

**Submission  
No 222**

## **INQUIRY INTO PUPPY FARMING IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

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## SUBMISSION - PUPPY FARMING IN NEW SOUTH WALES INQUIRY

### Introduction

Thankyou for the opportunity to give my input to the Puppy Farming in NSW Inquiry. I am an animal lover who has volunteered in dog and cat rescue in NSW for decades, and have sadly witnessed the tragic state of our pound system in NSW and the huge numbers of healthy dogs and cats that are unnecessarily killed, many whose lives originated in Puppy Farms and many of these killed because there were simply too many and not enough caring homes. Others were killed due to health issues from poor breeding and many killed due to behavioural problems from a lack of socialisation or from being sold to irresponsible people who gave no training or life skills to these poor individuals. Bearing witness to healthy dogs, puppies, cats and kittens who scream out as their little lives are ended is an abhorrent act to have to witness, let alone for veterinarians or staff to do. It is also a very sad state of affairs that volunteer run not-for-profit groups are left to scramble to find the space, volunteers and funds to try and save as many of these dogs and cats as possible from being killed. On a weekly basis they frantically call out for help with fostering and money for transport in an effort to rescue them from their death which is imminent within days. This is soul destroying volunteer work I am very familiar with, where volunteers put their own life aside to try and desperately save lives of animals caught up in our pound system. Lives of perfectly healthy, sociable dogs and cats. Yet the Government not only enables this killing and gives no support to these selfless volunteers and groups taking the responsibility that should be undertaken properly and compassionately by local Government, but also allows cruel Puppy Farming operations to prosper and be a major contributor to pet abandonment and to feeding the pounds with yet more animals. For every puppy and kitten that is born in NSW, sadly there is one that will get to die at a pound or shelter.

I have also witnessed the deplorable conditions in puppy farms where the imprisoned, malnourished and sick dogs had given up any hope of ever being treated with kindness and their bodies were beginning to shut down. I find it appalling that in 2022 the cruel Puppy Farming Industry where dogs and cats are held captive and bred for their entire lives, creating an abundance of puppies and kittens that often have health and behavioural problems, and only contribute to a broken Pound system that routinely kills healthy dogs and cats, is not only flourishing but entirely legal in NSW. Australians are a nation of animal lovers and it is time that our animal protection laws caught up with community expectations.

### Life on a Puppy Farm

Puppy farms are essentially puppy factories where units of production are pumped out at the greatest possible speed and profit, rarely with a thought to the sentient and gentle beings that are imprisoned within their walls, leading to numerous unacceptable animal welfare issues. These are intensive breeding facilities where the poor dogs and cats usually spend their lives confined in cages, often overcrowded, often without bedding, or even sunlight or fresh air and kept in unhygienic and deplorable conditions and treated as intensive breeding machines, with little thought for their own individual needs or indeed basic needs for any quality of life. Overbreeding and inbreeding are commonplace, as are genetic defects, illness and death. Often due to greed for profit veterinary assistance is denied and staff, if any are kept to a minimum so dogs and cats, including puppies and kittens are left in squalid conditions surrounded in an ammonia filled environment surrounded by their own faeces and urine, without fresh air or water and often with injuries or infections left to fester in this squalor. Eye and ear infections, rotting teeth and gum infections, matted hair and skin infections are a common sight. These dogs are also rarely given exercise or any socialisation let alone any acts of kindness. These establishments are often in rural areas, sometimes remote areas or behind fences where they are rarely seen by the public or inspected by any authorities so it is not uncommon that the whole property may be strewn with rubbish or unkempt and drains and effluent not dealt with properly and unhygienic. Enclosures are often very flimsy with dogs exposed to the elements and problems exacerbated with rain or with hot or cold temperatures. Fresh water, so vital to life is even denied with makeshift containers and/or competing with algae and mice/rats. Dogs from puppy farms often have heavy flea and parasite burdens. Without regulatory compliance or oversight these operations keep minimal and often inaccurate records. Apart from a lack of transparency these operations are also quite deceitful when it comes to marketing their product, a living sentient being. They will take a puppy out of the squalid conditions they are living in and place him/her in front of a screen, purely used

for photographic and marketing purposes to make it look like the puppy is living in paradise. However in the photo the puppy might have a colourful and pretty background but they never look happy. It is always the dogs and cats living within the walls of these establishments that pay the price with all these animal welfare issues.

