 clients and 104 animals helped.
 - Aged Care Program: 129 clients and 192 animals helped.
 - Mental Health and Emergency Boarding Program: 107 clients and 166 animals helped.
 - Homelessness Program: 22 clients and 26 animals helped.
 - Pet Emergency Treatment: 140 clients, 140 animals assisted

- Total: 462 clients and 628 animals helped.

The statistics reflect the significant impact of the Community Programs Team's work, showcasing their dedication to assisting clients and animals across various services. Their efforts continue to play a vital and growing role in supporting animal lovers in need within our community.

Domestic Violence

A recent Australian study revealed that approximately 50 per cent of women in violent relationships reported that their violent partner had hurt or killed one of their pets. The study also revealed that 33 per cent of these female pet owners, who were now living in crisis accommodation, had delayed leaving their violent relationship because of concerns for their pet's welfare.

Through our Domestic Violence program, RSPCA NSW aims to offer practical solutions for pet owners leaving situations of domestic violence. We safely house and care for their pets, allowing them time to find safe refuge and reunite them with their beloved pet as soon as possible.

Services of our Domestic Violence program include:

- temporary foster accommodation and emergency pet boarding,
- financial assistance for veterinary treatment,
- financial assistance with impound fees, and
- financial assistance with transport fees.

The Domestic Violence Program has reached:

- FY2020/2021: 134 clients helped, 220 animals helped.
- FY2021/2022: 105 clients helped, 139 animals helped.
- FY2022/2023: 64 clients helped, 104 animals helped.

Aged Care

RSPCA NSW understands that a pet can mean everything to an elderly owner.

Our Aged Care program aims to keep pets and their elderly owners happy, healthy, and together in their own homes for as long as possible. We assist elderly pet owners over 65, Indigenous pet owners over 50, and palliative care patients of any age.

Services our Aged Care program offers include:

- temporary foster accommodation and emergency pet boarding if the owner requires medical treatment, respite or other assistance,
- assistance with veterinary treatment,
- home visits to assist older people with primary pet care,
- assistance with pet grooming, and
- assistance with transport to and from the local veterinarian.

The Aged Care Program has reached:

- FY2020/2021: 215 clients helped, 292 animals helped.
- FY2021/2022: 141 clients helped, 140 animals helped.
- FY2022/2023: 129 clients helped, 192 animals helped.

Mental Health and Emergency Boarding

RSPCA NSW strongly believes in the emotional, mental and physical benefits of the relationships between people and pets. We assist people with mental health issues and help them care for their pets with our Emergency Boarding Program.

Services our Emergency Boarding program offers people suffering from mental illness include:

- temporary foster accommodation and emergency pet boarding,

- financial assistance for veterinary treatment, and
- financial assistance with impound fees.

The Mental Health and Emergency Boarding Program has reached:

- FY2020/2021: 189 clients helped, 533 animals helped.
- FY2021/2022: 157 clients helped, 221 animals helped.
- FY2022/2023: 107 clients helped, 166 animals helped.

Homelessness

For some homeless people, their pets may be the only positive thing in their lives. We strongly believe in the emotional, mental, and physical benefits of the relationships between people and pets. Giving up a much-loved animal can cause significant distress to someone already suffering hardship. Our Homelessness program assists pet owners who are currently homeless, couch surfing, sleeping rough or in temporary accommodation.

Services our Homelessness program offers include:

- temporary foster accommodation and emergency pet boarding,
- financial assistance for veterinary treatment, and
- financial assistance with impound fees.

The Homelessness Program has reached:

- FY2020/2021: 70 clients helped, 94 animals helped.
- FY2021/2022: 23 clients helped, 23 animals helped.
- FY2022/2023: 22 clients helped, 26 animals helped.

Community Outreach

Our Community Outreach team support and promote good animal welfare by assisting high-priority communities with services, information and resources that improve animal health and welfare, contribute to human well-being, and strengthen the human-animal bond.

We address the overpopulation of unwanted companion animals and assist people in accessing core preventative veterinary services. This positively impacts animal and human health and welfare and reduces the number of dogs and cats entering pounds and shelters.

Our schemes offer various service, including health checks and advice, access to subsidised desexing, microchipping, vaccination, behaviour and training advice, parasite prevention, pet food, and core pet-care resources like leads and carriers. These services are targeted to areas of need in Sydney and regional and remote areas of NSW and are generally run in conjunction with local councils, veterinary services, social housing providers and human services.

