

**Submission  
No 3**

## **INQUIRY INTO POUNDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

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# **Inquiry into pounds In New South Wales**

## **Submission**

Thank you for initiating this important inquiry, and for the opportunity to have input to your deliberations.

Up to September last year, I spent six years as president of RSPCA Eurobodalla Volunteer Branch, and four concurrently as Canine Coordinator. During that time, the branch rehomed some 950 animals, principally cats and dogs, and we worked closely with the local pound. The rangers frequently requested our assistance in rehoming impounded animals and we were pleased to help whenever possible.

In July 2022, RSPCA NSW changed its procedures for dealing with local pounds, setting up a centralised and online process, and not permitting local branches to interact with council rangers regarding pound animals. The result of this was a lengthier and more complicated process with which Eurobodalla Shire Council did not engage.

The rangers here now work more closely with the local Animal Welfare League branch to rehome animals, and do the best job they can to find new homes for those dogs and cats which are suitable for rehoming. However, the rangers' task is made more difficult by a range of factors, principally:

- aged and inadequate pound facilities;
- inadequate staffing for proper animal care; and
- adoption policies which do not require desexing before an animal is rehomed.

I first raised these issues with the Council in 2019, and some minor improvements to the pound were undertaken as a result. This year, I and two former RSPCA branch colleagues met with the new General Manager and again highlighted the inadequacies of the pound facilities and processes, and we are hopeful of significant action being taken in the near future.

I know that, around NSW, several councils have spent significant funds on developing new facilities for dealing with impounded animals, and putting in place procedures more suited to 21<sup>st</sup> century expectations about our society's treatment of companion animals. However, many others are lagging behind,

and as a result, animals which have already suffered at the hands of humans are frequently being housed in bare, extremely cold or stiflingly hot conditions, with totally inadequate space for exercise, minimal human contact and lack of enrichment. Most of these pounds have no special facilities for neonate puppies and kittens, which they are often called on to deal with. Local rangers will often adopt impounded animals to unsuitable owners, just to get them out of the poor conditions of the pound.

With shelters full as a result of cost of living pressures, more responsibility is falling to local government to care appropriately for companion animals passing through their hands. It should be the norm, not the exception, in 21<sup>st</sup> century Australia, for local governments to :

- house impounded animals in temperature controlled environments;
- provide large exercise space and enrichment activities for dogs;
- have suitable accommodation for pregnant animals, and for new mothers and babies;
- house cats away from dog noise in large cages which give them space to climb and hide;
- provide out of hours drop-off facilities for people to leave stray animals;
- provide several hours' access on most days for potential adopters to visit;
- provide meet and greet facilities for potential adopters to interact with animals;
- in regional and rural areas, have stock yards for farm animals;
- microchip, desex, vaccinate and register all cats and dogs before adoption; and
- enlist the help of volunteers for cleaning, enrichment and administration.

I know from my work with RSPCA that too many people fail to desex their cats as required by law, or even to microchip their pets. These rules need to be enforced more vigorously, and there should also be a requirement for dogs to be desexed unless an owner is a registered breeder. A senior minister in the previous government said to me, during a meeting organised to discuss poor compliance, that requirements such as microchipping were legislated to act "as an incentive". That's not good enough: we need a greater focus on enforcement and compliance to help reduce the number of unwanted animals ending up in pounds and shelters.

New housing developments should include a requirement for cats to be kept contained (with suitable and adequate enrichment), thus reducing their ability to reproduce as well as protecting wildlife. (It will also help keep the cats safe from the many dangers they face if they wander.)

Pounds should not be able to return animals to owners until the animals are desexed (at the owners' cost, and, if necessary, assisted by animal welfare organisations' desexing support programs). Pounds should also require a written commitment from adopters of cats that they will be contained within the adopter's premises.

I recognise that none of this comes without cost. However, as always, it becomes a question of priorities. Spending money on improved impoundment facilities will not only provide appropriate basic care for companion animals, but it will take pressure off local councils to adopt animals cheaply and to potentially unsuitable owners just to get them out of the pound. Funds expended on enhancing compliance with microchipping, desexing and cat containment will flow through to lesser numbers of unwanted puppies and kittens. Investment now will produce dividends quite soon, given the young age at which cats and dogs can reproduce. Local government needs to be supported in these efforts by additional, earmarked funding from the State Government.

I know from experience that impounded animals generally make wonderful pets. Some have come from loving homes into what is often a lonely, prison-like environment. Others have been let down from the start by humans. Companion animals perform a huge service to our society, and we owe it to them, when they most need us, to treat them with proper care during what is hopefully a transition to a new life.

Louise Webb