Puppies and kittens are also not given the proper socialisation critical to their development to a well-balanced and socially acceptable adult. This is setting them up for failure and just feeding more animals into our broken and failing pound system, also creating more problems for the community, local Government and for not-for-profit groups as well as to the individuals who thought they were buying a healthy puppy with a sound temperament.

People buying puppies that have originated from these intensive breeding facilities and may have paid thousands of dollars can find that within hours or days of bringing their puppy home that they are sick or even die or that they have life-long health issues costing thousands or even tens of thousands of dollars more in vet bills, and pain/suffering for the animal, and angst and emotional trauma for the guardian. Legal proceedings in these instances can be costly and intimidating and it is hard to prove the health/quality of the animal at the time of purchase under consumer protection laws.

I have regularly seen young dogs often who had only just turned one year of age surrendered to the pound or a self-funded rescue group with medical issues caused from poor breeding. These dogs had usually been bought from a Pet Store or online and their conditions commonly included double rows of teeth, rotten teeth, luxating (dislocated) patellas, hip dysplasia, deafness, blindness and skin conditions. Some of these conditions being a well-known risk with certain breeds of which the parents should be tested before breeding. All these animals either suffered pain or a reduced quality of life thanks to the woeful and intentional breeding practices of the cruel Puppy Farm breeders. All these have caused grief and a financial burden on the unsuspecting people who think they have purchased a healthy puppy, or as is often the case where it all becomes too hard and the dog is surrendered to a not-for-profit group who is left to pick up the extensive veterinary bills and rehabilitation and volunteers needed for these poor dogs to be able to live a life free of pain. And all this before they can even attempt to rehome them.

The mother dogs are forced to pump out litter after litter, often back to back, with no consideration for their age, health or physical and mental wellbeing. At present, there is little oversight of these facilities leading to physical and mental suffering for the dogs within them. One recent 2020 case in point is the story of Strawberry the young Boxer, who at less than a year old gave birth to 3 pups before complications set in, and she struggled to give birth to the rest of the pups, who had died inside her leading to serious infection, where a whistleblower described her as having a putrid discharge and "smelling dead". Another 24 hours went by and she was seen still clinging to life but crawling with maggots seen coming from her vagina and from her mouth and the (what I can only call evil) Puppy Farmer refusing to get her Veterinary help. The final evil act by this Puppy Farmer was kicking Strawberry as she lay there dying and saying "Are you dead yet". The unthinkable pain and suffering that this poor dog endured at the end of her miserable life and she didn't even reach her first birthday. The only reason the public know about this case is because of a brave whistleblower.

Like many dogs that die on Puppy Farms Strawberry's body was just tossed in the bush. Many have mass grave sites also. This all occurred on a Puppy Factory that the NSW then Agriculture Minister Adam Marshall claims was monitored by authorities and regulated by robust animal welfare legislation as this facility had come under the spotlight before and was investigated in 2015 and even taken to court. Eight weeks later Strawberry's surviving 2 pups were then listed on facebook for sale in a pet shop in Western Australia. These young puppies are often transported all over Australia where their origins become dubious. Yet another reason that puppies and kittens should be banned from being sold in Pet Shops. Strawberry was not even a year old and her life filled with abuse, and her death so unnecessarily tragic due to the selfish greed of one person, a lack of scrutiny by authorities and our failing laws.

How many thousands of other dogs are out there suffering like Strawberry, when individual Puppy Farms can have 300 or more dogs, every single one of them an individual capable of suffering and fear and pain. Dogs can be surrendered because an owner finds it difficult to look after just 2 or 3 dogs, so try and imagine the workload with providing adequate care for 300 or more dogs even with just feeding and dealing with all the excrement, let alone exercise, health and their individual needs. Then there is also the issue of dog fights especially when

they are living in such stressful conditions. With most Puppy Farms being inadequately staffed, often with a high turnover due to the deplorable conditions, it can very quickly become unmanageable and it is always the dogs that pay the price, and often with their lives.

