



**Submission
No 56**

INQUIRY INTO POUNDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Sydney Dogs & Cats Home

Date Received: 17 August 2023

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17 August 2023

To The Director and the Hon Emma Hurst MLC Chairperson
Portfolio Committee 8, Parliament House
Macquarie Street NSW 2000

Subject: Response to NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into NSW Pounds - Legislative Changes and Animal Management Strategies

On behalf of Sydney Dogs & Cats Home, we appreciate the opportunity to address the inquiry into New South Wales pounds. As a leading organisation dedicated to the welfare of companion animals, we are deeply committed to improving the treatment, care, and outcomes for animals in pounds throughout the state.

Who we are:

Since 1946, Sydney Dogs & Cats Home has cared for Sydney's lost abandoned and neglected pets. As Sydney's only charity pound and community facility, we open our doors to thousands of pets each year, currently servicing 6 council areas and helping over a million Sydneysiders and their pets. When we are able to build our permanent facility our capacity will grow to over double our current levels to help ease the strain on the NSW animal management crisis.



At Sydney Dogs & Cats Home, we support the Getting to Zero Movement and we strive to rehome every healthy and treatable animal that comes through our doors. We're proud to say we never place a time limit on any rehomable animal awaiting adoption.

We also deliver a range of successful community programs, creating a lifeline for both the animals in our care and for those in the community who need it most.

(a) Resourcing challenges affecting NSW pounds:

One of the key issues affecting New South Wales pounds is the inadequacy of funding provided by state and local government. With the surge in animals requiring care, this has not been met with sufficient funding increases. Insufficient funding restricts the ability of pounds to provide proper facilities, care, medical attention, and support to the animals in their care. Equally importantly is creating a safe environment for the workers, volunteers and members of the public

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who attend the facilities. The lack of, or substandard, facilities due to inadequate funding is also impacting community members – both who are current and future pet owners – and the safety of community members with the increase number of aggressive stray animals.

With the rising number of animals requiring care, capacity concerns at pound facilities are resulting in the unnecessary euthanasia of animals across the state.

Workforce is an ongoing resource challenge, with hiring skilled and experienced staff challenging, with high numbers of role vacancies impacting quality of care for the animals, and adding strain and safety risks for staff.

We urge the government to re-evaluate and increase the allocation of funds to pounds, considering the growing number of abandoned and stray animals and increasing demand and reliance on the sector.

(b) Adequacy of pound buildings and facilities:

The current state and shortage of pound facilities in New South Wales is a pressing concern. Many of these facilities are suboptimal, lacking proper space, appropriate housing, ventilation, and other essential amenities. These conditions compromise the welfare of the animals and the safety of both the animals and the staff. Upgrading and improving the infrastructure of pounds along with building additional facilities must be prioritised to ensure the well-being of the animals to create a conducive environment for their care and to meet the increasing demand.

Sydney Dogs & Cats Home are working with the NSW Government to secure promised funding to build a permanent facility, that will meet best practise standards ensuring the highest level of animal care and safe working environment for staff, volunteers and members of the community. This facility will enable us to grow our Council intake to support the current sector that is in crisis with overflowing facilities. We are hoping we can get this essential project underway in the immediate future.

(c) Welfare challenges facing animals in NSW pounds:


Ultimately, the welfare challenges faced by animals in pounds across New South Wales are deeply interconnected with financial resources. As a charity pound, Sydney Dogs & Cats Home has

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experienced the constant struggle to balance providing the best standard of care for the animals with the limited funding available. See below for further detail on each of the challenges:

