

**Submission
No 53**

INQUIRY INTO POUNDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Albury City Council

Date Received: 17 August 2023

INQUIRY INTO POUNDS IN NSW

ALBURY CITY COUNCIL

This submission is on behalf of Albury City Council (AlburyCity). The responses to the questions posed have been collated in conjunction with subject matter experts working at AlburyCity. Members of this Council team are willing to be contacted for more information or be part of an action working group if required.

(a) resourcing challenges affecting New South Wales pounds, including the adequacy of funding given towards the operation of pounds by local and state governments.

AlburyCity will apply for funding opportunities as they present, but relevant and appropriate grant opportunities are limited. As an impounding, education and adoption cross-border and regional provider, AlburyCity has previously been successful in receiving funding from the Cross Border Commissioner Infrastructure Fund – noting that many NSW institutions would not be eligible to apply for this funding. AlburyCity is supportive of ongoing funding assistance to improve infrastructure, provide education programs or subsidise de-sexing and vaccinations being made available across wider NSW. Regular community programs could be developed and implemented through a 50:50 partnership, similar to that of the road safety programs through TfNSW. A greater impact can be achieved with ongoing funding as opposed to one-off opportunities, although all opportunities are welcomed.

(b) the adequacy of pound buildings and facilities in New South Wales

AlburyCity cannot comment on the adequacy of pound buildings elsewhere in NSW. The Albury Animal Care Centre, however, is currently in planning and design stage for the construction of a new facility due to be completed in 2024/25. As a provider of services to neighbouring and cross-border councils, the new larger facility is planned to provide the highest quality service and care, be innovative, contemporary and community education-adoption focussed.

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

There is no consistent framework as to expectations in reference to the provision of housing, bedding, feeding, exercise, enrichment, veterinary treatment, vaccination and desexing. Currently, pounds and shelters in NSW do not have their own standalone code of practice unlike Victoria.

All animals adopted from the Albury Animal Care Centre are desexed as an adoption requirement, despite this not being a legislative requirement in NSW.

There is a lack of veterinary services which impacts most regional areas, especially afterhours. This lack of vet services predominately impact animal welfare pre-pound as animals can be injured, dumped or otherwise in need of vet care, it then becomes the responsibility of councils to manage the welfare of animals without access to any vet services.

(d) the adequacy of the 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 adequacy of NSW Animal Welfare Code of Practice No 5 the laws is insufficient. Rather than falling under the 'dogs and cats in animal boarding establishments', NSW pounds and shelters would benefit from their own code of practice including the design of animal housing areas, guidelines for animal care workers and the number of staff required per a number of companion animals, transport, treatment and care, enrichment and socialisation, disinfection and hygiene and care/nutrition.

The Companion Animals Act 1998 also requires a review in consultation with operational subject matter experts to eliminate ambiguities.

In relation to Issue 49 Veterinary Practitioners Board instructions – Stray Dogs and Cats. Council has a preference that local vets accept stray animals from the public in the first instance. Council supports the Office of Local Government encouragement for vets to become Approved Persons. Approved Persons can carry out online searches of the Companion Animals Register 24 hours a day, seven days a week specifically for the purpose of re-uniting cats and dogs with their owners. This would reduce the burden on Council rangers and assist more animals to go back to owners rather than impounding.

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

There are many factors to consider as to what influences the number of animals ending up in NSW pounds.

1. Some Councils/Rangers not making every effort to return animals home prior to impounding. This is not the case with AlburyCity rangers.
2. Councils/Rangers not having the information required to contact an owner to return the animal. For example, no microchip, or owners' failure to update details when changed.
3. Irresponsible pet ownership, lack of desexing, poor welfare, inadequate containment, microchipping, and registration
4. Animals being surrendered, no choice from owners but could be due to rental/housing, cost of living and/or domestic violence.
5. Post covid pets, hasty decision, inappropriate housing, poor breed selection at the time
6. No room in shelters/rescue/foster homes, therefore nowhere for impounded animals to go once they have completed their statutory holding time.

Strategies: The Albury Animal Care Centre, through the construction of the new facility, is including an education centre for the benefit of the community and stakeholders. Training and education will be available about responsible pet ownership, correct breed selection, easy and readily available methods to keep microchip details up to date, school visits, post puppy preschool training to help people beyond those puppy months to help with anti-social antics, barking and general support. Desexing programs will continue to be run, including the current "Keep Track of Your Best Mate program.

Proactive Councils/Rangers to return animals home regardless of registration status (follow up registration later instead of impounding, this will lessen the financial burden)

Home visits from Council/Rangers to help untangle containment issues and offer support.