As well as the mothers and fathers that are imprisoned in these facilities and living a life of deprivation there are often lifelong health and/or behavioural problems for the puppies who are sold and their guardians often left with huge veterinary bills and angst at seeing their pet in pain all due to poor breeding. On top of this there are issues with mass overbreeding and high pet abandonment rates again all feeding into our severely broken pound system in NSW. There is absolutely nobody that benefits from these cruel establishments except from the Puppy Farm owner, and their ill-gained profits also usually go unseen by the Taxation Department.

### Personal experience

One of my own personal experiences with Puppy Farms in NSW is an animal cruelty case which involved up to a thousand animals on a remote rural property and was an exercise in disbelief and frustration both at the lack of laws protecting animals and as a consequence the suffering I witnessed, and the incompetence of the organisation who prosecuted the case (the RSPCA), and the lack of support and information given to the primary witness which was myself. And I was left in no doubt that after the court case, any animals that were allowed to be left in the care of these people who ran the Puppy Farm and who were consequently charged with multiple animal cruelty and neglect charges, would continue to be subject to the same appalling conditions, treatment, neglect, pain, suffering and death as had been inflicted on them prior to the case.

On this particular day which was over 40 degrees in temperature I was invited to visit a rural property where up to a 1000 animals of different species were being kept in shocking conditions, all in very exposed conditions without adequate shelter, many without any water available, many emaciated and in poor condition, many dying of heat stress, and dead bodies amongst the living in tiny overcrowded restrictive and exposed cages or tethered in the heat. I reported this matter to RSPCA NSW the following day and after a week it was inspected and some of the animals were seized from the property, and it took nearly 2 years to get to court.

Without my persistence in this matter this would never have got to court. The RSPCA lost my written statement and photos as evidence in this case not once but on 2 separate occasions. Luckily I had extra copies with me at the court case for it to go ahead.

When I rang RSPCA to enquire about the final verdict in the case I was told " I am not sure if I can divulge that to you". But of even more concern was when I asked if these people would be checked on in the future to see if they were complying with regulations, I was told " We cannot check on them unless we have a new complaint against them " I found out just recently after the death of one of the persons charged that the RSPCA were compiling a new case against this same person for similar offences. This was 16 years later, 16 years of further suffering for the animals on this property. All the puppies were being sold at Pet Shops with the consumers being totally unaware of the abhorrent conditions these poor animals were coming from and that their money was helping to perpetuate.

In summary this case showed that up to a thousand animals were suffering and dying under the care of people who were eventually taken to court thanks to a member of the public, and despite the feeble efforts of the enforcement agency, were charged for animal cruelty and neglect but that these same people were allowed to continue to inflict harm and suffering to a multitude of animals on a continuing basis until their death 16 years later. The faces of some of the animals that I left behind at that property that day 16 years ago still haunt me. How many animals must have suffered over the years.

There were 40 dogs on this property all suffering from neglect, riddled with fleas and other parasites, with no fresh water, many emaciated, some with untreated injuries and yet still today we have no legislation outlawing puppy factories, or the overbreeding of companion animals or adequately protecting animals in this situation from years of confinement, neglect, and deprivation. These same people were breeding birds, rabbits and also had farm animals who were all suffering at the hands of their captors and again there was no legislation protecting any of these poor animals.

I was able to rescue 2 of the dogs from this Puppy Farm, both Labrador Retrievers who had been used for breeding purposes their entire lives. Both females they had been passed from another Puppy Farmer to this one and had spent their lives constantly confined, neglected and used for breeding.

