

**Submission  
No 55**

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

**Organisation:** Liverpool Plains Shire Council

**Date Received:** 17 August 2023

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The Director  
Portfolio Committee 8  
Parliament House  
Maquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 200  
Dear Hon Emma Hurst MLC

17.08.2023

**Re: Portfolio Committee 8 – Inquiry into Pounds in New South Wales**

Thank you for inviting Liverpool Plains Shire Council to contribute to the Inquiry into Pounds in New South Wales. Please find attached Council's submission prepared around some of the critical questions being examined by the Inquiry comprising of the questions1 (a) – (h).

Liverpool Plains Shire Council is the local government authority that manages the Liverpool Plains Shire, which is located in the New England North West region of New South Wales. The Shire has a permanent resident population of approximately 7,870 and covers an area of 5,086 square kilometres

The Shire is a predominantly rural shire with large agricultural landholdings. The two principal settlements are Quirindi and Werris Creek and the smaller villages of Blackville, Caroon, Currabubula, Pine Ridge, Premer, Spring Ridge, Wallabadah and Willow Tree.

Liverpool Plains Shire Council owns and operates on animal pound in Quirindi manned by one permanent staff during the week and casual staff for limited cleaning and feeding over the weekend.

As one of the smaller populated Councils, any changes to the requirements for animal management can have a significant impact. In addition to the general cost pressures on small rural Council, I also reaffirm the difficulty in attracting suitable staff for a wide range of positions, including those engaged in animal management.

Council seeks to do the best it can with the limited resources to manage animals in accordance with legislation and community expectations for a humane outcome for animals that come under its control.

If you wish to discuss any aspect of our submission, please contact Council's Ranger, Mrs Christine Anderson

Yours Sincerely

**David Kitson**  
**Manager Planning & Regulation**

Response to Questions raised Portfolio Committee 8 – Inquiry into Pounds in NSW

**1. That Portfolio Committee 8 – Customer Service inquire into the report on pounds New South Wales, and in particular:**

**a) Resourcing challenges affection New South Wales pounds, including the adequacy of funding given towards the operation of pounds by local and state governments.**

Local Councils are always financially limited in the services they can provide to their communities as their funds are raised from rates and state government funding. Pounds are one of many services provided by Councils that has an ever-increasing expense. Recent changes to the Companion Animals Act 1998 have meant that animals are staying in pounds longer, which has increased the costs of managing animals. This increased cost burden is ultimately funded from very limited rates income.

**b) The adequacy of pound buildings and facilities in New South Wales**

Liverpool Plains Shire Council upgraded its pound about six years ago to an enclosed building with 8 holding pens. The building was funded over a couple of financial years and was built to fit the standards of the NSW Animal Welfare Code of Practice No 5 – Dogs and cats in animal boarding establishments (1996). This facility is significantly better than the open caged facility it replaced. Overtime the building has been modified to improve the conditions for animals in care and we have planned improvement still to come.

All councils provide the best facilities they can. Many councils have over the last ten years upgraded their pounds and others are in this process now. There can never be a one-size-fits-all pound facility as available land, budget, size of pound required and environmental conditions (weather), varies between Councils and the geographic area of NSW e.g., a pound built for the climate of Tweed Shire Council (warm humid climate), might be entirely unsuitable for Snowy Monaro Regional Council (dry heat in summer, very cold in winter).

**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.**

Liverpool Plains Shire Council seeks to address the basic needs of the animals in the pound. There are always financial limitations to what can be provided, as pounds are only one of many services provided by Council for the benefit of the community and funded by ratepayers. The current pound supplies all the basic needs for the animals, as well as age-appropriate chew toys and a radio in the kennel area to alleviate stress and boredom.

Worming and flea treatment is provided on an “as needs” basis and all injured animals are provided with medical care. Vaccination and desexing are not provided by Council, as this is quite costly. With the numbers of animals that come through the pound the vaccination and desexing of all animals would be a significant cost burden, which would need to be financed from limited rates income. Fortunately, many of the rehomed animals are vaccinated and desexed by the rescue organizations that in many cases have access to veterinary practices that provide such a service on a voluntary or discount rate.

**d) The adequacy of the laws, regulations and the codes governing New South Wales pounds, including the Companion Animals Act 1998 (NSW) and the New South Wales 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.**

Most of the laws governing pounds are adequate and are beneficial to the care of animals in the pound confines.

**The newest amendment to the Companion Animals Act 1998, requiring all animals to be offered to at least two rescue organisations flawed legislation that is:**

- **resulting in significant additional costs to Council**
- **inhibits the ability of Council to actively encourage the removal of dangerous dogs from the community**
- **inhibits Council to better manage the flow of animals through the pound**

Liverpool Plains Shire Council had prior to this amendment, offered the owners of dangerous and/or dog that had been involved in attacks, the option of surrendering this dog to Council for euthanasia (at Councils expense). This was done with the aim of encouraging the removal of dangerous dogs from the community. After the legislative change Council can no longer offer this option, as it means keeping the dogs in the pound longer and possibly needing to offer them to rescue organisations. The type of dogs that Council prior policy was directed towards are dangerous and aggressive dogs, and the mandatory requirements to retain them potentially puts Councils pound staff at risk.