- **Housing:** One of the primary welfare challenges in pounds is the availability of appropriate housing for the animals. Many pounds are often overcrowded due to the increasing number of stray, abandoned, or surrendered animals. Insufficient space and inadequate facilities can lead to stress and behavioural problems in animals, potentially affecting their overall well-being and adoptability.
- **Bedding:** Proper bedding is essential for providing comfort and warmth to animals in pounds. However, limited financial resources can hinder the ability to regularly replace and maintain bedding materials, which may result in unsanitary conditions and discomfort for the animals.
- **Feeding:** Providing adequate and balanced nutrition is crucial for the health and well-being of animals in pounds. However, budget constraints can limit the quality and quantity of food available to the animals, leading to potential malnutrition and health issues. Relying on members of public to donate food is problematic not only due to the inconsistency of supply but also because providing animals with numerous brands of food readily leads to gastrointestinal upset.
- **Exercise and Enrichment:** Animals in pounds require regular exercise and mental stimulation to prevent boredom and improve their overall welfare. Unfortunately, due to limited staffing and financial resources, it can be challenging to offer sufficient exercise and enrichment opportunities to all animals in a pound setting.
- **Veterinary Treatment:** Access to timely and appropriate veterinary care is vital for animals in pounds, especially those with pre-existing health conditions or injuries. Financial constraints may lead to delayed or limited veterinary treatment, impacting the animals' recovery and well-being. Providing veterinary treatment for animals in care comes at an exceptionally high cost to the pounds looking after these animals.
- **Vaccination and Desexing:** Vaccination and desexing play crucial roles in preventing the spread of diseases and controlling the animal population. However, the costs associated with these medical procedures place an enormous strain on pound resources, leading to potential lapses in vaccination and desexing programs.

Considering these challenges, we believe that increased government support and funding for pounds in New South Wales is necessary. Additional financial resources would enable pounds to improve their facilities, maintain higher standards of care, and implement vital programs, such

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as vaccination and desexing initiatives, which would have a long-term positive impact on the welfare of animals.

Moreover, we recommend considering collaborative partnerships between animal welfare organisations, government agencies, and community stakeholders to pool resources and expertise, promoting a collective effort to enhance animal welfare in pounds.

Addressing the welfare challenges facing animals in pounds across New South Wales requires a multi-faceted approach that focuses on allocating adequate financial resources, promoting collaborations, and implementing effective policies and practices.



(d) Adequacy of laws, regulations and codes governing NSW pounds:

The current legislation 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), need to be urgently reviewed and strengthened to improve and better safeguard animal welfare:

- **Review and Updates:** The laws and codes should be periodically reviewed and updated to reflect advancements in animal welfare practices, scientific understanding, and community expectations. For example, the scientific research to support the implementation of TNR programs as an effective animal management strategy is well established however legislation is not yet reflective of this. Regular reviews will help address emerging challenges and promote better animal care standards in pounds.
- **Standardisation and Enforcement:** Ensuring consistency in standards across all pounds in New South Wales is vital to guaranteeing the welfare of animals regardless of their location. Developing standardised guidelines for housing, veterinary care, exercise, and enrichment will promote better compliance and accountability. The enforcement and compliance regime should be improved to ensure all pounds adhere to the highest standards of care and treatment.
- **Transparency and Reporting:** Establishing transparent reporting mechanisms for pounds, including regular inspections and public access to inspection reports, can enhance accountability and encourage adherence to regulations.
- **Prevention:** Legislation reform is required to address the overpopulation of animals to prevent the high volume of animals requiring pound facilities.

See **k) Other related matter** on page 7 of this document for recommendations.

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(e) Factors influencing the number of animals in NSW Pounds:

Several factors contribute to the influx of animals in pounds, and addressing the root cause of high intake rates is essential to alleviate the burden on pounds and enhance the overall wellbeing of animals.

By adopting a preventative and proactive approach to address these challenges, we can work towards creating a more compassionate and sustainable environment for animals in pounds across the state.

Factors influencing the number of animals ending up in NSW pounds and strategies to reduce these numbers are as follows:

- **Irresponsible Pet Ownership:** Irresponsible pet ownership, including failure to desex pets and inadequate containment measures, contributes significantly to the number of stray and surrendered animals in pounds. Implementing educational campaigns on responsible pet ownership and promoting microchipping and the benefits of desexing can help reduce the number of animals ending up in pounds.
- **Lack of Affordable Veterinary Care:** Financial constraints prevent some pet owners from accessing affordable veterinary care, leading to untreated health conditions and subsequent surrenders. Implementing low-cost veterinary clinics or subsidies for essential veterinary services can alleviate this issue.
- **Inadequate Microchipping and Registration:** Further strengthening the enforcement of microchipping and registration laws can help reunite lost pets with their owners, reducing the number of animals entering pounds.
- **Stray Management Programs:** Collaborating with local councils and animal welfare organisations to implement effective stray management programs, such as trap-neuter-return (TNR) for community cats, can drastically reduce the number of strays entering pounds.