Bonnie who was 10 years old was extremely emaciated, her body writhing with fleas, and an injured back leg making her lame. The Puppy Farmer told me that she had recently sold her last litter of puppies and that she was so poorly that she wanted to shoot her. I said I would take her and have her humanely euthanased to which she agreed. When I approached, Bonnie did not even turn around or lift her head, or acknowledge that anyone had approached, she had totally lost the will to live. On this extremely hot day she had no water and the only signs of any bowl was an empty old car hubcap near where she laid tied up to a kennel half her size so that half her body was exposed to the searing sun. I was told that her back leg had been injured on a barbed wire fence and she hadn't been able to use it since. This same dog after being taken to a vet, freed of her shocking flea and hookworm burden and treated for anaemia, fed nutritious food and shown affection soon regained her weight and began to thrive and did so for another five happy years. Her leg injury which had never been seen by a vet was treated and was mostly muscle wastage from a lack of nutrition and it too healed and she recovered so well that she regained the use of her leg without even having a limp. Vets originally said her leg would need to be amputated but she was in no condition to undergo surgery. She did suffer from bowel incontinence as she got older due to her many years of breeding.

Barbie was also riddled with fleas and had a heavy worm burden and her ears were dripping with blood with half of one ear being a huge scab from fly/insect bites. She too had no water or proper shelter. After being rescued and given vet treatment, proper nutrition and care Barbie also enjoyed another 18 months of life but the constant breeding left her with multiple health issues including a prolapsed bowel.

Another little dog a chihuahua was kept in a wooden box with solid walls all around and an opening at the top. This poor little dog, apart from being confined in this box was denied being able to see her surroundings and the only thing she could see was a patch of sky above. Her water container was a mass of solid green algae. When I asked the Puppy Farmer about this dog she picked this poor dog up by yanking her out of her box gripping onto one front leg, where she yelped in pain and was lucky her leg wasn't pulled out of it's socket. Leaving this poor little dog in those conditions behind that day has haunted me ever since.

Other dogs were kept in crowded groups and were fighting and clearly stressed from their filthy surroundings, which consisted of dirt floors, makeshift and inadequate shelter, no bedding, lack of proper nutrition or clean water, and with no parasite control ,vet care or socialisation. They certainly never received any kindness and were unable to leave their prison. This property like so many other Puppy Farms would have been very hot in summer and very cold in winter.



Labrador Bonnie the day after she was rescued from the Puppy Farm ( and after just having had her last litter of puppies taken away from her )

#### Current framework

The current framework regulating dog and cat breeders in NSW is extremely insufficient, outdated and also difficult to navigate. It basically allows the mass overbreeding of animals to continue with barely any oversight at all. The welfare needs of the animals confined in these prisons are ignored and instead they are left in squalor without their basic needs being met and left to suffer and die unseen and unheard. All these facilities need is approval from a local council authority to operate and even then many do not even bother to get this and still manage to operate largely unseen and unknown. The RSPCA NSW Annual Report 2020/2021 refers to the RSPCA NSW Puppy Factory Taskforce as having identified nearly 900 breeding facilities across the state. This is a staggering number in itself and you have to wonder just how many illegal operations are also out there.

As their business model is focused on profit and puppies can be sold for thousands of dollars, often where cash transactions are made at a local service station or McDonalds where these innocent puppies are handed over, owners of these puppy farms can create significant wealth and this too goes under the radar of authorities with the Government allowing them to create their ill gained wealth free of tax. And at the same time not-for-profit volunteer rescue groups are often left to pick up the pieces of these broken puppies and foot the extensive veterinary bills in an effort to enable these dogs to live a life free from pain.

#### Strong Legal Protections Needed

Dogs and cats need much stronger legal protections in NSW and there is no place for puppy farms or kitten farms in a compassionate society.

There are individuals who will buy pets as a novelty or as amusement for their children which soon wears off. This was seen during the peak of the Covid 19 pandemic where people were buying pets to alleviate boredom and as soon as they went back to work there was an influx of these same pets being surrendered to pounds and shelters. It is people like these, that aren't buying pets for genuine reasons, that this vile industry is feeding, the people that are not responsible pet owners and do not care about the welfare and unique needs of a companion animal, but are more interested in using an animal purely for their own benefit. Of course I am not saying that all these dogs and puppies are going to bad homes, there are many that will, purely down to luck, end up in a loving and caring home where all their needs are met. But for the mothers of these puppies it is an entirely different story, living a life of misery, a hell not worth living and with no escape. They do not have a voice and we must as a society have laws in place to protect them from harm.

