

INQUIRY INTO POUNDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Camden Council, Campbelltown City Council and Wollondilly
Shire Council

Date Received: 18 August 2023



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The Hon. Emma Hurst MLC
Chairperson
NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Pounds
Portfolio Committee No. 8 Customer Service

Dear Chairperson,

Re: Macarthur Region response to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Pounds in NSW

The Macarthur Region includes the Camden, Campbelltown and Wollondilly Local Government Areas. Currently home to approximately 351,800, the region is set to experience one of Australia's largest growth trajectories to reach over half a million residents by 2041.

We are committed to the well-being of our region's animals. Within our region, Campbelltown City Council and Wollondilly Council host existing pound facilities in their Local Government Areas. Camden Council is developing a pound facility through infrastructure funding secured under the NSW WestInvest Program, and acknowledges the generous support of the NSW Government in this regard.

Collectively, we recognise the significance of this inquiry and its potential impact on improving animal welfare standards in across NSW, and thank you for the opportunity to make a submission in respect of the key issues affecting pound services in our region.

Operational Funding

The demand for pound services, including housing, feeding, veterinary treatment, and rehoming, continues to grow. However, the available funding for pound operations often falls short of the required resources to adequately address the needs of abandoned or stray animals. The consequences of insufficient funding are far-reaching and affect not only the animals but also the quality of services provided and the work health and safety of pound staff.

In light of the challenges posed by resourcing and funding limitations, we call upon the NSW Government to explore options to enhance funding allocation for NSW pound facilities including:

1. Allocating additional funding to NSW pound facility operators specifically designated for pound operations, taking into account the growing demand for services, population growth in the LGA/region, and the resources required to maintain high standards of animal welfare.
2. Work in partnership with NSW pound facilities to identify and address both the common and specific resourcing challenges faced by pounds across New South Wales, tailoring solutions to meet their unique and/or common needs.

3. Recognise the importance of animal welfare and the critical role pounds play in ensuring the well-being of animals in our communities. Elevate funding for pound operations as a priority to assist in the allocation of resources.
4. Allocate funds for comprehensive training and development programs for pound staff to enhance their skills, knowledge, and work health and safety practices.

Animal Welfare Challenges

Animal care and welfare are at the forefront of our priorities, and we acknowledge that challenges exist in providing adequate housing, bedding, feeding, exercise, enrichment, veterinary treatment, vaccination, and desexing for animals in pounds.

Animal care and welfare are of the utmost importance to pound facility operators in NSW. However, we recognise that challenges exist due to several factors:

1. The demand for pound services continues to grow, leading to a strain on available resources. This increase is due to a number of factors, including population growth, cost-of-living pressures, returning to work environments following the COVID-19 pandemic, and other pressures being experienced in the home environment. Limited funding opportunities hampers our ability to provide the necessary care and services for the animals in our care.
2. Providing high-quality care for animals requires a dedicated and skilled workforce. A lack of sufficient qualified staff can impact our ability to meet the diverse needs of the animals, resulting in compromised animal welfare.
3. Outdated infrastructure and limited space can lead to overcrowding within pounds. This can adversely affect the animals' well-being, making it challenging to provide adequate exercise, enrichment, and personalised attention.
4. Access to prompt and comprehensive veterinary care is vital for maintaining the health of animals in pounds. The acute shortage of qualified vets to undertake vital contract services is significantly hindering the ability to provide adequate, timely care and services. Similarly, this is affecting vaccination and desexing programs which are essential to curb the spread of disease and overpopulation to reduce the number of animals ending up in pounds.

We support the Office of Local Government in its implementation of comprehensive animal welfare standards and guidelines. Consistent and high-quality care for animals across all pound facilities is a shared goal that we strive to achieve. These standards and guidelines serve as essential frameworks for ensuring the well-being and proper treatment of animals in our care and should be made available to Local Government as a priority.

To address the challenges facing animal care and welfare in pound facilities, we recommend the following:

1. Prioritised funding opportunities for NSW pound facilities to enhance the resources available for animal care and welfare in pounds. Adequate funding is critical for maintaining the highest standards of care for animals.
2. Invest in ongoing training and development programs for pound staff to enhance their skills and qualifications. This will contribute to the provision of better care for the diverse needs of animals in our care.
3. Foster collaborations with pound facilities across all reputable non-government organisations (NGOs), volunteer, Council and community pounds. This collaborative approach can help address resource limitations and improve the overall care provided to animals.