To ensure valuable veterinary medical resources are given to the people who require them the most, pet owners will need to be able to provide proof of a valid Centrelink benefits card to access these services.

Education campaigns that increase community awareness about the importance of desexing and other aspects of socially responsible ownership, as well as conversations that occur at the individual level, are vital to the programs.

Community Outreach Team Summary by Financial Year

- FY2020/2021
- CAWS (Community Animal Wellbeing Scheme): 949 clients and 1115 animals helped.
- Healthy Pet Days: 962 clients and 1118 animals helped.
- ICCAHPs (Indigenous Community Companion Animal Health Programs): 94 clients and 210 animals helped.

- Total: 2005 clients and 2443 animals helped.

FY2021/2022

- CAWS: 665 clients and 772 animals helped.
- Healthy Pet Days: 826 clients and 1064 animals helped.
- ICCAHPs: 305 clients and 525 animals helped.
- Total: 1796 clients and 2361 animals helped.

FY2022/2023

- CAWS: 824 clients and 1064 animals helped.
- Healthy Pet Days: 1165 clients and 1499 animals helped.
- ICCAHPs: 217 clients and 396 animals helped.
- Total: 2206 clients and 2959 animals helped.

FY2023/2024 (Q1-Q3)

- CAWS: 440 clients and 548 animals helped.
- Healthy Pet Days: 995 clients and 1199 animals helped.
- ICCAHPs: 119 clients and 218 animals helped.
- Total: 1554 clients and 1965 animals helped.

Through these initiatives, the Community Outreach Team makes a substantial contribution to the welfare of both animals and their owners. The team consistently provides essential services to different community sectors, supporting the bond between people and their pets.

Community Animal Wellbeing Scheme (CAWS)

Subsidised desexing, microchipping and vaccinations in Sydney and regional communities of NSW in collaboration with local councils, veterinary services and RSPCA Branches.

The Community Animal Wellbeing Scheme (CAWS) has reached:

- FY2020/2021: 949 clients helped, 1115 animals helped.
- FY2021/2022: 665 clients helped, 772 animals helped.
- FY2022/2023: 824 clients helped, 1064 animals helped.
- FY2023/2024 (Q1-Q3): 440 clients helped, 548 animals helped.

Community Healthy Pet Days:

Vaccinations, veterinary health checks, behaviour advice, microchipping, parasite prevention, pet food, and access to subsidised desexing through local veterinary services are provided in collaboration with the local council, local human social services and social housing providers, and RSPCA Community Volunteer Groups and Branches.

The Community Healthy Pet Days has reached:

- FY2020/2021: 962 clients helped, 1118 animals helped.
- FY2021/2022: 826 clients helped, 1064 animals helped.
- FY2022/2023: 1165 clients helped, 1499 animals helped.
- FY2023/2024 (Q1-Q3): 995 clients helped, 1199 animals helped.

Indigenous Community Companion Animal Health Program

Our Indigenous Community Companion Animal Health Program improves the health and safety of Aboriginal children and families in remote communities by improving the health and welfare of their companion animals. We provide core preventative veterinary services to communities that might otherwise be unable to access them and provide information to support improving animal and human health, well-being, and positive pet ownership.

Programs are provided with community support and by working with local Aboriginal services such as Local Aboriginal Land Councils, Aboriginal Health Services, elders groups and Aboriginal housing providers. We also provide employment for community members before and during the program. Studies show that improvements in animal health and welfare can directly affect the health and welfare of humans. Limiting the number of stray dogs also reduces the number of associated problems, such as the spread of disease from faeces, dog bites, excessive noise, and stock attacks.

Our Indigenous Community program was operated in partnership with NSW Health Aboriginal Environmental Health Unit as part of their Housing for Health program in recognition of the importance of the One Health framework. When the program resumed in 2022, funding from NSW Health was discontinued, and now relies on ad hoc funding including one-off Federal Government support for an Ehrlichia Canis awareness project.

The Indigenous Community Companion Animal Health Program (ICCAHP) has reached:

- FY2020/2021: 94 clients helped, 210 animals helped.
- FY2021/2022: 305 clients helped, 525 animals helped.
- FY2022/2023: 217 clients helped, 396 animals helped.
- FY2023/2024 (Q1-Q3): 119 clients helped, 218 animals helped.

