

**Submission
No 6**

INQUIRY INTO POUNDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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Inquiry Into Pounds In New South Wales

Submission

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission.

I am very concerned with the high rate of killings at NSW government pounds and shelters. I am also concerned about the terrible conditions in which pound animals are kept.

Instead of killing unwanted animals, pounds must receive sufficient funding to allow them to focus on rehoming.

From what I have seen, the pound building and facilities in NSW are very rudimentary. It is no wonder the unfortunate unwanted animals are not 'chosen' for adoption. They lack adequate bedding and comforts. They are kept in cages and not exercised. They are often in need of veterinary treatment, vaccination and desexing. All this counts against their being adopted, because they present as depressed, noisy, apprehensive and thus likely to be assessed as unsuited to rehoming – when that is far from the case if the animals were sufficiently socialised with humans and other animals.

It is unacceptable that the government does not supply funding and make sure these pounds have a strong legal Code of Practice that is managed and enforced so that the pound animals have a fair go at being rehomed. If the animals are frightened and in strange surrounds, it is no wonder they can come across as aggressive or timid or noisy. Any animal that is in a strange and frightening new environment and perceives danger will not behave well. They are thrown together with other animals with whom they are unfamiliar and often perceive as a threat. Therefore, it is vital that pounds are able to not only house and feed animals, but also ensure they have comfortable, dry bedding, enrichment, vet treatment, vaccinations and desexing. The pounds should be 'no kill'.

A friend of mine adopted a couple of kittens from a pound in country NSW and was horrified and saddened by the conditions of those poor animals. Lucky for them they now have a safe home with someone who cares for them. I feel very sorry for those animals that are – through no fault of their own – left behind to be killed.

This must change. It is inhumane and unacceptable in 2023.

So, pounds need more oversight to ensure the above criteria are met and to make sure the animals are well cared for. And to do this, pounds and shelters require more government funding.

The current laws are obviously failing. The Code of Practice dates back to 1996 and this is in urgent need of updating. The law is totally inadequate in this day and age. Far too many animals are being killed. The laws are out of date and need to be completely rewritten to provide better care for the animals, and pounds must focus on REHOMING rather than KILLING – and they should be given the funding to ensure this can happen.

Compliance and enforcement provisions in the code of practice urgently need to be updated.

It is time the government developed well targeted strategies to find homes for unwanted animals, so they are not killed.

I know of an excellent organisation called Getting to Zero (G2Z). It has done excellent work, liaising with councils and governments around Australia. The NSW should make sure all its councils are in touch with this organisation, which is based in Queensland.

Euthanasia rates and practices in NSW pounds, including the adequacy of reporting of euthanasia rates and other statistics

Things cannot continue as they are at present. The high number of killings in council pounds is unacceptable. The public are entitled to know the figures. How many animals are killed? Why are they killed? Why weren't they rehomed? What prevented them from being rehomed? The accuracy of statistics in each of the state's pound is critical to reducing the large numbers of deaths in NSW council pounds and shelters.

Rescue groups do a terrific job in rehoming as many animals as they possibly can. But they rely on donations from caring members of the community and on dedicated volunteers.

It is disgraceful that pound animals are often just shot. I believe all animals, on failing to find a home, should as a last resort be humanely killed by intravenous injection by a qualified and licensed vet. Killing is the correct word – it is only euthanasia unless the animal is so ill that that a needle is the kindest and most compassionate solution. And regardless of what happens, the statistics on the killings and the rehoming in public pounds and facilities must be accurately maintained and published on websites so the public is fully aware of what is going on.

At present few of the Office of Local Government annual pound reports are publicly available. That must change. The public have a right to know if their taxes are being used to kill unwanted animals.

Councils need to improve their own adoption rates directly from pounds. They should have funding; they should not have to rely solely on rescue groups taking some of the animals and then killing the rest at the pound. This is unconscionable.

Behavioural assessments need to be strictly regulated and statistics on cause of death/killing noted accurately. As I said earlier, no animal is going to be perfectly behaved in a strange place away from their normal home. Allowances need to be made for their feelings of isolation and fear. If the pounds are using taxpayers' money to kill animals, the public is entitled to know why. The public needs to have access to information about how and why animals are killed.

My family and I donate regularly to rescue groups. They do a wonderful job saving as many animals as they can, but it all costs money. They don't rescue the animals just so that the pounds can kill the animals who remain behind. These rescue and rehoming groups save the government a lot of money – and the government should listen to their arguments about the new laws and codes of practice that are urgently needed to put a stop to all the killing.

Many taxpayers give donations to rescue groups, and I am sure they would be very happy for the government to have a code of practice that sets in train processes to ensure that animals in pounds have better lives and better outcomes so that they are adopted instead of being killed. The government needs a huge injection of funds into its pounds and shelters.

Re the number of cats presenting at pounds, I agree that the Companion Animals Amendment (Rehoming Animals) Act 2022 might be helpful, but I don't want that to lead to the further transfer of responsibility away from council pounds and on to already busy and overburdened volunteer rescue and rehoming organisations.

It is unacceptable that NSW council pounds and shelters are still operating under the 1996 NSW Animal Welfare Code of Practice for Dogs and Cats in animal boarding establishments. A new Code of Practice that reflects contemporary science and community expectations is needed NOW.

Mandatory Local Government Council Strategic Companion Animal Management Plans ('SCAMPs') - with attached policies and key performance indicators – must be brought in so that councils can organise ongoing four yearly public consultation periods to ensure the plans are still meeting public expectations.

A new Pound and Shelter website, including an online complaint form and 1800 'hotline' to receive public pound and shelter complaints would be very useful.

I strongly urge the government to set up an independent and comprehensive audit of all current pound and shelter infrastructure and all the animal management practices, policies and procedures under which they operate. I am not talking about a few sample audits – every single pound and shelter must be audited. The government cannot make improvements if it doesn't know the facts. Accurate statistics are vital.

In conclusion, the government must strengthen inspection and enforcement powers for agencies authorised under POCTAA to undertake regular surprise inspections of pounds and shelters.

The government must implement a comprehensive review of Companion Animals Grants, including how those funds are managed and distributed, with assessments based on outcomes.

I recommend that the not-for-profit, self-funded and volunteer rescue groups receive annual grants to carry out their valuable work in rehoming and caring for abandoned animals.

Initiatives should be introduced to support vulnerable or at-risk owners so they do not have to surrender their beloved animals. Grants should also be given to communities after bushfires, floods and in other emergencies. Every effort should be made to support vulnerable people to look after their animals during such events. It is well documented that having a pet leads to a longer life. So, it is important to remember that people's pets are their family. They must be supported so that they do not have to surrender their beloved pets in tough times, domestic violence, and health issues.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute my views. I hope some urgent action will be taken to reduce the killing of pound and shelter animals and to make their time in pounds and shelters more pleasant and fulfilling before they find the happy and welcoming new homes they deserve.

Charles Davis

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