

INQUIRY INTO POUNDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

Dear Committee

Being killed in a pound or shelter is still the leading cause of death for companion animals in NSW with most animals not making it out alive. This is not an acceptable situation to the public and NSW can and should do better. Urgent reforms are needed to address this crisis occurring now in our pounds and shelters.

When did it become acceptable practice not to care for animals properly? Companion animals have basic needs to survive and be happy- daily healthy food, clean water, access to vets to correct health issues, comfortable warm bedding and blankets, clean kennels, enrichment (outside play areas), kindness and care. All these basic needs have been denied animals kept in pounds and shelters for a very long time. In fact animals have been subjected to abuse, neglect and cruelty.

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.

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community sentiment that all animals are sentient beings and that they feel pain and suffer in silence when inadequate outdated legislation does not protect them from neglect, abuse and cruelty.

The pound and shelter system has been neglected for decades because animals are viewed as waste and garbage. We must view all animals as sentient beings that can feel pain, suffering and abuse. **Under NSW's traditional animal pound and shelter model, animals are managed as 'waste management' or 'feral pest management' policies. They focus on disposal rather than care, rehoming and adoption. This is an appalling view that these poor abused abandoned animals are regarded as waste. They deserve a chance of life and we as a state have failed them. Rehoming and adoption must be the ultimate goal.**

Pounds and shelters are a publicly funded community service paid for by local communities. However, owing to the broken pound and shelter system and years of neglect there must be state funding provided to improve levels of care in these facilities with more staff and vet care and improved infrastructure and kennels for the animals. Staff training to deliver improved understanding and raise animal welfare outcomes for dogs especially is needed.

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.

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.

Proper funding to improve animal welfare standards is essential. The government props up declining industries such as NSW Forestry Corp with millions every year of taxpayer money. Subsidies of public taxes are also handed out in the millions for fossil fuel extraction companies who will destroy nature, wildlife, valuable ecosystems and further pollute our country and exacerbate climate change. The money is there and is often wasted. Reforming the pound and shelter system will need funding to address its neglect over many years and deserves and needs financial funding to face the following challenges.

The main challenges are-

- resourcing challenges and funding.
- inadequate infrastructure-pound buildings and facilities need improvements.
- welfare challenges and provisions (housing/bedding/healthy food etc).
- questionable adequacy of laws, regulations, codes- improved legislation standards in government.
- factors influencing animals ending up in pounds.
- euthanasia rates- decrease by setting much lower limits and giving a longer time period for animals to have the opportunity to be rehomed. Develop a different mindset that they are not 'waste' but living sentient beings that deserve a chance in life.
- role and challenges of behaviour assessments.
- relationship between pounds and rescue organisations- this needs to be improved to create a closer working relationship where both are working towards the common goal of improving the chances of each and every animal of being rehomed not euthanised.
- homeless cats living in pounds and rescue organisations- specific rescue organisations that specialise in cat sanctuary and rehoming should and must be sourced by pounds. A state neuter program must be established to reduce cat populations.
- improving the treatment, care and outcome for animals- more staff and accessibility to vets.

Recommendations to help solve these challenges include-

- 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 (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, polices,
 - 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.***
- 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.

- 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. Compassion, understanding, providing pet food as well groceries for the vulnerable and temporary accommodation to try to keep their pets with them.

Obviously legislating changes to the outdated legislation is needed urgently like changes to POCTAA, overhaul of the Companion Animals Act, improved enforced animal welfare standards with explicit, clear practices to ensure compliance and enforcement of standards is ongoing in all animal facilities in the state.

I sincerely hope the NSW government adopts recommendations from the community to address the state's woeful broken pound and shelter system. Companion animals housed in these facilities do not deserve to be treated cruelly, abused or neglected. They do not deserve to be euthanised simply because of complacency to deal with this issue. It is not their fault they have been abandoned. They deserve a chance to be rehomed and adopted. NSW government must raise its animal welfare standards to align to community expectations.

Thank you for your time.