

**Submission
No 60**

INQUIRY INTO POUNDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: German Shepherd Rescue New South Wales

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Terms of Reference

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

Pounds in New South Wales are severely underfunded and have far too few facilities/staff to house and care for the dogs while waiting to be rehomed. Thus putting undue stress on their staff as well as onto Rescue organisation personnel who receive constant requests for urgent release of dogs into their care. Rescue organisations, manned by volunteers are doing their best to take some 'load' from Council Animal Shelters but it is very stressful for the volunteers to accept that healthy and rehoming dogs are being euthanised due to lack of resourcing.

Some country pounds are run by the local Ranger with no other help.

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

There does not appear to be adequate areas where dogs can be let out of their pen to spend time in the open to exercise themselves or be exercised with staff and also spend time away from other dogs, thus increasing dog reactivity which can lead to low adoption rates and increased euthanasia. Pens are often small for larger dogs and the dogs have to be housed close to one another increasing stress for the dog. Even Blacktown Animal Rehoming Centre has just been opened and there are only a few pens to allow dogs into for exercise and the kennels are really small.

Currently the code of practice regulating pounds is barely being adhered to. It appears the pounds are doing the bare minimum in order to comply with the codes. Dare we say the staff are doing the best they can with what they have which is not enough funding, inadequate buildings and staff shortages. That then results in basic food and shelter, no enrichment, inadequate exercise, no training or behavioural assessments.

Funding is required so more staff can be employed, opening hours could be longer, staff would be able to give a better indication of a dog's temperament and or behaviour in one telephone call instead of rescue volunteers having to attend the pound to assess the animal themselves.

Sadly the euthanasia numbers are far too high but that is not down to anyone but the irresponsible breeders and the owners who take puppies on and don't realise what they are getting into. Back Yard Breeders (BYB) often produce animals that are not viable for a good long healthy life. It would be interesting to know how many animals are euthanised not because the pound has no room for them but because they are so mentally and physically handicapped the kindest and cheapest thing would be to euthanise them humanely.

In order to reduce euthanasia rates as we have mentioned there needs to be Legislation banning BYB's and other irresponsible breeders. These types of people are exploiting animals because they can. At the moment it is not illegal to produce puppy's one after the other. If the public were educated in not buying from a BYB this whole problem would simply reduce and eventually disappear completely. In order to prevent this supply must be stopped.



(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

We have observed dogs being stressed due to inadequate housing (especially in hot or cold weather), often no bedding, relying on donations of food of questionable quality - dogs we receive are often suffering from diarrhea, are skinny.

In pounds the dogs receive little enrichment or exercise, have not been seen by a vet (some pounds do have vet checks), no vaccination or desexing before being released to Rescues, this has resulted in us receiving dogs with untreated kennel cough, diarrhea etc and requiring rescues to take immediately to the vet for treatment.

If the pounds ensure that dogs are vaccinated, wormed, are vet checked and desexed (unless they are under 12 months) before releasing to rescues it would mean that rescues could immediately rehome the dogs to suitable owners, thus resulting in less time in foster care or kennelled, which in turn reduces costs to rescues and more importantly less stress and trauma for the dog.

It will also meet the public's expectations that rescue dogs should only have low adoption fees attached.

We do not believe the housing and care provided to animals meets community standards: the animals are housed in cold, wet, noisy conditions. There is no room in any the Pounds we have attended in Greater Sydney for adequate exercise and there does not appear to be enough trained staff to walk the dogs. Their nutrition is not adequate ie very cheap dry food only. The pounds do not provide adequate training or behavioural assessment. There is no enrichment. Due to overcrowding dogs are 'double bunked'. Not enough assessment takes place prior to the dogs being put in together. This is a major concern as bitches in season are placed with entire dogs. We have personally been involved in rescue where a bitch was impregnated and we as a rescue group had to take responsibility once the bitch was obviously in pup.

(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

To ensure transparency it would be good for pounds to be required to report to government and release to the public euthanasia data including - numbers, age, sex, breed, reason for euthanasia, who approved euthanasia, conducted by whom. Increased auditing of compliance to laws as well as resources set aside for independent auditing to ensure this occurs.

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

The reasons for animals in pounds should be reported, including why people surrender, study on how many animals are actually bred per year from all sources.

