

**Submission
No 7**

INQUIRY INTO POUNDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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Submission

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission. My family and I are very concerned about the current practices and lack of monitoring of NSW pounds. We believe the laws need updating in line with community expectations. I have included more on laws under Terms of Reference (d) and (k) and below.

Term of Reference (a)

(a) resourcing challenges affecting NSW pounds, including the adequacy of funding given towards the operation of pounds both by local and state governments

The NSW government must introduce a fully funded, mandatory, and legally enforceable pound and shelter system for all pounds with the focus on saving lives rather than the far too common killing that is taking place right now. Pounds must receive sufficient funds to enable them to focus on rehoming.

Term of Reference (b) and (c)

(b) the adequacy of pound buildings and facilities in NSW

(c) welfare challenges facing animals in pounds across NSW, including the provision of housing, bedding, feeding, exercise, enrichment, veterinary treatment, vaccination and desexing

We have a dear friend who told us about a terrible pound in a NSW country town. I am not sure which one, but we fear the terrible circumstances for the animals she saw there are most likely widespread throughout NSW pounds.

My friend said that the unwanted animals are dumped into bins at a 'collection' facility. That is, people do not even have to hand over the animals to a person. I realise this is anecdotal, but I trust the person who told me about it, because she ended up adopting two of the kittens she found dumped at that pound. She is also a wildlife carer with very high skills and has devoted her life to protecting all animals, not just wildlife.

Pounds must receive sufficient funding to provide appropriate housing, feeding, exercise veterinary treatment, vaccination and desexing and rehoming.

Term of Reference (d)

(d) the adequacy of the laws, regulations and codes governing NSW pounds, including the Companion Animals Act 1998 (NSW) and the NSW Animal Welfare Code of Practice No 5 – Dogs and cats in animal boarding establishments (1996), as well as the adequacy of the current enforcement and compliance regime

We trust that this inquiry will recommend - as urgent - a taskforce to determine the effectiveness of the Companion Animals Act 1998 NSW and NSW Animal Welfare Code of Practice 5 – Dogs and cats in animal boarding establishments (1996). As can be seen from the figures quoted below and the very large numbers of pound animals being killed, these laws are overdue for reform and their compliance and enforcement provisions need to be updated.

To achieve that the NSW Ministers for Agriculture and Local Government must immediately introduce 'No Kill' legislation with changes to POCTAA to include all impounded animals (regardless of species) and outlaw the killing of healthy but homeless animals.

The Minister for Local Government must amend the Companion Animals Act to reflect the changes where applicable.

The Minister for Agriculture must amend the Animal Research, Fisheries, Exhibited Animals Protection, Game and Feral Animal Control, Veterinary Procedure acts, and any other relevant acts to reflect the changes where applicable.

Such legislation must develop a stand-alone Code of Practice for all impounded animals in NSW pounds and shelters.

The responsible authority must then carry out comprehensive and independent audits of all NSW pounds and shelters to identify the level of compliance and/or non-compliance with the **new Code of Practice**, including - procedures, policies, and 'kill' and 'no kill' numbers.

Term of Reference (e)

(e) factors influencing the number of animals ending up in NSW pounds, and strategies for reducing these numbers

Strategies are needed to find homes for unwanted animals and to reduce the numbers of killings. I recommend an organisation called Getting to Zero (G2Z) - See the link below and my selected quote from their website. G2Z has worked with governments, councils, and pounds to reduce the numbers of unwanted animals and its Getting 2 Zero Model has had excellent results.

“Getting to Zero (G2Z) aims to increase responsibility for companion animals so that **every community and municipality can achieve zero euthanasia of all healthy and treatable cats and dogs.**”

G2Z is relevant to state governments, local government animal management departments, **pounds, shelters**, rescue groups, breed organisations, breeders, pet shops, animal trainers, groomers, wildlife organisations, veterinarians, and all community members who are concerned about better management and welfare of cats and dogs.

Please [read about the G2Z Model](https://www.g2z.org.au/) and how you and your community can participate.”

<https://www.g2z.org.au/>

Term of Reference (f)

(f) euthanasia rates and practices in NSW pounds, including the adequacy of reporting of euthanasia rates and other statistics

As I said above, the high number of killings in council pounds is unacceptable. Because the public are entitled to know the sad truth, it is important that the numbers of animals killed is transparently and accurately reported. The government must provide pounds with the resources to do their job effectively and humanely in the public interest.

Despite the success of rescue groups managing to find new homes for animals, the NSW pound and shelter system still many other kills animals with little or no public transparency and accountability. Shooting impounded animals must cease. Animals that cannot be saved must be humanely killed by intravenous injection by a qualified and licensed veterinary practitioner. We object to the

use of the word 'euthanasia' when what really happens is that the animals are KILLED. Euthanasia means the mercy killing of people or animals who have illnesses that cannot be treated. The public need to know the truth.

The NSW Office of Local Government (OLG) has been compiling annual pound data reports since 2012. However, **few reports are publicly available**. The public has a right to see the data collected across NSW pounds and shelters.

In 2020-21, OLG data shows there were 44,000 cats and dogs in council pounds. Some 8,290 cats and 6,751 dogs were transferred to volunteer, self-funded rescue, and rehoming groups.

But councils need to improve their own adoption rates directly from pounds. In 2020-21 there was a large decrease in the number of dogs sold. Pounds need more funds.