All dogs and cats being sold should be desexed unless going to a properly registered Breed Specific breeder. It is a known fact that many of the dogs kept in Puppy Farms are often transferred to other Puppy Farmers, once they are no longer required, so their poor bodies can continue to be milked for as much as they can get from a new Puppy Farmer. Others when no longer profitable are dumped in the bush or on roadsides and left to die. I regularly saw examples of this, with some being found and it was obvious that their poor bodies had been used for continual breeding and once they were no longer profitable they were just discarded like rubbish. Others such as one Puppy Farm I visited would shoot their dogs that were no longer profitable. The laws are completely absent in protecting any of these dogs. Not only do we need to end Puppy Farming in NSW but we also need to ban the sale of all live animals including puppies and kittens in pet shops in NSW. And the online sale of live animals including puppies and kittens should also be banned on non-regulated platforms like Gumtree, The Trading Post and Community Buy Swap and Sell sites.

There needs to be stronger oversight by Government of self-regulated dog and cat breeding industries, member bodies, eg. Dogs NSW and the Master Dog Breeders Association, to ensure compliance and enforcement including the introduction of a breeders license and a cap on entire breeding animals

### Recommendations

We desperately need laws in NSW to stop Puppy Farming and the Companion Animals Amendment (Puppy Farms) Bill 2021 would go a long way to addressing this. As has been evidenced in NSW when stronger laws were brought in in Victoria many of the Puppy Farmers in that state just moved their operations over the border into NSW. Puppy Farmers will continue to come to operate in NSW because of its weak laws. As an absolute minimum we need stronger laws against these cruel operations and in line with other states such as Western Australia and Victoria.

- The number of breeding dogs or cats must be capped at 10, with no more than two litters per fertile female.
- All breeders (with 3 or more breeding animals) should have to register with their local council before they can operate their business, and be required to undergo pre-registration and regular renewal of registration inspections as set out in the *Companion Animals Amendment (Puppy Farms) Bill 2021*.
- Pet shops must only be allowed to sell animals sourced from pounds or shelters, not from puppy farms. This has already been done in Victoria.
- All animals must be advertised for sale with a 'source number' which links back to the registration system.
- Vet checks should be mandatory for each dog or cat in the business, carried out both annually and before and after breeding.
- A 'fertile female' should be defined as a female dog or cat that is at least 12 months of age and has not been desexed.

- A staff ratio of at least one staff member for every five animals kept at the registered companion animal premises would help to ensure adequate care is provided.

### Conclusion

I do not agree with the intensive farming of any animals as it is unethical, and causes animal suffering on an enormous scale. Our companion animals including cats and dogs who are referred to as “Man’s best friend” deserve so much better and accordingly our laws need to protect them.

The way these Puppy Farms operate is unethical and appalling and leads to severe physical and mental suffering, as well as overbreeding and high abandonment rates. It allows female dogs or cats to be confined, deprived and bred from for their entire lives, and hundreds of animals can be kept at a single farm. And no real oversight, monitoring or regulatory actions are currently taken leading to deplorable conditions with poor animal welfare outcomes. The suffering that individual dogs and cats endure at these facilities is totally unnecessary and so very wrong. All animals no matter where they live should be able to live a life free from harm and suffering.

In addition to this the poor breeding practices, including inbreeding and genetic disorders is leading to dogs and cats with lifelong medical issues or early deaths. Their guardians are left with an emotional and financial burden with no real protection from consumer laws. Due to the conditions and lack of socialisation puppies coming from these places often have behavioural problems. All of this contributes to pet abandonment and the crisis that is our broken pound system in NSW where healthy dogs and cats, puppies and kittens are still routinely killed in staggering numbers. These unscrupulous businesses are creating a huge burden for volunteer based not-for-profit rescue groups who scramble to save lives in our broken pound system. The only dogs, cats, puppies or kittens sold in pet shops should be those put up for adoption by rescue groups or shelters/pounds. This is from an animal welfare perspective as well as protection for consumers.

In conclusion I strongly support the Companion Animals Amendment (Puppy Farms) Bill 2021 because it will solve a lot of the animal welfare issues, alleviate a lot of suffering and is in line with Victorian and Western Australian legislation.