The new Albury Animal Care Centre will offer emergency, short term accommodation for victims of domestic violence/homelessness in the new facility.

As in previous response, Council supports the Office of Local Government encouragement for vets to become Approved Persons. Approved Persons can carry out online searches of the Companion Animals Register 24 hours a day, seven days a week specifically for the purpose of re-uniting cats and dogs with their owners. This would reduce the burden on Council rangers and assist more animals to go back to owners rather than impounding.

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

Euthanasia rates have been trending down over recent years. Reporting needs to be tightened as to 'why' dogs and cats are being euthanised. Feral cats should have their own reporting section and be separated from domestic cats who are euthanised. A more extensive reporting system will allow the NSW OLG to understand why animals are being euthanised and what changes are needed to reduce these numbers. Why are 48.6% of euthanised dogs in NSW Staffordshire/varieties? Or generally larger breeds? (As per The CIE Draft Report of Rehoming of Companion Animals in NSW).

Some guidelines for people working in the animal management/pound field about the management of animals with behavioural issues would be welcomed. With limited resources in rural and regional areas and rescue organisations struggling with capacity, focus and priority need to be given to animals who are deemed sound of mind and body and suitable for rehoming.

(g) the role and challenges of behavioural assessments in New South Wales pounds

Provision of funding and change of legislation to allow Councils to invest in training and development for people working within the pound system to make an educated assessment of animals within their facility. Councils have accountability to their community and should be making their own decisions about suitability for rehoming over organisations. If in doubt or dispute Councils should engage the services of a trained and certified dog behavioralist for a second opinion. The availability, cost and use of behavioural assessor should be reviewed, and cost subsidised to help improve the number of behavioural assessments that can be conducted. This could improve the number of animals able to be rehomed and create greater efficiencies at impounding facilities.

The amendments to the Companion Animals Act 1998 – Section 64B have not made positive changes in this area. The responsibility to assess behaviour or whether it is cruel to keep an animal alive has been shifted onto vets (unless Council has adopted a policy) – this has moved the responsibility and greater opportunities to rehome away from Council and can be at significant cost. It is also placing burden on vets who have limited capacity to leave the practice to attend a facility, and conversely, the

impounding facility may not be able to transfer the animal due for assessment. Regional and Rural councils indicate it is problematic to obtain a vet assessment mainly due to vet demand and resourcing.

Possibly a user pay behavioural assessment option could be considered for those individuals wishing to adopt from the pound.

(h) the relationship between New South Wales pounds and animal rescue organisations

AlburyCity have a strong relationship with all local rescue organisations which has been built over many years. With the amendments to the Companion Animals Act, we contact in writing multiple 'Approved Rehoming Rescue Organisations' outside our area daily looking for a connection and in hope they may be able to start taking some animals from our facility. These rescue organisations are full at most times and the changes to the Act place a mental burden upon volunteers who feel guilty if they cannot accept an animal. An improvement would be to allow impounding facilities to contact known and trusted rescue agencies regardless of whether they are Approved Rehoming Rescue Organisations. This may cast the messaging out wider and strengthen relationships between Councils and additional rescue organisations.

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

This question needs to be broken down between feral cats, semi-owned cats and cats that are owned yet still breeding. Clear framework and strategies to tackle each group of cats needs to be put in place. More support and funding from the government so that councils can set up targeted programs is vital. More emphasis needs to be applied to cat population issues. Rural and Regional Councils are in need for more support for desexing programs, more importantly vet resourcing. If metropolitan vets or mobile desexing programs could regularly visit rural and regional areas would make a significant difference. More education surrounding responsible cat ownership regarding desexing would assist.

Clearer legislation surrounding enforcement of stray cats to enable council to manage complaints would also be beneficial.

(j) strategies for improving the treatment, care and outcomes for animals in New South Wales Pounds

More funding available for Councils to supply animals with better than standard care whilst they are in their care. Including flea and worming treatment, quality food, bedding/jackets for winter and or grooming if applicable. Impounding facilities are traditionally set up for short term accommodation, but the focus should also be on longer stay adoptable pets. Personalised meet and greets with an informed and experienced Animal Care Attendant is essential to ensure that animal is set up to remain within that new home and fits into that lifestyle. Albury City Council have opened their own Cat Adoption Centre for cats to stay long term until a home is found. We understand cats cope well for extended periods however dogs can over time deteriorate and become institutionalised. Preference for long term dog residents to seek the refuge of rescue agencies should be a priority. Daily enrichment should be given to both dogs and cats in Councils care. Council's need to employ staff/management who are experienced in animals in facilities and animal husbandry.