

**Submission
No 51**

INQUIRY INTO POUNDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Edward River Council

Date Received: 17 August 2023

Inquiry into pounds in New South Wales

This submission is being made by Edward River Council. The submission is made in accordance with the terms of reference and addresses the following terms of reference;

1. Resourcing challenges affecting New South Wales pounds, including the adequacy of funding given towards the operation of pounds by local and state governments;

Funding for pound upgrades and new builds is beyond the reach of most Local Government budget allocations. In order to achieve quality, compliant facilities new pounds and upgrades should be funded by the State Government through grants or allocations in order of priority.

Local Government funding is absorbed by staffing costs, vehicle purchase, fit out and upgrades, staff training costs, pound maintenance, equipment, building upkeep and security. Supplies for animal sustenance, housing and handling.

2. The adequacy of pound buildings and facilities in New South Wales

Guidelines have not been finalised for Pound buildings and facility standards despite being flagged some time ago. The standards proposed at that time appeared to be of a higher standard than currently exists for most regional pounds, given that the majority of regional/rural pounds are designed to hold animals for relatively short periods of time and are older buildings.

The cost to achieve the standards which equate to similar standards for animal rescue shelters would be cost prohibitive. Should State Government determine the new standards be introduced it should work with individual Councils to provide funding incentives and resources to achieve compliant buildings.

3. Welfare challenges facing animals in pound across New South Wales including the provision of housing, bedding, feeding exercise, enrichment, veterinary treatment, vaccination and desexing.

The Council pound is an older facility which has basic amenities. Food and water bowls and raised bedding is supplied however donations of blankets, dog toys and exercise equipment etc are often relied on to provide enrichment of care.

Council does not have a large secure fenced area where dogs can exercise freely however opportunities are provided where possible to allow dogs to exercise in open space under the supervision of Councils Ranger.

Veterinary treatment for welfare checks and immunisations does not occur at the pound. Local Vets do not undertake onsite welfare checks and are generally only prepared to offer services from their surgery with payment required at the time of treatment. Should Council

request an onsite visit for a welfare check or immunisation it would likely result in a transfer of the pet owners' responsibility and the costs to Council.

Council currently runs a free microchipping program and a subsidised Desexing Program which is funded by Council and is well received by the Local community. The desexing program can only be offered to pension or concession card holders due to the strong demand and the costs associated with providing this program.

4. The adequacy of laws, regulations and codes governing New South Wales 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.

The regulation of New South Wales pounds does not provide clear guidelines to Council. Council is satisfied that the Companion Animals Act 1998 provides adequate guidance to Council for enforcement and compliance activities however could be supported by training, compliance templates, resources and guides that would provide greater uniformity in enforcement.

5. Factors influencing the number of animals ending up in NSW pounds, and strategies for reducing these numbers
 - More responsibility needs to be placed on pet owners to ensure compliance with legislative requirements
 - Assistance provided to pet owners to assess housing, containment and care regimes to prevent animals from roaming.
 - More capacity for Animal rescue shelters to receive animals from pounds for rehoming – often animals will need to be held in the pound for longer periods of time that required by legislation due to no capacity to receive animals.
 - Assistance in transporting animals to rehoming facilities. Council's Ranger generally has to transport animals to shelters often weekly or fortnightly which may involve up to a 4 hour minimum round trip and his absence from his day to day animal control duties. This invariably results in a delay to moving animals from the pound and loss of service in the Council area whilst he is away.
 - Obedience training for animals could be offered to pet owners at a subsidised or low cost. This would hopefully educate owner and their animals and reduce poor animal behaviour and animal attacks, which could in turn reduce the number of animals that need to be seized and impounded.
6. Euthanasia rates and practices in NSW pounds, including the adequacy of reporting euthanasia rates and other statistics

Rehoming of dogs and domestic cats is always Council's first option. When animals are unsuitable for rehoming or all efforts have been exhausted to find a shelter to take the animal they are euthanised at the local veterinary surgery (at cost to Council).

When animals are rehomed or euthanised the numbers are reported to at a Council level, however not through other reporting mechanisms.

7. The role and challenges of behavioural assessments in NSW Pounds

Council's Ranger has undertaken training which has provided him with the skills to undertake behavioural assessments in the pound. This is of assistance and considered an essential skill for dealing with the management of animals in the pound.

8. The relationship between NSW pounds and animal rescue organisations

It is difficult to find Animal rescue organisations in regional areas which have sufficient capacity to rehome animals from the pound. Council has worked hard to establish local and regional networks, who will always do their best to assist Council with rehoming animals. Whilst both Councils and Animal rescue shelters recognise their responsibility to work together to achieve rehoming it is often difficult to achieve this and comes down to timing, space for holding animals in the pound while waiting for a place and the capacity for the animal rescue organisation to take additional animals.

9. 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.

There is an ever increasing number of cats both domestic and feral that are abandoned or straying. Often people do not have financial capacity to desex cats so they rely on Council's desexing program, which while being a great initiative is only able to be extended to pensioners and concession card holders.

There is limited capacity among rescue shelters to provide space for abandoned or stray cats. So they often cannot be rehomed from pounds.

Adopting a cat from a rescue shelter involves fees to cover vaccination, desexing and microchipping cost which many people cannot afford, therefore there is a tendency for people to take kittens from other sources and not follow up with desexing or registration.

State Government could cover costs for release of animals from shelters. Housing authority should impose limits on tenants in regard to the number of animals they can have at their rented property and ensure the owner has had the cat desexed, microchipped and registered. In many cases the issue of abandoned cats left at public housing falls on Council to and not the owner or housing authority to manage.

10. Strategies for improving treatment, care and outcomes for animals in NSW Pounds

Create Multi purpose animal facilities that operate as an animal pound, rescue shelter, training facility and animal health assessment facility.

This could be operated on a regional basis shared between smaller Councils with funding from a state and local government authorities. This would relieve pressure on very small centres to provide animal pounds, particularly if more stringent standards are to be enforced.

Funded free vet assessments including welfare checks, immunisations, subsidised desexing could be provided at the centres and would create improved outcomes and a better perception of Council pounds being a place that seeks to care for, train and improve animal welfare.

11. Any other related matter

Council experiences many problems with stray and domestic cats. There are large numbers of cats responsible for hunting and killing wildlife and birds and straying onto neighbouring properties damaging property and causing hygiene issues . Stray and uncontained cats are hard to catch and control , they are generally not microchipped or registered and the cost to contain and euthanise many of these cats is borne by council as many are too wild to be rehomed.