Currently there is an influx of dogs ending up in the pounds mostly due to COVID-19 and people being home and wanting a puppy, the BYB breeding and selling puppies to anyone for the money and not for the good of the puppy. People are now realizing how much work a young dog is and they now don't have time for them.

The existing financial situation with the interest rates rising so quickly and a lot of people/families under financial stress and so selling homes and moving into smaller homes/apartments and needing to rehome their dog.

Prior to COVID-19 we were able to home a dog within two weeks to a month, now it is taking us a minimum of two months. German Shepherd Rescue are receiving an email a day with someone wanting to surrender their dog. We don't have any facilities otherwise we would be able to take in more dogs to train then rehome.

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

There is currently some reporting by rescues as to the number of animals held per year and how many animals were euthanased. As far as we know the pounds don't report these figures

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

Dog assessments are not being conducted accurately and good dogs are being listed as dangerous and scheduled for euthanasia incorrectly. Example a German Shepherd cross was labelled a dangerous dog, scheduled for euthanasia if GSD rescue would not take him because he failed his behavioural assessment that was not conducted appropriately and designed to illicit an aggressive response. We conducted an assessment on the dog, which included a health check examination. The dog knew basic commands, presented his belly for rubs, allowed us inside his run with his food and did not show a single sign of aggression. On our initial observation prior to having contact with the dog, he was in a run surrounded by little fluffy dogs and a Great Dane and showed no aggression, fence fighting or prey driven behaviour. To date having fostered this dog he is an obedient dog who is gentle and patient with young dogs and reactive dogs. He is willing to please and loves men, women and children. Had a veterinary nurse not intervened and contacted GSD Rescue, this dog would have been euthanised.

Some of the pound assessments are too hard to pass without some formal training ie passing another dog without becoming fixated or reacting in any way. This is a difficult task when many of the animals they receive have never been socialised, strays, never left the backyard or may have been attacked by another animal, may have attacked an animal or fearful. Unfortunately, the staff we have met do not have the experience or knowledge to implement and execute a behavioural training plan that could assist mild to moderately reactive dogs and as a result will more than likely be euthanized eg a three year old entire male Belgian Malinois was shown to us at the pound. Our volunteer found him quick to learn, calm, wanted to please, allowed her to conduct a health check examination and correct him if he jumped up or tried to get into her personal space. This Belgian Malinois was one of the nicest and balanced examples of the breed she had ever met and he had great potential for rehoming. However the handler advised me that he had failed his assessment in one area that involved interacting with another dog. The Belgian Malinois was going to be given another chance at assessment but no training plan to ensure that he is given the best chance at passing. What did not make sense is that time between assessments will not change the behavioural outcome. She provided the handler with some training to assist her as she really wanted this dog to succeed but has not received any formal training.

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

We have a working relationship with the pounds in Greater Sydney and some of the rural pounds contact us, but with staff changing regularly these relationships change all the time. Some staff are great and contact rescues regularly however others only advise us of dogs that are urgent and we are only given a very short time to find a foster carer or home for a dog.

Pound managers should reach out to veterinary clinics, breed specific and all breed rescues, breeders the minute they get a dog into their facility so the dog has the best possible exposure to either locate it's rightful owners or have the best chance at adoption. From the last ten German Shepherd or Belgian Malinois dogs we have assessed at pounds in Sydney, three were on the list to be euthanised and five will more than likely make the euthanasia list as a result of: failing poorly conducted animal assessments, late communication with breed specific rescues, poor qualification process of potential adopters and poorly trained staff that have not got the skills to aid these animals that are contained in a high stress environment.

(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

Mandatory desexing of all cats (other than registered bred cats) is essential. There also needs to be legislation for cats to be banned from being allowed to roam at night. Perhaps a subsidy should be offered by Government to cat owners

to assist them in building cat compounds so the cats are never out and therefore desecrating wild life. They are usually well fed so they are not fulfilling a need to feed themselves, they have a high prey drive and it is instinct for them to chase and catch wildlife. If cats were bound to an enclosure, particularly at night, this would prevent many animals from being on the endangered list. The mandatory microchipping of all kittens and younger cats was an excellent initiative.

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

Currently some dogs are left in the pound for several weeks before anyone actually works with them and assesses them.

All dogs should be assessed immediately they are brought into the pound. Ideally the owner should show the assessor what they can about the dog, and any training it has had.

All staff need to be trained how to put on a slip lead correctly and also on animal behaviour and how to handle dogs safely.