Factors Influencing the Number of Animals Ending up in New South Wales' Pounds

The number of animals ending up in pounds is influenced by various factors, including:

- irresponsible pet ownership (including impact of substantial population of unmicrochipped and unregistered pets);
- lack of awareness about responsible pet care;
- increase in community surrenders unable to keep the pet due to pressures such as rental issues, cost of care etc.; and
- inadequate desexing practices.

Education campaigns and community outreach initiatives serve as vital tools in reducing the number of animals entering pounds and raising community awareness about responsible pet ownership and advocating for adequate desexing practices. These efforts play a pivotal role in influencing pet owners' behaviour, encouraging responsible pet care, and ultimately reducing the number of animals entering pounds. Additionally, these initiatives foster a sense of community responsibility towards animal welfare, creating a more compassionate and informed society.

Despite the undeniable benefits of education campaigns and community outreach, it is crucial to address the financial implications they pose for pound operators and rate payers in respective local government areas. The costs associated with organising and executing such campaigns can be substantial, including expenses for advertising, educational materials, public events, and personnel. Furthermore, the return on investment in terms of registration revenue has diminished since the introduction of lifetime registration in NSW.

The introduction of lifetime registration for pets in New South Wales has undoubtedly provided long-term benefits for pet owners and reduced the burden of annual renewal fees. However, it has resulted in a decline in registration revenue, as pet owners no longer need to renew their registrations annually. As a result, the traditional revenue stream that once supported various animal-related initiatives, including education campaigns and community outreach, has been significantly affected. This impacts on a council's ability to finance the provision of services and facilities that serve other important community needs.

Considering the importance of education campaigns and community outreach initiatives in reducing the number of animals entering pounds, we propose the following recommendations:

1. Increase Local Government funding to assist local councils carry out effective initiatives without being solely dependent on registration revenue and the reliance of revenue from rates.
2. Foster partnerships with reputable NGOs and animal welfare organisations to share the costs and resources of education campaigns and outreach efforts. Collaborative efforts can expand the reach of these initiatives and create a more significant impact across the state.
3. Encourage private businesses, philanthropists, and animal lovers to contribute through sponsorships and donations to support educational programs and outreach activities. Public-private partnerships can significantly bolster the available resources for animal welfare initiatives.
4. Introduce incentives for responsible pet owners, such as reduced registration fees for desexed pets or access to discounted veterinary services. These incentives can encourage more pet owners to prioritise responsible pet care and desexing.
5. Implement a comprehensive impact evaluation system to measure the effectiveness of education campaigns and outreach initiatives. By understanding the impact of these efforts, we can fine-tune strategies and optimise resource allocation for future programs.

Euthanasia Rates and Practices in New South Wales Pounds:

We understand the gravity of euthanasia and its impact on both animals and our community. We are dedicated to implementing measures that aim to minimise euthanasia rates and improve animal welfare.

In support of our commitment to minimising euthanasia rates and enhancing animal welfare, we call upon the NSW Government to consider the following actions:

1. Provide additional funding opportunities for pound operators in comprehensive adoption and rehoming programs, which will facilitate the successful placement of animals into forever homes.
2. Allocate resources to support community education initiatives that promote responsible pet ownership and emphasise the importance of adopting from pounds and rescue organisations.
3. Encourage collaboration and knowledge sharing among pound operators, animal rescue organisations, and animal welfare experts to develop effective strategies for reducing euthanasia rates.

We are dedicated to working collaboratively with the NSW Government and other stakeholders to achieve the best possible outcomes for the animals in our care.

Role and Challenges of Behavioural Assessments in New South Wales Pounds:

As a local government entity dedicated to animal welfare, we recognise the significance of behavioural assessments and the challenges associated with conducting comprehensive evaluations.

Behavioural assessments are a fundamental aspect of ensuring successful adoptions and the long-term well-being of animals. These assessments provide valuable insights into an animal's temperament, behaviour, and compatibility with potential adopters, allowing us to make informed decisions about their suitability for adoption into loving homes. By understanding an animal's unique traits and needs, we can match them with families that can provide a nurturing and suitable environment, reducing the risk of returned adoptions.

