

**Submission
No 70**

INQUIRY INTO ANIMAL CRUELTY LAWS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Hunter Animal Watch

Date Received: 28 November 2019

Hunter Animal Watch has over 20 years' experience operating a subsidised desex programme across the Lower Hunter. Our target group is pensioners and low income earners. We have assisted over 32,000 pet owners. Hunter Animal Watch was founded due to the large number of healthy animals being euthanised purely due to over-supply. The founders of Hunter Animal Watch considered the most practical way to improve the situation was to assist pet owners financially with the cost of desexing their pets with a view to reducing the number of unwanted puppies and kittens.

Hunter Animal Watch notes the following ongoing issues within the community:

- Many owners continue to ignore the 1998 laws which encouraged life time registrations, even though desexing would make the registration cost even cheaper for pensioners and low income earners. These laws do not appear to be policed in any way.
- A significant proportion of owners live in government housing. In this accommodation some residents keep numerous pets, and breed them. The Department of Housing places no restriction on the number of animals kept. This should be addressed.
- An issue which needs serious attention is animal cruelty. Crimes against animals are often handed lenient sentences, when in fact it is well-known that animal cruelty can lead to cruelty to humans and is often a reason abused women stay in an abusive relationship – namely to protect pets.
- The RSPCA and AWL do all they can but we believe the problem is no longer containable in the face of increased human population and associated increase in pet population. The Police, equally able to pursue cruelty, are under pressure dealing with other crimes.
- Horses left in dry paddocks, often singly and often with no shade.
- Continuation of mulesing when humane alternatives are available.
- Greyhound racing and horse racing present many problems and should be given serious attention.
- Continuing cruelty in factory farming.
- Registration details should be consolidated into one only national database. There is confusion amongst pet owners as to how microchipping and registration works. Contact details are often not updated when pet owners move due to them misunderstanding how the system works. We would also like to see the data made more easily available to smaller organisations such as ours. On a number of occasions we have had stray dogs brought to our charity shop, we know they are chipped but have been unsuccessful in obtaining the pet owner's details. The general understanding in the community seems to be that when an animal is scanned, the reader immediately shows the owner's phone number. Pet owners generally seem to believe that their contact details are readily available to anyone with a scanner. It doesn't make sense to put a pet through the pound experience when all that is needed in many cases is a simple phone call.
- Some cruelty comes out of people being ignorant to an animal's needs – education is key in improving this ignorance. We believe animal welfare needs to be added to school curriculums. We also believe wider education of the general public is warranted on matters such as identification requirements, the importance of updating contact details, the benefits of desexing, debunking of myths, eg, dogs and cats should have a litter before being desexed, etc.
- We believe it would be beneficial to society for complete transparency from all animal shelters regarding the number of animals that are euthanised each year. There are still some in the community that believe that it is okay to let their pet breed as they can take the puppies or kittens to the local shelter and they will all find homes. Many still don't grasp that there are not enough homes available.

We strongly believe that the best way to move forward is to establish an independent office of animal welfare.

Thank you for your time in reading our submission.