(f) Euthanasia rates and practices in NSW pounds:


We are aware of pounds in NSW that are euthanising to manage capacity restrictions. However at Sydney Dogs & Cats Home, we support the Getting to Zero Movement, striving to rehome every

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healthy and treatable animal in our care. We're proud to say we never place a time limit on any rehoming animal awaiting adoption.

Transparent and accurate reporting of euthanasia rates and other statistics is crucial for assessing the effectiveness of animal management strategies. Implementing strategies to reduce euthanasia rates, such as the following should be a priority:

- Community education around responsible pet ownership
- Funding microchipping, registration and desexing programs
- Promoting pet adoption from pounds and rescue organisations
- Investing in behaviour modification programs, and
- Supporting foster carer and rescue networks

Current legislative and external pressure on pounds around the assessment of animals suitable for rehoming to reduce euthanasia, including those that have demonstrated high risk behaviour, needs urgent review. Animal welfare is being compromised along with placing the safety of staff, animals and members of the community at risk.

Following a preventative animal management approach, rather than a reactive approach will have the greatest impact on reducing euthanasia numbers across the state.



(g) Role and challenges of behavioural assessments in NSW pounds:

Behavioural assessments play a significant role in understanding the temperament of animals to diagnose any required medical care, along with appropriate matching with suitable adoptive families.

However a considerable body of research now exists questioning the validity of formal behaviour assessments in a shelter / pound environment. Although conducting a comprehensive behavioural assessment may help match animals with suitable homes and ensures public safety, challenges exist within these assessments, including:

- **Resources and Expertise:** Limited resources and trained staff can impede the frequency and accuracy of behavioural assessments.
- **Stressful Environment:** The pound environment can be stressful for animals, potentially affecting their behaviour during assessments altering their accuracy.

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To address these challenges, increased funding for improvements to the environment along with behavioural training and resources including collaboration with behaviour experts could contribute to more effective observation-based behavioural assessments and enhance the accuracy of these evaluations.

The other significant challenge that pounds are faced with in relation to behavioural assessments is the legislative and external pressure to rehome all animals including those that have demonstrated high risk behaviour either to themselves, other animals, or people during their time in a pound. The pressure on pounds to rehome animals who have demonstrated high-level unpredictable aggression poses a significant challenge and the rehoming of such animals can result not only in risk to people and animals within the community but also compromised welfare to the animal in question.

A balance needs to be achieved where out-dated structured behavioural assessments are no longer accepted but also where animals can in fact be deemed as not suitable for rehoming and subsequently euthanised if posing either a safety risk or their welfare is compromised.



(h) Relationship between NSW pounds and animal rescue organisations:

Pounds and animal rescue organisations play complementary roles in animal welfare. While pounds focus on sheltering and rehoming animals, rescue organisations often step in to provide specialised care and support for animals with specific needs. Collaboration between pounds and rescue organisations is essential for:

- **Transfers and Rescues:** Facilitating regular transfers of animals from pounds to rescue organisations can ease overcrowding and provide animals with specialised care and attention.
- **Foster Programs:** Developing foster programs in partnership with rescue organisations can provide temporary care for animals in pounds, alleviating stress and increasing adoption rates.
- **Training and Support:** Exchange of knowledge and resources between pounds and rescue organisations can enhance overall animal care and welfare.

At Sydney Dog & Cats home, although we value the role and importance of rescue organisations, our limited resources don't allow for effective rescue relationship management. Collaboration, establishing formal partnerships and communication between pounds and animal rescue organisations is crucial to managing animal populations in a more co-ordinated approach to animal welfare. Funding to support this would be beneficial.

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(i) Challenges with number of homeless cats living in NSW:

The overpopulation of homeless cats remains a persistent challenge for pounds and animal rescue organisations. Legalising and implementing targeted TNR trap, neuter and release programs, alongside funded desexing initiatives for community cats, can significantly reduce the number of homeless cats and improve their overall welfare.