Conducting comprehensive behavioural assessments can be challenging for several reasons:

1. Lack of adequate resources, including staff, time, and funding, required to conduct thorough behavioural evaluations for each animal. The demand for pound services and the number of animals in our care can sometimes strain our available resources.
2. Conducting accurate behavioural assessments requires specialised knowledge and expertise. It is the case that pound staff may not have received formal or appropriate training in animal behaviour assessment, which can affect the quality and consistency of assessments, or further delay the rehoming of animals.
3. Animals in pounds often come from diverse backgrounds and experiences, which can influence their behaviour during assessments. Tailoring evaluations to suit each animal's unique circumstances and history is essential for accurate results.

To address the challenges associated with behavioural assessments, we advocate for increased support and training for pound staff in conducting thorough evaluations. This includes:

1. Allocate funding and resources for comprehensive training programs in animal behaviour and assessment techniques. Regular training sessions can empower pound staff with the skills needed to conduct accurate evaluations.
2. Foster collaborations with animal behaviour experts and professionals who can provide guidance, mentorship, and assistance in conducting behavioural assessments.
3. Provide access to behavioural assessment tools and resources that can aid in the evaluation process, ensuring consistency and objectivity in the assessments.
4. Encourage a culture of continuous learning among pound staff, where they can regularly update their knowledge and skills in animal behaviour.
5. Qualified behavioural assessment services be made available by the Government to assist pounds as and when required, in the behavioural assessment of animals where needed due to resourcing or capacity issues.

We call upon the NSW Government to consider the importance of behavioural assessments in pound operations and support operators in providing the necessary resources and training for conducting thorough evaluations. By investing in staff expertise and support, we can improve the adoption process, enhance animal welfare, and promote responsible pet ownership.



Relationship between New South Wales Pounds and Animal Rescue Organisations:

The relationship between New South Wales pounds and animal rescue organisations is a critical component of animal welfare management. Ongoing collaboration between these entities is essential in achieving positive outcomes for the well-being and rehoming of animals in our care. We understand the importance of streamlining communication, sharing resources, and establishing strong partnerships to improve animal welfare outcomes.

Open and regular communication between pounds and animal rescue organisations is crucial for effective collaboration. Sharing information about animals in need, their behavioural traits, and medical histories ensures that rescue organisations can provide appropriate care and find suitable forever homes for these animals. Clear and timely communication also helps prevent duplication of efforts and fosters a more coordinated approach to rehoming.

Collaboration between pounds and animal rescue organisations can allow for the sharing of resources, including financial assistance, supplies, and volunteer support. This pooling model of resources enables both parties to optimise their efforts and make the most significant impact on animal welfare in our community.

Many pounds have established transfer and rehoming programs with animal rescue organisations. These initiatives facilitate the movement of animals from pounds to rescue organisations, where they receive specialised care and have increased opportunities for adoption. These programs have proven successful in reducing euthanasia rates and increasing the number of animals finding loving homes.

Animal rescue organisations often have foster care programs, providing temporary homes for animals until they find permanent adoptive families. This collaborative effort can help relieve overcrowding in pounds, provides individualised care for animals, and increases their chances of successful rehoming.

By working together, pounds and rescue organisations can advocate for animal welfare issues, promote responsible pet ownership, and educate the community about the importance of adopting from shelters. These joint efforts can have a positive impact on reducing the number of animals entering pounds and increase public awareness about animal welfare.

During emergency situations, such as natural disasters or large-scale rescues, collaboration between pounds and rescue organisations becomes even more critical. Working together ensures a coordinated and efficient response to save and care for animals in distress.

We actively seek to strengthen our relationship with animal rescue organisations. We recognise that by working together, we can make a more significant impact in providing high-quality care and finding permanent homes for animals in need.



Conclusion

We recognise the value of every animal's life and its commitment to finding safe and loving forever homes underscore their dedication to animal welfare. By fostering collaboration with animal rescue organisations, implementing transparent reporting, and encouraging community involvement, we aim to create a positive impact on the welfare of animals and the community as a whole.

It is critical that the NSW Government address the existing resourcing challenges to increase funding to ensure a high and consistent quality of animal welfare across NSW.

We note that due to the Inquiry's time constraints, this submission has not been formally presented to, or endorsed by our Councils. In that respect, the signatories may need to provide supplementary material or make minor amendment following closure of the submission period.

If you would like to discuss the contents of this submission in more detail, please do not hesitate to make contact with Campbelltown City Council's Director City Planning and Environment, Mr Jim Baldwin

We look forward to playing an active role and further assisting with this inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

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