

Submission  
No 49

## INQUIRY INTO POUNDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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The Hon Emma Hurst MLC  
Chair, Portfolio Committee 8  
NSW Parliament  
By-mail: [portfoliocommittee8@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:portfoliocommittee8@parliament.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Ms Hurst,

### **Inquiry into the pounds in New South Wales**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the committee's inquiry into the pound in New South Wales. The City of Sydney welcomes the committee's commitment to examine adequacy of resourcing for pounds in NSW.

#### **Provision of housing, bedding, feeding, exercise, enrichment, veterinary treatment, vaccination and desexing for the impounded and surrendered animals.**

The number of animals being impounded and surrendered in NSW is continually rising, resulting in severe overcapacity, and overcrowding issues for animal holding facilities. This has a significant impact on the animal's welfare and mental wellbeing. Animals in pounds' care are experiencing heightened stress levels and discomfort due to insufficient housing and are receiving inadequate exercise and enrichment necessities due to a lack of staff and volunteer resources to cope with the increase in the number of animals.

Holding facilities' financial resources are also under strain due to the higher number of animals requiring feeding and veterinary care. Veterinary fees for basic services such as desexing and vaccinations have risen significantly in the past 12-24 months. Despite ongoing community donations, animal holding facilities are finding it challenging to support animals that may require specific nutritional needs (for example pregnant cats and small kittens), as these food items are rarely donated due to their high costs.

While many animal holding facilities have always operated at a very high standard of animal care, the overcapacity of animals is beginning to have an impact on staff and volunteers' ability to dedicate sufficient resources to each animal. Subsequently, animal care needs such as sufficient exercise, enrichment and social interactions, adequate cleaning, quarantine control, and addressing veterinary needs are beginning to be impacted. The City of Sydney would welcome any support from the NSW Government that would increase funding for the operation of pounds.

#### **Euthanasia rates and practices.**

City of Sydney operates in partnership with Sutherland Shire Council Animal Shelter and utilises their facility as the City's animal impounding and re-homing facility.

Both the City and the shelter have a 'low kill' policy, which means only animals assessed to be a danger, or who have an illness that affects their quality of life are euthanised. The City and the shelter are committed to ensuring that all animals, that are suitable for rehoming, find their new owners.

With a significant increase in the number of animals being impounded and surrendered that require re-homing, the City makes its best efforts to advertise and promote animals for adoption. However, adoption rates are currently low. Incentives such as foster care programs and dedicated adoption promotions are currently not alleviating the overcapacity issues. With rescue and rehoming organisations facing the same challenges of overcapacity and high volumes of surrender requests, the situation has resulted in rescues and rehoming organisations being unable to assist by taking animals into foster care and re-homing. The overcapacity and overcrowding issue have reached a crisis point for many re-homing organisations, and without an urgent intervention, it is highly likely that euthanasia rates will begin to increase in NSW pounds.

### **Factors influencing the number of animals ending up in NSW pounds.**

#### Number of impounded animals.

	<b>2022/23 financial year</b>	<b>2021/22 financial year</b>
<b>City of Sydney Council</b>	81 dogs and 64 cats	50 dogs and 29 cats
<b>Sutherland Shire Council Animal Shelter</b>	112 dogs and 453 cats	107 dogs and 387 cats

There are several factors that have contributed to the overcapacity crisis that NSW pounds, animal welfare and rescue organisations are currently trying to manage.

#### Post pandemic pets.

During the COVID pandemic, animals' adoption rates and the demand for pets were so high that animals were being adopted as soon as they became available. At the time, the number of animals in pounds was extremely low in comparison to previous years. For example, at City of Sydney animal holding facility, it was common for one dog and only a few cats to be held during the lockdown periods.

In the last 12 months however, the City has experienced a sudden upward shift in the number of impounded animals and a decrease in the number of animals being collected by their owners. It appears that some people who had adopted or purchased a pet during the COVID pandemic were no longer able or willing to commit to caring for their pets, with reasons ranging from having to return to work, changes in circumstances or living arrangements, no longer had the time, or unable or unwilling to address training and behaviour requirements for their pet.