Community Clinic/ Access to Vet Care

The last few years have proven more than ever how irreplaceable the love of an animal can be and how that companionship can mean the world to people. Access to Vet Care is an innovative approach to protecting the human-animal bond, providing financially struggling pet owners access to affordable veterinary services at our RSPCA veterinary clinics in Rutherford and Yagoona. Anyone with a valid Centrelink benefit receives an automatic 35% discount on veterinary services and the ability to set up a payment plan for the rest, making most veterinary services accessible.

This program was launched in FY2022/2023 and has delivered:

- FY2022/2023: \$253,028.00 in care for 1,819 clients.
- FY2023/2024 Q1, Q2 and Q3: \$449,167.00 in care for 3,397 clients and 3,796 animals.

The CHAIR: Sorry, could I just pick up on that? How is the best person for the job determined when you are assessing their CVs, their interview and their referees et cetera? I look at your standard operating procedures and I look at the desirable qualifications and essential qualifications for the chief inspector and they're not qualifications at all; they're just, I would say, experiences. Appropriate investigative experience is an essential qualification, ability to manage human resources, sound knowledge and capacity to implement an EEO policy. And your desirable qualifications are relevant post-secondary qualifications with no further detail. How does the panel—I'm assuming it's a panel interview. How would they assess that when your own standard operating procedures are so vague, I wouldn't even know what the essential qualifications are for the role that Mr Fang is describing?

STEVEN COLEMAN: Mr Chair, if I can divert—Mr Beerden also manages our HR function. If we can just spend a couple of minutes talking to the recruitment process—

The CHAIR: Mr Beerden, what are the real essential qualifications? Because what you've got listed in your SOPs—I don't know how you would assess that in any quantitative way.

WILLIAM BEERDEN: Any recruitment process—what we typically do is we would, as Mr Coleman said, advertise for it. We would have some desirable qualifications, skills, competencies—some that are essential, some that are non-essential. We'd also take on board any in-house or on-the-job experience into consideration for any applicant, and it'd be a combination of those things when we initially shortlist candidates. Then we would conduct interview processes and decisions would be made based not only on qualifications, competencies et cetera but also on the responses that are given by the people who are in the interview process. Just in terms of the skills and qualifications et cetera, I've got a training matrix of what we have as compulsory training.

The CHAIR: *Perhaps on notice—I'm just trying to observe time. We only have about 25 minutes left with you. If you could table that perhaps—*
WILLIAM BEERDEN: *Sure.*

This has been answered in the supplementary questions.

The Hon. WES FANG: *When was the last time that a job applicant declared a conflict of interest to you?*
WILLIAM BEERDEN: *I'd have to take that on notice.*

Since my tenure with RSPCA NSW I have only had to recruit 2 job applicants and neither had a conflict to declare. I have been made aware that 2 inspectors currently employed by RSPCA NSW have secondary employment which has been declared.

The Hon. WES FANG: *We can argue about the chain of responsibility a little bit later. In relation to the deputy chief inspector position, when did that become vacant?*

WILLIAM BEERDEN: *I can't exactly remember the month, Mr Fang, but I think it might be about six months ago, maybe a little bit more.*

The Hon. WES FANG: *What was the process for the employment of a new deputy chief inspector?*

WILLIAM BEERDEN: *Again, I think, if my recollection serves me correctly, we would've advertised internally for that role. I don't know if we actually went external on that role. I can't remember. I'd have to check. But I can take that on notice.*

The Hon. WES FANG: *How many applicants did you have for that position?* **WILLIAM BEERDEN:** *I'll take that on notice as well.*

The Hon. WES FANG: *Who was on the interview panel for that position?* **WILLIAM BEERDEN:** *It would've been Mr Meyers—Chief Inspector Meyers. The Hon. WES FANG:* *The person who's not here, correct?*

WILLIAM BEERDEN: *Correct. I would have to take it on notice. Again, I don't get involved in the day-to-day recruitment of individual roles.*

The Hon. WES FANG: *It was advertised internally. Do you know how many people internally applied? You don't remember at all?*

WILLIAM BEERDEN: *I'll have to take it on notice.*

The Hon. WES FANG: *Do you know how many people were shortlisted?*

WILLIAM BEERDEN: *I'll take that on notice if that's okay.*

The Hon. WES FANG: *Do you know how many people were interviewed?*

WILLIAM BEERDEN: *It's fair to say I can take any question specifically about the appointment of that role on notice and I'm happy to get back to you on that.*

The Hon. WES FANG: *What I'm seeking to find out is how many people within your organisation had more experience than the person that actually won the job?*

WILLIAM BEERDEN: *I can't answer that.*

The Hon. WES FANG: *Do you know if the person who won the job had any personal relationships, friendships or any connection with people inside the organisation that was declared?*

WILLIAM BEERDEN: *No, I'm not aware.*

This has been answered in the supplementary questions.

