

**Submission  
No 79**

## **INQUIRY INTO POUNDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Organisation:** PetRescue

**Date Received:** 18 August 2023

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## Executive summary

PetRescue is a national animal welfare charity that works with over 900 organisations Australia-wide within the animal rehoming sector. We are heavily invested in the development and progression of animal management and rehoming in Australia, and support the intention of the Companion Animals Amendment (Rehoming Animals) Bill 2022 in providing all pets who find themselves in the system with the chance to be adopted into loving homes.

Our submission groups the Portfolio Committee's Terms of Reference into four discussion points. We have combined the findings of the CIE 'Rehoming of Companion Animals in NSW' draft report with internal data from our national adoption platform, findings of our 2023 annual State of Pet Adoption report, and industry and scientific references, to provide evidence-based recommendations for improved management of 'at risk' companion dogs and cats in New South Wales.

## Introduction

PetRescue is a national animal welfare charity with a [vision of a future where every pet is safe, respected and loved](#). In 2004, we launched the first national pet adoption website to help rescue pets who may otherwise go unnoticed, and find a new family to love. Today, PetRescue's free programs and services help millions of Australians discover the joy of adopting a new family member and assists more than 900 rescue organisations, shelters, and councils in saving the lives of thousands of rescue pets. Every year approximately 60,000 pets find loving homes via our platform.

As innovators in pet welfare and rehoming, PetRescue is invested in developing the entire system that affects the management, care, and rehoming of pets within Australian communities. We work with organisations and individuals from across the spectrum of animal management and rehoming, as well as researchers, community outreach organisations, and commercial pet service providers, from every area of Australia.

While New South Wales, like much of Australia, is currently facing significant challenges in the pet management and rehoming space, this intense need creates a drive for change and incredible opportunities to harness that drive and shift the entire sector towards a more effective, successful, and welfare-conscious future for both our people and pets. PetRescue

sees these current challenges within the pet management sector in New South Wales as an opportunity for the sector to create a future where every pet is safe, respected and loved.

In principle, PetRescue supports the goals of the [Companion Animals Amendment \(Rehoming Animals\) Bill 2022](#) in standardising the rehoming process, improving transparency, record-keeping for pets in care, and providing all pets who end up in the system with the opportunity for successful placement in a pet home.

However, the Amendment, though well-intentioned, failed to address the underlying causes of poor outcomes for pets moving through the companion animal management and rehoming system. Three unaddressed underlying challenges include:

1. The dramatic imbalance between the pet-owning community's needs, and pet support services currently available;
2. A lack of proactive measures to keep pets in their existing safe homes and out of the system; and,
3. A lack of resources to care for and rehome pets that are in the system

Additionally, the Bill has unintentionally exacerbated tensions between local government and rehoming, by increasing demand on a system that was already resource-poor and reliant on a volunteer workforce to save the lives of pets.

While we acknowledge the sector-wide lack of professionalisation, ongoing training, or personal development among both paid and volunteer workers, the Bill's underlying assumption that rehoming, animal care, behaviour and health assessments provided by Local Government are less valid than those provided by Not-For-Profit shelters and volunteer rescue organisations has worsened relationships within the sector.

In this submission, we will discuss factors from the broader context in which companion animal management and rehoming occur that affect the success and sustainability of these systems, and focus on successful, evidence-based practice from Australia and internationally, to make recommendations to the Portfolio Committee.

The CIE 'Rehoming of Companion Animals in NSW' draft report discusses many of the known issues with rehoming of companion dogs and cats in NSW, and presents clear data from NSW to support recommendations made. As such, we will not cover these topics in detail within this submission and will instead make recommendations for broader context

changes that the state government can contribute to, that will positively impact companion animal management and rehoming in the state.

The Committee's Terms of Reference have been grouped into topics for the purposes of providing feedback. Sources are cited throughout, and where internal PetRescue data has been included, the source and context have been provided clearly and we can clarify further on request.

We have used the term 'municipal shelter' in lieu of 'pound' throughout our submission, as companion animals, while legally property, are non-human members of our communities with which people share social bonds. Temporary care provided for pets by council-run animal care facilities should provide an equivalent standard of care to Not-For-Profit shelters and therefore be recognised as such.