Sydney Dogs & Cats Home are committed to supporting our local Councils and communities with effective cat management strategies working alongside our prevention programs. Prevention programs such as mass desexing is vital to ensure effective, low cost, sustainable animal management is achieved. As well as reducing Council impounding costs, a desexing program is proactive in preventing unwanted animals, nuisance issues, feral / semi owned cat populations and impacts on wildlife. It also reduces euthanasia rates.

Review of legislation to include mandatory desexing for companion animals will assist in the management of homeless cat populations.



Collaboration with the State and local governments, vets, welfare and rescue organisations along with the community is critical for effective cat management.

(j) Strategies for improving treatment, care and outcomes in NSW pounds:

To enhance the treatment, care, and outcomes for animals in NSW pounds, the following strategies are recommended:

- Strengthen legislation to promote responsible pet ownership and mandate desexing.
- Increase funding to pounds to ensure adequate resources for animal care and management.
- Improve pound buildings and facilities to meet the welfare needs of animals and staff and enforce compliance mechanisms to ensure all pounds meet animal welfare standards.
- Invest in public awareness campaigns and funded desexing programs to reduce the number of animals arriving at pounds.
- Promote pet adoption and foster care programs to reduce euthanasia rates.
- Provide behavioural assessment training for pound staff and collaborate with experts in the field.

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- Foster stronger partnerships between pounds and animal rescue organizations to facilitate successful rehoming.
- Legalise and implement targeted trap and release programs for managing homeless cats.

(k) Any other related matter:

PREVENTION

There are a number of ways to improve animal welfare, conditions and outcomes in NSW Pounds, and most of this is connected directly to increasing funding. However, the focus for long term sector sustainability and to reduce the ongoing financial strain, is the critical work on prevention. We need to reduce the number of animals coming into the facilities, reducing the amount of State and local funding and the number of new facilities needed.

Extensive Legislation reform will be required to achieve this around:


- **Mandatory Desexing:** Enacting legislation that mandates the desexing of all companion animals in NSW will play a significant role in controlling the animal population and reducing the number of animals ending up in pounds. Mandatory desexing can significantly curb unplanned litters and overpopulation. This measure would need to be carefully crafted to address exemptions for registered breeders and situations where desexing might be medically inadvisable.
- **Pet Retailer Regulations:** Implement stricter regulations for pet retailers to ensure that pets are sourced from reputable breeders or rescue organisations. This helps prevent impulse purchases and reduces the chances of animals being abandoned later.
- **Ban on Puppy Mills and Backyard Breeding:** Introduce comprehensive laws and the enforcement to prohibit puppy mills and backyard breeding operations. This would prevent the proliferation of unhealthy and poorly-socialised animals that often end up in pounds.
- **Microchipping and Registration:** Strengthen enforcement of microchipping and registration laws to ensure that lost pets are reunited with their owners and to hold owners accountable for their pets.
- **Public Awareness and Educational Programs:** Establish legislation that supports public awareness campaigns and mandates animal welfare education in schools, educating about responsible pet ownership and animal care and the importance of adoption from shelters.

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- **Tenant and Housing Rights:** Advocate for legislation that protects the rights of pet owners in rental properties, reducing the likelihood of surrenders due to housing restrictions.
- **Support for Vulnerable Pet Owners:** Legislation can allocate funds for programs that provide financial assistance, temporary housing, and veterinary care to low-income individuals, seniors, and individuals with disabilities who are at risk of surrendering their pets.
- **Community Cat Management:** Legalise, implement, and encourage trap-neuter-release (TNR) programs for community cats, addressing their population growth and reducing the number of unowned cats entering pounds and reducing euthanasia rates.

It is essential to recognise that sustainable change requires a comprehensive and collaborative effort from various stakeholders, including government bodies, animal welfare experts, veterinarians, and the general public. It should be balanced, practical, and geared toward achieving the dual goals of promoting responsible pet ownership and best animal welfare while minimising the number of animals entering pounds.

We encourage ongoing communication and partnership among these groups to achieve significant improvements in animal management strategies and pound conditions.

Thank you for considering our perspective. We are available to discuss the above and provide more detailed recommendations to the Government if required. We are eager to work together towards a more compassionate and responsible approach to animal welfare in New South Wales pounds.

Sincerely,

Melissa Penn
General Manager
Sydney Dogs & Cats Home