(k) any other related matter.

i) Staff

Many of the pound staff are not educated in handling animals correctly, using equipment correctly or knowing what behaviours need to be stopped immediately as they will have the propensity of causing an accident or becoming dangerous – This needs to change ASAP!

Approximately half of handlers we have experienced don't know how to introduce dogs correctly to people. On our encounters, we have experience pound staff to have little to no control of the dog (especially if they are large or strong) they are showing our volunteer for assessment, have put the volunteer in a day run and released an unknown dog with them before she had had the chance to say to leave it on the lead or they don't know the correct procedure to handing a lead over to another person that is unknown to the dog. This conduct is extremely dangerous for a potential adopting person or family to experience and has the potential to end in an accidental injury or worse.

Our interaction with all the pounds we dealt with was generally good. However more training has to be conducted to educate the staff on the types of breeds or cross breeds they had in their care. Too many times we were contacted to take on a German Shepherd which in no way resembled anything like a German Shepherd, the breed we were specialising in. This was an enormous waste of our time as photos sometimes do not portray a true picture of the type of dog. We would travel many hours to attend the pound to ascertain the dog in question was not specific to our breed.

The pound staff were always overworked and very stressed. They did not have the time or the experience or the education to attend to the dogs in their care as they were often front desk staff as well as part time attendees.

There was a time where pounds would allocate a dog to a rescue group on first in first serve basis. There is a rescue group in Melbourne who would often take dogs from Sydney pounds and road transport them to Melbourne. They were also economical with the truth by insisting to the staff they were dealing with that the dog/s was being fostered in Sydney. This was absolutely not the case on many occasions and the dogs ended up on the long haul to Melbourne in searing heat when they travelled in the summer. Staff need to be made aware this is not on and local rescues should be given priority. No matter how many times we raised it we were ignored by one pound in particular.

ii) Adopters

A comprehensive screening process of potential adopters should be conducted. Starting from an application form, informal interview and an assessment of handling skills and interaction on the day they view a particular animal. If an animal will be adopted the new adopter should be counselled on how to introduce their animal into the home etc.

iii) Photographer

The pounds should engage a local photographer to take professional photos of the dogs looking for new homes. The pounds that do this have a better response for the dogs. Hawkesbury Animal Shelter allow a volunteer photographer in once a week to take photos which are posted on the Friends of Hawkesbury Facebook page.

iv) Dogs

All dogs should be fitted with a fixed collar that cannot slip off the dogs neck and should be strong enough to hold the dog – a measure of safety should a dog back out of a slip lead and escape, a safety measure for staff entering kennels, if slip lead has been put on incorrectly can be corrected etc.

v) BYB

The NSW Government should take responsibility for the welfare of the animals in pounds but it goes far deeper than just the welfare of animals. Back Yard Breeding should be banned immediately. There are many Back Yard Breeders (BYB's) advertising in local papers and all an employee has to do is look through the ads, speak to rescue groups, gain proof of BYB and shut them down. This has not occurred to date and if they were banned then the Government would not have a problem because the pounds would be 90% empty. Registered breeders also need to stop selling their stock to BYB's.

Dogs and cats are ending up in pounds because BYB's are breeding inbred dogs with major issues (due to the inbreeding). These issues don't normally appear until adult hood and that is when there is a high dumpage rate because the BYB has gone to ground. How to prevent this: educate the public as to who they should be acquiring their next family member from. BYB's have the gift of the gab and they will inform the potential puppy buyer that if they are not intending to show, why would they need registered pedigree papers? Of course there are no papers because their breeding stock is generational BYB. They may have acquired a breeding bitch from a registered breeder originally but after that their breeding stock could be anything from brother/sister, grandfather/daughter and it goes on.

Also as mentioned in the previous paragraphs ban BYB's. Sadly educating registered breeders in their puppy selling practices would be difficult as some potential puppy buyers are not truthful with their reasoning for wanting a puppy or someone gets in their ear suggesting they could make money from breeding.

Educate potential owners. Encourage registered breeders to breed to demand only. Breeders are regulated to how often they breed from the one bitch but if they have 10 breeding bitches then that is a lot of puppies. Breeders do get desperate as they breed mainly to make money and they do and will sell to inappropriate owners when they are running out of time to sell the puppy/s. Many do not take responsibility for their puppies once they leave the breeding facility and that is when pups are surrendered.