The Hon. WES FANG: *Did SafeWork provide you with unsafe work notices, or did they provide you with improvement notices in relation to the way that you conduct your operations?*

WILLIAM BEERDEN: *We've been working with SafeWork over the last few months, in particular—*

The Hon. WES FANG: *That's not the question that I asked. Did they give you official—*

WILLIAM BEERDEN: *Yes, I'm getting to the answer. We've been working with SafeWork over a number of matters. And we have had some—I can't remember exactly if they were improvement notices. They might have been. They were more around process—about how we deal with people.*

The Hon. WES FANG: *You don't remember if you had improvement notices from SafeWork.*

WILLIAM BEERDEN: *Sorry, we've had improvement notices. I can't remember—*

The Hon. WES FANG: *That's not what you said originally. You said, "I can't remember if we've had improvement notices." You then said you did.*

WILLIAM BEERDEN: *I withdraw that. Can I answer the question again?*

The Hon. WES FANG: *No, this comes down to—I asked you specifically, "Did you have improvement notices?" You said, "I can't remember if we had." You knew very well that you had. You were just trying not to answer that. Is that correct?*

WILLIAM BEERDEN: *No, that's incorrect. We've had a number of interactions with SafeWork. I'm pretty sure we've had improvement notices.*

The Hon. WES FANG: *Pretty sure? You just said you had.*

The CHAIR: *Would you like to take it on notice so you can provide an accurate answer?*

WILLIAM BEERDEN: *Thank you, Chair. I'll take that on notice.*

The Hon. EMMA HURST: *I might ask a couple of follow-up questions from this. There are the improvement notices you have spoken about. Were there also any SafeWork orders?*

WILLIAM BEERDEN: *I'll have to take it on notice.*

This has been answered in the supplementary questions.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: *Mr Coleman, have any horses seized by the RSPCA ever been agisted at properties owned by families or friends of RSPCA staff?*

STEVEN COLEMAN: *I believe so.*

The Hon. EMMA HURST: *Can you provide records on how much they were being paid to agist these horses in the past five years?*

STEVEN COLEMAN: *Can I take that on notice, just to be really clear? But my understanding is that it was significantly cheaper than market rate.*

This has been answered in the supplementary questions.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: *Have you provided a submission to the New South Wales Government about the funding that the RSPCA needs to continue its enforcement operations going forward?*

STEVEN COLEMAN: *Yes.*

The Hon. EMMA HURST: *Can you provide us with a copy of that on notice?* **STEVEN COLEMAN:** *Subject to checking that off with the Minister.*

The Hon. EMMA HURST: *You're able to provide that to us?*

STEVEN COLEMAN: *Yes.*

This has been answered in the supplementary questions.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: *Can I ask on notice how much it cost the RSPCA to run this case?* **STEVEN**

COLEMAN: *Do you know that?*

KATHRYN JURD: *I know essentially what it cost, but I'm willing to take it on notice.*

In respect of the Brighton prosecution costs are currently outstanding and may need to return before Justice Hamill SC. RSPCA can provide the costs once the matter is no longer before the Court.

The CHAIR: *Can I go to some financial questions, Mr Coleman? In 2023 the gross income from government grants, according to your financial statements on the national charity register, reads at \$7.065 million. How does that reconcile with the Government's announcement in that same year of \$20.5 million? I'm happy for you to take this on notice because there are more conflicts. It also conflicts with the 2022-23 annual report, where you report a total revenue of \$16.5 million, but your annual financial statements on the register state \$75 million in total revenue in 2022 and \$65 million in 2023. Where does that \$50 million-odd disappear to between one financial report and another? There seems to be a lot of financial discrepancies between what you have on your website and what is being reported federally to the ACNC register. On notice, can you come back to us and clarify that?*

STEVEN COLEMAN: Yes.

RSPCA NSW's financial statements are prepared in accordance with Australian Accounting Standard 1060 - Simplified Disclosures adopted by the Australian Accounting Standards Board (AASB) and the requirements of the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission Act 2012. Our financial statements are audited by KPMG. The Society's financial statements are published on both our website and on the ACNC website. The financials presented on both sources reconcile perfectly.