We have also referred to the 'sector' and 'companion animal management and rehoming system' throughout this document without making a distinction between companion animal management and shelter and rehoming unless this is specifically relevant to the point being made. This is deliberate and intended to highlight that the functions of all organisations working within this space are deeply interconnected, with the common goal of people and pets living safer and healthier lives together, and as such, there is no 'us' and 'them'.

Forward progress towards better human and pet welfare outcomes, in the community, while in care, and post-adoption is only achievable through a collaborative approach. Facilitating progression towards this must be a priority for the Portfolio Committee during this review process.

## **TOPIC 1 - Supporting pets in place and stemming the flow of animals into the system**

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

*(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*

First and foremost, we acknowledge that bringing animals into the animal management and rehoming system has potential to do unintended harm to both people and pets (Fawcett, 2019). Therefore, we encourage everyone within the system to take this opportunity to take a holistic approach by ‘zooming out’ and asking which animals within the system really need to be there. In addition, to question and consider whether there are positive outcomes achievable through supporting animals in place or facilitating placement with new owners directly.

We also note that all jurisdictions across Australia are experiencing significant capacity challenges, so the situation in NSW is not wholly or predominantly created by recent changes in legislation. The societal factors affecting communities that drive pet relinquishment and flow through the system are not inherently different in NSW than in other states, however with the introduction of the Bill the ‘live outcome’ and capacity pressure felt by rehoming organisations is now being recognised and experienced at a municipal shelter level.

For a productive discussion about solutions for the current capacity issues experienced within the NSW sector to occur, it is important to understand factors affecting demand on the system and how these can be addressed, to keep pets in homes to reduce demand on the sector.

## Owned Pets

The flow of owned animals into the system correlates across time and space with human-centric factors limiting owners’ capacity to care for their pets.

A 2023 Australian paper by McDowell and colleagues examines factors that contribute to ownership challenges and adverse pet welfare outcomes through the same model used in human communities, the Social Determinants of Health (McDowell et al., 2023). This model, along with studies from Canada (Ly et al., 2021a and 2021b), the US (Hoffman et al., 2021), and a systematic review including research from Australia (Lambert et al., 2015) show that insecure housing, financial stress, major changes within the family (e.g. divorce, deaths), and limited access to resources required to care for pets are all significant driving factors in pet relinquishment and negative welfare outcomes.

These findings are reflected in our own data from PetRescue’s Home2Home program, as shown in Figure 1 (below)