While already running several programs aimed at educating pet owners about their responsibilities, the City of Sydney would welcome any support from NSW Government to promote public education on responsible pet ownership.

#### The financial pressures.

With the continual increase to the cost of living many pet owners start to experience financial pressures. This has a significant impact on pets, where owners are finding they no longer have financial resources to adequately care for their animals. Owners are unable to afford veterinary care, pet food, training, and behavioural requirements, or are having to downsize and relocate to more affordable housing where they can no longer accommodate their animal. This has contributed to an increase in surrendered animals and surrender enquiries. It has also impacted the number of animals that are not collected by their owners once impounded, due to the costs of impound fees, resulting in an increased number of animals that require re-homing.

The City of Sydney would welcome any support from the NSW Government for low-income people experiencing financial hardship, to cover or subsidise animals' basic needs. The City of Sydney also would welcome any increased funding for animal welfare organisations such as the Animal Welfare League, Cat Protection Society, RSPCA, and rescue organisations to support programs for pet owners in need of financial support.

#### The rental market challenges.

The current rental market is another significant factor in the number of animals either being surrendered, not collected by owners when impounded, or requiring re-homing. Inability to find a suitable housing option is currently one of the main reasons reported in surrender enquiries. Many pet owners are having to downsize or move to more affordable accommodation and are often unable to find pet friendly rentals or obtain strata approvals.

The City of Sydney and the shelter received reports that some pet owners spent over 12 months searching for pet friendly accommodation and remained unsuccessful. Many landlords will preference tenants without pets placing further restrictions on renters with animals. There were also reports of landlords approving pets in rentals, then retracting the agreement for pet owners with medium to larger sized dogs.

The City of Sydney has made a separate submission to the NSW Government on their proposed reforms to the Residential Tenancies Act 2010 to make it easier for renters to have pets. The City welcomes the Government's commitment on this issue, but calls for the government to adopt a mode similar to the approach used by Victoria, the ACT and Northern Territory. Under this approach, landlords should only be able to refuse a pet by obtaining a Tribunal order allowing them to do so (rather than only requiring a reason to be given).

#### People buying dogs from breeders rather than adopting.

The current challenge of overcapacity at animal holding facilities, is significantly impacted by the current low rates of adoption. People are still buying pets from pet-shops and private breeders, that potentially deter potential pet owners from adopting animals from pounds, rescue, or rehoming organisations. It seems to be a trend that certain breeds of dogs, such as small or "designer breeds", are the types of dogs in high demand. They are not the types of dogs that are typically found for adoption from re-homing organisations. With the high demand for certain breeds and types of dogs from the public, people will continue to breed and sell dogs while there is a market for it. This in return has substantive impact on the dogs seeking new homes with re-homing organisations.

The City of Sydney would welcome any support from NSW Government that would promote adoption of pets from rehoming organisations, over pets sold by pet-shops and private breeders. The City of Sydney also supports more strengthened regulation of private breeding practices, such as those proposed under the Companion Animals Amendment (Puppy Farms) Bill 2021.

#### **Relationship between Council pounds and animal rescue organisations.**

With rescue organisations facing the same issues of overcapacity and high volumes of surrender requests, the situation has resulted in rescues rarely being able to assist pounds and welfare organisations with foster care and re-homing of animals. The overcapacity and overcrowding issue have reached crisis point for many re-homing organisations, and without intervention and solutions to the problem, it is inevitable that euthanasia rates will begin to increase. Many of these rescue organisations are volunteer run and self-funded. They have limited foster care, housing options and limited funding for animals so are only able to assist pounds and welfare organisations where they have availability. Rarely can rescue organisations facilitate animals with specific behavioural and training needs or animals requiring medical care.

The City of Sydney would welcome any support from NSW Government that would increase funding opportunities for animal rescue and rehoming organisations.

## **Management of homeless cats living in New South Wales.**

The *Companion Animals Act 1998* (NSW) permits cats to roam free. This created some inconsistencies amongst local councils whereby some councils will not impound stray cats, leaving the councils who will impound and rehome cats to take on cats from outside of their Local Government Area ("LGA"). Over the past two years the City has impounded 30 cats that were found in another LGA and taken to veterinary clinics in the City, by members of the public.