In relation to the Government Grant Income recognition queries for FY22/23, I refer the Committee to disclosure note 3 in our financial statements:

- Under section 3(h) the following accounting policy is disclosed: "Deferred income represents the unspent grants or other fees received on the condition that specified services are delivered or conditions are fulfilled....The Society realises grant income upon fulfillment of specific obligations in line with the requirements of AASB 1058."
- Under section 3(f)(ii) the following accounting policy is disclosed: "Capital grants received under an enforceable agreement to enable the Society to acquire or construct an item of property, plant and equipment to identified specifications for its use are recognised as revenue as and when the obligation to purchase or construct is met."

The Society brings to account grant revenue in its financial statements in line with these policies.

In answer to the query specifically related to the \$20.5m in grant funds received by the Society in late June 2023 for the Companion Animal Welfare Grant Program, these funds related to the 2023/2024 financial year and were therefore recognised in the 2022/2023 financial statements as a deferred income under the liabilities of the Society.

The CHAIR: Are you able to provide on notice any further breakdown in terms of wages in terms of expenses and staff? How much of that \$35 million is inspectorate? How much of it is CEO, deputy chief inspector and the 500 other employees?

STEVEN COLEMAN: I can take that on notice.

\$35.2 million was invested in salary and wage costs in FY22/23. Of that, \$5.2 million accounts for all direct Inspectorate salary Costs including the Chief and Deputy Chief Inspectors. The remaining \$30 million relates to the salary and wages costs of all other RSPCA NSW employees including the CEO.

STEVEN COLEMAN: We generally organise their accommodation and travel, and we make sure that it's reasonable.

The CHAIR: Define "reasonable". What would you accept as reasonable? Is there a limit?

STEVEN COLEMAN: It depends what the location is. Obviously city accommodation is more expensive than regional.

The CHAIR: And regional accommodation is sometimes limited.

STEVEN COLEMAN: Correct.

The CHAIR: But there's not a set rate that you have in terms of per night or anything?

STEVEN COLEMAN: We have a set rate for staff.

The CHAIR: What's that? On notice, if you want to—

STEVEN COLEMAN: Yes, I'm happy to supply that.

Our staff travel policy includes: "Employees are entitled to claim reasonable accommodation, meal and beverage expenses, covering breakfast, lunch and dinner. Reasonable is considered to be:

- Meals \$55 per day (as a guide: \$15 for breakfast or lunch, \$25 for dinner)
- Accommodation \$140 per night"

The CHAIR: *What's the process of joining the board? Is there a minimum and maximum time period in terms of board positions? Are they elected annually or biannually? Perhaps on notice, can you provide—*

STEVEN COLEMAN: *Our constitution reflects a board that can have up to eight member-elected directors. If we have a skills gap, the board can coopt up to four directors to bridge that gap. Elections are every second year.*

RSPCA NSW's constitution is available on our website.

The CHAIR: *Can I pick up on a couple of questions from Mr Fang on workplace safety? You've talked about the number of complaints. How many of those complaints resulted in workers compensation claims? How many of them were actually reported to your nominal insurer for claims?*

WILLIAM BEERDEN: *I'll have to take that on notice, Chair.*

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The CHAIR: *On notice, can you also come back with how many workers compensation claims you've had over the last three years for what would best be described as psychosocial hazards—bullying, harassment, stress and mental health? We've heard from the vet inquiry that vets are under extreme pressure. Inspectorate officers would be under the same stress, dealing with what they're dealing with. I'm interested about how that's manifesting like with other industries.*

WILLIAM BEERDEN: *I can certainly do that.*

Year to date since 1 January 2022 there have been nineteen notifications related to stress/anxiety/psychosocial hazards. There were six workers compensation claims for lost time injury. Of the six claims, two were denied liability by the insurer, with four being accepted.

The Hon. WES FANG: *You should stand aside, Mr Coleman. The time for questions has lapsed. Can I just put a final question on notice regarding the 500 horses? Was your visit in September 2023 the result of an email that was sent to you by a Ms Mavrides regarding the fact that Mr Talbot was on the Racing NSW banned list? Can you confirm whether that was the cause for you go out to that site or not?*

STEVEN COLEMAN: *I don't believe so, Mr Chair.*

We can confirm that it was Racing NSW that prompted the investigation.