**The legislation gives no ability for experienced animal handlers/pound operator to make a judgement about the ability of dogs to be safely rehome and ignores the reality that there are dogs that have little or no chance of being taken by rescue organisations. There are compelling reasons for such animals to be euthanised without a holding period and attempts to rehome.**

Likewise, many feral and unowned cats also have little chance of being safely rehomed and/or taken by rescue organisations. The community doesn't want feral/unowned cats in and around their homes, killing native birds and animals and fighting with their pet cats. So, they humanly trap them and hand them into the pound staff to deal with. As these cats were born wild, they get severely stressed being confined in a cage and display aggression towards people at all given opportunities. As Liverpool Plains Shire Council is in a rural area, there are limited options for these cats to be rehomed as rescue organisations, which while they do take these kinds of cats, don't want to drive a six to eight hour round trip to collect them.

Making use of veterinary services to humanly euthanise aggressive animals should be allowable, without the burden of trying to rehome them, for the welfare of the animal and the benefit of the community.

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

There are three major influencing factors, with first two being prominent in the Liverpool Plains Shire:

- 1) The **cost of living**. The cost of providing food, parasite control and veterinary care for animals has increased over the last year. People finding it hard to pay bills don't have spare money to care for pets.
- 2) The **rental market** being very tight. People wanting to move into affordable decent housing are surrendering much loved pets so they can be considered for rental properties.
- 3) End of **covid pandemic** restrictions. Many people adopted pets during the lockdowns associated with the pandemic. Now the lockdowns have ended, people are returning to the lifestyles they had previously and no longer want the responsibility for the pets.

There are no easy solutions to this situation. Many people have been breeding animals to supplement their finances, especially during the covid when there was a high demand for pets. This has added to the number of animals in communities, so it has become increasingly difficult to rehome animals from the pound. Backyard breeders and pedigree breeders alike are fueling this problem, by continually breeding animals for a limited and shrinking market.

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

Liverpool Plains Shire Council always tries to rehome as many animals as possible. Unfortunately, the reality is that there aren't always suitable homes for some animals. Some animals that would otherwise be suitable for rehoming are euthanised at times because there just-aren't homes for them to go to. Many animals do get stressed being in a pound environment for extended periods, this is because being in the pound is not like being in a loving home, no matter how good the pound is. Like most Council pounds, Liverpool Plains Shire Councils' pound has limited space. It is emotionally draining for pound staff to euthanase animals that would make great family pets. It is also very stressful trying to find somewhere to house animals when the pound is at or above capacity.

The reporting of pound statistics is very straight forward. Records are maintained of animals coming in and going out of the pound. Euthanasia rates at pounds are like many other statistics, they can be interpreted and/or manipulated to fit an agenda. Councils have a responsibility to their communities to operate pounds so:

- stray animals can be reunited with caring owners and
- unwanted animals can find new homes and
- aggressive animals can be removed from communities before any or more damage is done.

The good work pound staff do to with rehoming of suitable animals is rarely reported on by those who are fixated on the euthanasia rates.

### **g) The role and challenges of behavioural assessments in New South Wales pounds.**

Liverpool Plains Shire Council uses pound staff to assess animals. We have never been approached by an animal behaviouralist who is willing to donate their time to assess animals. Being a rural Council, it is unlikely that such a professional would be willing to travel from other centres at no cost.

**Any proposal to involve animal behaviouralist in the operations of Council pound would be cost prohibitive and would seriously undervalue the skills and abilities of dedicated pound staff that, in many cases, have had many years of experience handling animals.**

### **h) The relationship between New South Wales pounds and animal rescue organisations.**

Liverpool Plains Shire Council has over the years developed good relationships with rescue organisations.

**Rescue organisations are vitally important for Council in reducing euthanasia rates by rehoming animals that have come into the pound as strays or surrenders.**

The relationship is built on hard work and trust. The rescue organisations trust us to provide them with honest information about the behaviour and traits of animals and not to “sugar coat” anything just to get an animal out of the pound. This information can include why an owner has surrendered an animal, as not all behaviours can be assessed in a pound environment e.g., digging, fence jumping, attaching other animals etc. The rescue organisations rely on our information so they can find suitable foster carers for the animals that they agree to take.

When rescue organisations have no places available to take extra animals, the limited spaces in the pound inevitably start to fill up. This can lead to an increase in animals being euthanised, as there is nowhere for them to go. In the case of Liverpool Plains Shire Council Pound, rescues are very good at arranging transport to get animals they are taking, out of pounds in a timely manner, which does relieve the pressure on limited available space.

The reduction in the euthanasia rate as a result of the involvement of animal rescue has been profound over last 12 years.

2010/11 - Total number of dogs in pound – 181

Total number of dogs Euthanised – 105 = 58%

2022/23 - Total number of dogs in pound – 180

Total number of dogs Euthanised – 7 = 3.8%

The good work a Council pound does is reliant on the fantastic work of rescue organisations.