To address the challenge of managing cats' population, the City of Sydney currently has three Cat Management Programs.

### Street Cats Rehoming Program.

In 2015, the City received funding from the Office of Local Government's Responsible Pet Ownership Grant to implement the Street Cat Rehoming Program. The City has collaborated with veterinary clinics in the local area, Cat Protection Society, Inner City Strays and the Animal Welfare League NSW to act as satellite shelters to rehome kittens rather than impounding them through the shelter. All kittens impounded under this program were placed into foster care to be rehabilitated, and receive worming, flea, and veterinary treatment before being desexed, microchipped, vaccinated and rehomed. To date, over 260 kittens have been rescued from the streets because of this program.

### Subsidised desexing program.

The City offers subsidised desexing and microchipping for \$54 to eligible City cat owners and free desexing and microchipping when residents attend the City's Pet Days. Residents must hold a pension, concession, or healthcare card to access this service.

### Glebe Cat Management Program.

In 2019, the City collaborated with rescue groups to implement a pilot cat management program for a colony of cats in Glebe that are cared for by local residents. The Trap Desex Adopt Release ("TDAR") program involved trapping, desexing, vaccinating, and microchipping cats from the colony.

Before implementing this program, the City consulted with RSPCA NSW on the best model and protocol to use to meet legislative requirements under both the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979*, and the *Companion Animals Act 1998*. It was decided that it would be better to undertake TDAR program in an urban ecosystem where the impact of native wildlife is low, and where residents are able to provide ongoing care, feeding, and management of any cats that were returned to the colony site.

Of the 21 cats and kittens that were trapped under the TDAR program:

- 9 adult cats were released into the care of the residents that had been feeding them.
- 1 cat was euthanased due to poor health and humane reasons.
- 1 cat was released to a resident who had been feeding the cat and wanted to take on formal ownership of the cat.
- 1 kitten was euthanased for veterinary reasons.
- 9 kittens were rehomed through the Cat Protection Society

It is a requirement of the program that all cats and kittens adopted were microchipped, desexed, vaccinated and registered. The TDAR program allowed the City to stabilise the colony in terms of cat numbers and physical health, minimise and manage the level of complaints from residents and empower local residents through education and training to manage the cat colony.

Funding from the Government for cat management implement programs.

Effective cat management requires funding that will allow local councils to implement more programs to manage cats' population. The City of Sydney would support any additional funding for councils that offer subsidised desexing and microchipping programs to residents that are experiencing financial hardship.

Partnering with local rescue groups and/or veterinary clinics to rehome kittens can also be an effective way of managing unwanted litters of kittens.

**Adequacy of the laws currently governing animal rehoming processes.**

The *Companion Animals Act 1998* (NSW) requires lost animals to be delivered to its owners, council pounds, or any approved premises. In Sydney, this often results in situations where lost animals are taken to a veterinary clinic and then the council pound that is outside the Local Government Area ("LGA") where lost animal is ordinarily kept. While most owners report and make enquiries about their lost animals with their councils, very few make enquiries with other LGAs. This results in delays for returning lost animals to their owners and puts extra costs burden on councils and pounds that have to manage these animals. To effectively address this issue a few councils have entered into non-formal agreements for lost animals to be transferred into facilities that are in LGAs where the lost animal is ordinarily kept. However, this is not a uniform approach across all councils.

The City of Sydney supports legislative changes that would ensure lost animals are taken to holding facilities managed by councils where lost animals are ordinarily kept.

The City of Sydney welcomed recent changes to the *Companion Animals Act 1998* (NSW) and introduction of new section 64B that sets out action councils must take towards rehoming a seized or surrendered animal before destroying that animal. The City of Sydney supports legislative changes that would expand rehoming organisations' role in animal management processes, including ability for councils to enter animal management arrangements with approved rehoming organisations, to broaden council's options with rehoming or temporary care for animals that may require more time to find new homes.

Yours sincerely

**Monica Barone**  
Chief Executive Officer