

**Submission  
No 8**

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

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### **Submission to the inquiry on pounds in NSW**

I welcome the inquiry and hope that some positive outcomes can be found which will improve animal welfare in pounds and shelters and improve re-homing rates from pounds.

As a veterinary surgeon with over 30 years' experience, I have had plenty of exposure to regional and metro animal pounds and am generally very disappointed with several key aspects of their design and function. It is notoriously difficult to truly assess animal behaviour in pounds for several reasons, and there is also relatively low adoption uptake from pounds. I will address these in a series of points, related to my knowledge of animal behaviour and handling, which I spent the latter part of my career teaching to veterinary science students at Charles Sturt University.

Animal behaviour is defined as the activity of an animal in response to its environment. The immediate environment is THE MAJOR influence on animal behaviour at any given moment.

- **Impounded animals are stressed**

There is plenty of evidence to suggest that both cats and dogs (and indeed any impounded animal) is highly stressed by pound environments. Stress can be evaluated by hair cortisol concentration, although the procedure needs more refinement (van der Laan, Vinke et al. 2022)

Pounds are very noisy, animals may be able to visualise each other directly, there is olfactory overload, cleaning and kennel maintenance is stressful and there is limited human- animal interaction or intraspecific (dog-dog) interaction which is highly distressing for social animals like dogs.

Cats are different in their social requirements, but are equally stressed by noise, smells and the confinement in a small cage, often with no safe space for them to hide.

- **Behavioural assessment can be problematic due to animal stress**

This leads to difficulty in behavioural assessment of impounded animals, and some behaviour problems may not be recognised in pound behaviour assessment (Clay, Paterson et al. 2020) This has led to the suggestion that a robust assessment tool , qualitative behaviour assessment, be used in pounds as part of overall animal assessment (Arena, Wemelsfelder et al. 2019) However, pound workers may need specific training for this.

- **Animals need enrichment; social, environmental and behavioural**

Dogs are highly social animals and benefit from interaction with other dogs. Housing with other dogs has recently been shown to reduce stress significantly in kennelled dogs (Corsetti, Natoli et al. 2023)

Both dogs and cats need enriched housing, that allows them stimulating toys, places to hide and sleep (especially important for cats). A larger cage area has resulted in cats being adopted more readily, hence the overall stay in the pound or shelter is reduced (Wagner, Hurley et al. 2018)

- **Improved environments are more conducive to adoption for dogs and cats**

- **Pound staff need training**

All staff working or volunteering in pounds need basic training in low stress animal handling, and recognition of the signs of tension in dogs and cats.

Ideally, staff would have a Cert IV companion animal services, a qualification aimed at pound workers and animal rangers. While pound staff often have other tasks within the local government, attention to detail of animal needs is problematic.

- **A change of Local Government culture is needed**

Currently the Companion Animals Act enforcement relies on punishment. Education in to the benefits of pet desexing, responsible animal ownership and animal management should be a more productive approach.

Pounds need to have extended opening hours, and staff might target primary schools with information about responsible pet care. Don't leave that to the veterinary profession!

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Pollard Williams

### References

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