Term of reference (g)

(g) the role and challenges of behavioural assessments in NSW pounds

It is worrying, because council data shows that, having given some pound animals to rescue groups, the pounds then kill their remaining animals for 'various reasons'. When working out new codes for pounds, the 'behavioural assessments' must be strictly regulated and statistics on cause of death noted accurately. The word 'feral' is overused and inappropriate in many cases. Other terms such as 'surrender', 'unable to rehome' and so on are ambiguous. More transparency on the reason for killing is necessary when using taxpayer money to kill animals. The statistics must provide greater transparency to clearly reflect the reason for killing pound animals, rather than using euphemisms.

Term of reference (h)

(h) the relationship between NSW pounds and animal rescue organisations

The volunteer rescue and rehoming groups and organisations like G2Z above are doing a wonderful job with the help of donors and volunteers. Because their combined efforts are saving the government a lot of money, it is important that the government listens to what these groups say. I believe these groups should receive government funding for the important work they do. I am not saying the pounds should not take responsibility; but they should

listen to the experts who are already protecting and saving animals. We need to stop the animals going into pounds in the first place.

The public trusts these rescue groups enough to give them money. So just as it is important to maintain a well-funded and compassionate pound system, the government needs to financially assist hard-working rescue groups as well.

Term of Reference (i)

- (i) the challenges associated with the number of homeless cats living in NSW for both pounds and animal rescue organisations, and strategies for addressing this issue

It is shocking that being killed in a pound or shelter is still the leading cause of death for NSW companion animals. Sadly, it is the old, young, unweaned, sick, disabled, timid, and those in need of behavioural interventions that have a much higher kill rate.

There is anecdotal information that more and more pets are being surrendered now since COVID has abated, but statistics, such as surrender forms, are a more accurate gauge of the reasons for this. It was reported in the press and elsewhere that COVID increased impulse-buying of pets, but the underlying factors that contribute to surrender must be carefully analysed. NSW's troubles with pounds and shelters have been going on for decades – they cannot be attributed only to COVID. **And many people are at this moment surrendering animals because of the cost-of-living pressures.**

I agree that the Companion Animals Amendment (Rehoming Animals) Act 2022 is a small start, but recent NSW OLG circulars to councils are unclear and may not achieve good results. We may not be able to get results until 2023-24. Although worthy, that Act may lead to the further transfer of responsibility away from council pounds and on to already overwhelmed and overburdened volunteer rescue and rehoming organisations. Once again, I refer the inquiry to the work of Getting to Zero (G2Z) and its strategies that are working.

It is a tragedy that animals are dying in pounds and shelters - NOT because there are too few homes for them or because they are “unwanted”, BUT BECAUSE people in pounds are killing them according to unclear guidelines

under the existing Act. The assessment processes need overhauling. Continuous killing cannot continue be allowed to continue.

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. This is outrageous.

As I said above under Term of Reference (d), a NEW Code of Practice that reflects contemporary science and community expectations is desperately needed.

The responsible authority must Introduce mandatory Local Government Council Strategic Companion Animal Management Plans ('SCAMPs') - with attached policies and KPIs - so that councils can organise ongoing four yearly public consultation periods to ensure the plans are still meeting public expectations.

All councils must report mandatory monthly performance data in the press and online to improve transparency. Local community Animal Welfare Reference Groups and Committees should also be established.

The responsible authority must establish a new Pound and Shelter website, including an online complaint form and 1800 'hotline' to receive public pound and shelter complaints.

My family strongly supports Animal Liberation's 15-point plan. See Link - <https://www.al.org.au/nsw-pound-shelter-reform>

This plan lists the essential steps necessary to reform NSW's inadequate pound and shelter system.

We also support the calls for an independent and comprehensive audit of:

- a. all current pound and shelter infrastructure
- b. all animal management practices, policies and procedures.

I stress that these audits must include all pounds and shelters, not a few samples. Progressive and meaningful improvements cannot be achieved without independent, fact-based information showing what is happening, as well as compliance and non-compliance statistics.

Term of reference (j)

(j) strategies for improving the treatment, care, and outcomes for animals in NSW pounds

Please refer to my comments under Term of Reference (e) above about the work on pounds with councils and governments by Getting to Zero – G2Z, who I understand will be making a submission to this inquiry. Please listen and act on their sound advice.

Below are a few links with submissions from various organisations made to the federal government's 2020 inquiry entitled *The Problem of Feral and Domestic Cats in Australia* that might provide useful insights for the inquiry.

<https://kb.rspca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Findings-and-Recommendations-Identifying-Best-Practice-Domestic-Cat-Management.pdf>

https://catprotection.org.au/federal_inquiry_into_feral_and_domestic_cats_in_australia/?v=322b26af01d5

<https://www.g2z.org.au/national-cat-action-plan.html>

Term of Reference (k)

(k) Any related matter

The responsible authority must also:

strengthen inspection and enforcement powers for agencies authorised under POCTAA to undertake regular surprise inspections of all pounds and shelters;

conduct a comprehensive review of Companion Animals Grants, including how funds are managed and distributed, with assessments to be based on delivered outcomes;

introduce an annual grants program for not-for-profit, self-funded and volunteer rescue, rehoming, and advocacy groups;

introduce pound and shelter initiatives to support vulnerable or at-risk animal owners or caregivers during periods of intense need, to keep animals in their homes and ensure the welfare and wellbeing of both animals and humans – namely, those experiencing financial stress, homelessness, or risk of homelessness; domestic violence; emergency management incidents during bushfires and floods; and physical or mental health issues, including hospital stays and/or medical issues.

Thank you for the opportunity, and I hope the inquiry takes note of our family's concerns.

Jan Kendall
July 2023