

INQUIRY INTO POUNDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Ms Marie Humphries

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Dear Committee

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.

Terrible instances of dogs observed as underweight obviously denied food, too weak to stand, denied vet care with serious ailments such as infested with ticks, suffering with the deadly parvovirus, denied beds and blankets, hosed down, treated cruelly and dragged on leashes. Most animals are housed in empty concrete cold hard surface cages or prisons and denied warm bedding and blankets, and treatment when they are clearly sick. Enrichment is non-existent with no proper care, love or interaction as they exist solely to be ignored and suffer in silence. I am sickened by what I have read, seen and heard as to the treatment of innocent animals in these facilities who through no fault of their own but due to unfortunate circumstances they end up in these neglected facilities.

Our current animal welfare laws are outdated and well below the benchmark for an advanced country like Australia and certainly do not reflect community views on how animals should be cared for properly in pounds and shelters. It should not have taken the shooting of innocent dogs and puppies and noted evidence by observers as to the suffering and conditions these dogs were left in for the government to react. If regular checks and inspections were conducted in the first place the government would have known about this cruelty and neglect and taken swift steps to solve these problems. Lacking was obviously systematic and regular audits and checks on the treatment of animals housed in these facilities across the state.

Staff are responsible and so is the government authorities for allowing these facilities to operate without doing something about the situation. If the government is sincere in improving pounds and shelters they must action all recommendations to show the community that they are committed to genuine reforms and be willing to implement improvements as soon as possible. We cannot have a long drawn-out process tied up in bureaucratic red tape where animals continue to languish and suffer.

Because there has been no adequate systematic inspections for compliance many pounds and shelters have operated at substandard levels where poor animal welfare standards exist and animals suffer through neglect and abuse. We must perceive animals as feeling beings that experience pain, suffering, neglect. They deserve to be loved and cared for properly and given the chance to be rehomed instead of being treated as an annoyance or garbage to be disposed of.

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. This is appalling that we as such a strong developed country view these poor abused abandoned animals as waste. They deserve a chance of life and we as a state have failed them. Rehoming and adoption must be the ultimate goal.

Better improved animal welfare standards must be developed, adopted and practiced by every pound and shelter in the state. Regular audits and inspections must follow to ensure mandatory compliance of these standards. Enforcement of these standards is not negotiable. Hefty fines must be imposed for breaches of these animal welfare standards or evidence of animal cruelty.

It is highly recommended that the government consider and adopt the following initiatives to improve the lives of animals in these pounds and win back community trust.

- 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. Afterall 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.

Reforms in this sector are well overdue and are urgent. Whilst an inquiry into reforms takes place animals must be protected. There must be a ban on current euthanising of all animals unless an animal is suffering and nothing can be done to save them. The basic needs for shelter/pound animals must be met- comfort, bedding, blankets, warmth, daily food, water, interaction, cleanliness, health care and enrichment. It is suggested that a pause for all animals that are on death row whilst a roadmap for reforms is devised. Right now animals in pounds are living in miserable conditions, frightened, anxious and scared, please show compassion and institute urgent well managed and properly funded reforms to save these dogs from death row and give them a chance of a home.

Yours sincerely

Marie Humphries