

**Submission
No 59**

INQUIRY INTO POUNDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Mr Martin Derby

Date Received: 17 August 2023

Dear Committee

Pounds and shelters are a publicly funded community service paid for by local communities. The shooting of 15 dogs and puppies falls far short of community expectations. Bourke Shire Council was accused of this animal cruelty and a failure to exercise required duty of care in 2021. Dogs were also observed as underweight obviously denied food, too weak to stand, denied vet care (riddled with ticks, some with parvovirus), denied beds and blankets, hosed down, treated cruelly and dragged on leashes. The NSW Department of Primary Industries says, 'all pounds and shelters must comply with animal welfare laws.' ***However, our current animal welfare laws are outdated and well below the benchmark for an advanced country like Australia and certainly do not reflect community views on how animals should be cared for properly.*** It is obvious in this case that Bourke Shire Council was not complying with even the most basic animal welfare standards. Lacking is also systematic and regular audits and checks on the treatment of animals housed in these facilities across the state which would reveal ongoing cruelty and neglect of many animals in these pounds and shelters. Despite the NSW government proclaiming it takes 'animal welfare seriously', we see no evidence of this when there are no regular checks, no compliance and poor welfare standards in place.

Through no fault of their own animals are euthanised at appalling numbers and paying the ultimate price due to an inadequate broken system that operates with little or no public transparency, scrutiny and accountability. It is time that our animal welfare laws reflected changed community sentiment that all animals are sentient beings and that they feel pain and suffer in silence when inadequate outdated legislation does not protect them from neglect, abuse and cruelty.

There are many challenges that exist because the pound and shelter system has been neglected for decades and starved of proper funding and a commitment by any government to improve outcomes for these poor animals. Local pounds despite the fact that they are paid for by local communities need a large injection of funds from the state government to repair this broken neglected system. Funds are available when you hear of Josh Murray appointed as Secretary of Transport in NSW and allegations and criticisms of a flawed recruitment process that has cost the taxpayer \$120,000. And then there is NSW Forestry Corp that continually runs at a loss averaging \$25 million a year subsidised by the taxpayer. Wastage of taxpayer money is criminal when this could be channelled to repair the NSW broken pound and shelter system that urgently needs substantial funds to make up for the decades of neglect. Animal welfare standards must be raised to end this disgusting cruelty. There is no excuse. Governments have simply turned a blind eye to this issue.

Legislation must include proper regulation and compliance through regular checks and audits to ensure that these pounds and shelters meet the standards of care that are defined in the legislation and code of practice.

By introducing a fully funded, mandatory and legally enforceable NSW pound and shelter 'duty of care' regime the focus must be on proactive life-saving initiatives and solutions, and best practice animal welfare outcomes, rather than just killing and quick disposal of animals because they were just unlucky enough to end up in a pound or shelter. Consistent welfare standards across all pounds in the state must be enforced especially in regional areas.

End the currently unacceptable treatment and neglect of homeless and vulnerable impounded animals under NSW's traditional animal pound and shelter model, which manages animals under 'waste management' or 'feral pest management' policies, focusing on disposal rather than care, rehoming and adoption. Rehoming and adoption must be the ultimate goal.

To achieve the above-

- Immediately halt all NSW pound and shelter shooting and discontinue all 'euthanasia' methods apart from intravenous injection for compassionate reasons.
- Immediately end all pound and shelter 'euthanasia' procedures being undertaken by anyone apart from qualified and licensed veterinary practitioners.
- Urgently conduct a public online survey (8 weeks) and openly publicise (as the majority of the public are unaware of these forums for public comment) to engage the community and harness a broad range of views and expectations about the management of NSW pounds and shelters.
- Publicly exhibit (for 4 weeks) a tailored, stand-alone Code of Practice for all impounded animals in NSW pounds and shelters.

- Carry out comprehensive and independent audits of:
 - all NSW impounding facilities to identify the level of compliance/non-compliance and
 - all NSW impounding practices, procedures, policies,
 - actual 'no kill' performance.
- Introduce mandatory Local Government Council Strategic Companion Animal Management Plans ('SCAMPs') with attached policies and KPI's to enable ongoing 4 yearly 'local' public consultation periods, reviews and improvements in line with evolving public expectations.
- Enact a 'No Kill' Bill or sweeping changes to POCTAA to include all impounded animals (of all species) and **outlaw the killing of otherwise healthy homeless animals. These reforms must incorporate the full suite of 'No Kill' programs and principles as mandatory, forming a highly effective lifesaving plan.**
- Substantially overhaul the Companion Animals Act to include a revised focus on all impounded animals, regardless of species.
- Establish a new OLG NSW Pound and Shelter Reform website, including an online complaint form and 1800 'hotline' tailored specifically for public pound and shelter complaints and concerns.
- Enhance inspection and enforcement powers for agencies authorised under POCTAA to undertake routine and regular NSW pound and shelter inspections and enforcement. **If this role is to be performed solely by RSPCA and Animal Welfare League funding to both agencies must be increased to employ more inspectors to perform this role. There currently are insufficient numbers to perform this task.**
- Conduct a comprehensive review and overhaul of the NSW Companion Animals Fund, including an assessment of evidenced outcomes and how it is distributed and managed.
- Introduce an annual grants program for NSW not-for-profits, including self-funded and volunteer rescue, rehoming and advocacy organisations. These organisations do a wonderful job in trying to save as many animals as possible from these pounds and shelters that are tagged on 'death row'. They need financial support and recognition to continue their great work. After all they are doing the government's job of keeping animals off the streets, caring for them and rehoming them with support from volunteers and community donors. This public commitment must also be supported by the government.
- Introduce NSW pound and shelter initiatives to support vulnerable or at-risk animal owners or caregivers during periods of intense need, in order to keep animals in homes and ensure the welfare and wellbeing of both humans and animals. This should include those experiencing:
 - Financial stress, homelessness or are at risk of homelessness
 - Domestic violence
 - Emergency management incidents (e.g., bushfires and floods) and
 - Physical or mental health issues, including hospital stays or other medical needs. Many pets end up in these pounds or shelters simply because their owners are doing it tough. Supporting people in need, supports animals and reduces the number of animals that are surrendered to these shelters. A win, win for everyone.

We need action and proper funding to Council pounds and all community shelters. This will help to improve animal welfare standards in these pound and shelter systems, provide adequate staff to care for abandoned animals, better infrastructure to house animals where they feel safe, fed, comfortable and warm, provided with appropriate vet care and given a real chance through fostering to modify behaviours that have developed due to utter neglect, abuse or abandonment that they have suffered in their lives. *The ultimate goal must be to provide proper care and rehome animals through no fault of their own have ended up in these facilities.*

Reforms in this sector are well overdue and are urgent. Animals are on death row right now and are living in miserable conditions, frightened, anxious and scared, please show compassion and institute urgent well managed and properly funded reforms.

All abandoned companion animals or those surrendered because of hard times are all deserving of a chance of a better life. Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

Yours sincerely

Martin Derby