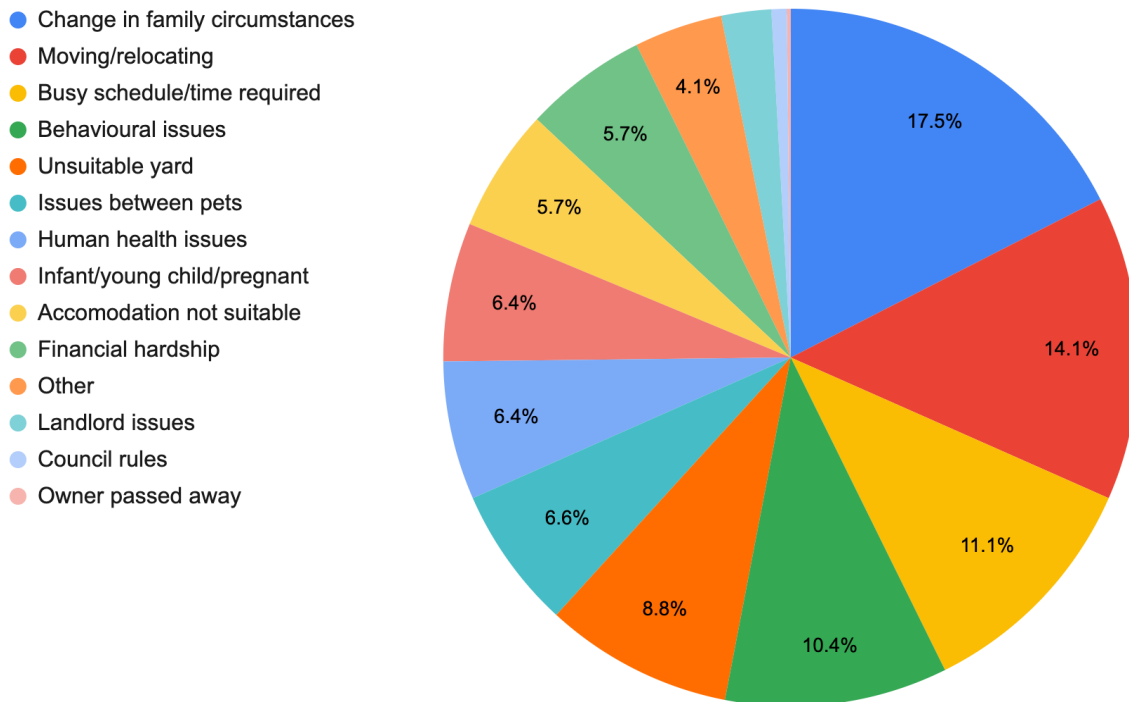


Figure 1. Reasons given by New South Wales pet owners for seeking help to rehome their pets through Home2Home.

Contrary to our historical animal management approach of ‘education and enforcement’, to successfully drive down intake and improve animal welfare outcomes will require a multi-faceted approach including:

- In-field support of pets and owners to improve owner ability to keep their pets (see joint statement from leading US organisations on [maintaining Capacity for care through field support services](#) and [Best Friends Intake Diversion in the Field Playbook](#));
- Diverting pets through direct rehoming where possible (Ly and Protopopova, 2023); and,

- advocating for societal changes that enable more owners to keep their pets, such as changes to rental laws, and provision of broadscale free or very low-cost desexing and veterinary care services (see [Humane Pro Pets For Life](#)).

Existing programs and research in this space have reported a number of key findings to inform implementation of owner support services, including:

- Support services provided in the field are significantly more successful at achieving positive outcomes for people and pets, compared to services provided at shelters to owners seeking to relinquish their pets (Seattle Animal Shelter Foundation, 2022 [“Shelter diversion keeps pets happy, healthy, and with their families”](#))
- Pet retention and intake diversion programs have been shown to reduce intake of surrendered pets by as much as 50% ([Jacksonville Humane Society](#)) and 87% (Ly and Protopopova, 2022)
- Field officers achieve improved compliance, better relationships with the community, and reduced intake of pets into the system by taking a holistic, ‘support first’ approach to animal management (Moss et al., 2023)
- Online, owner-assisted rehoming programs are a viable and legitimate approach to diverting intake of pets through both owner retention of their pet and direct rehoming outside of the system (Ly and Protopopova, 2022). This is supported by the outcomes PetRescue has achieved via our assisted rehoming program, Home2Home. Since the program began in 2021, 853 pets have been rehomed directly by owners and with our support, many more were kept by their original owners or rehomed directly outside of the program.
- Proactive programs have also been successful in Australia, with examples such as the award winning [West Cairns Animal Management Pilot Project](#) demonstrating successful collaboration to achieve improvements in animal management, welfare and human health outcomes.
- The biggest barriers for local governments to implement proactive programs to keep pets out of the system are lack of funding and staff (Russo et al., 2021).

Considering the chronic under-funding of companion animal management in local governments and Not-For-Profit shelters (as detailed in Topic 4), along with the dependence of most volunteer rescue groups on adoption fees (as shown by internal

PetRescue data), the entire sector faces severe capacity issues. To truly address these challenges, the sector requires untethered funding and strategies to actively support pets where they are, rather than just focusing on intake and rehoming.

## Free living cats

Unlike dogs, cat intakes into the system are primarily driven by the admission of urban stray cats. Often, animal management approaches generalise species and this can affect the efficacy and visibility of progress. As such, the approach to methodologies applied should match the species-specific challenges. Urban stray cat intakes are seasonal (see Figure 2, below and [CIE Rehoming of Companion Animals in NSW draft report](#)), and free-living cat populations in built-up areas are typically living commensally with people in those communities, although caretakers typically do not view themselves as owners (Zito et al, 2015; Zito et al., 2018).

NSW cat adoption listings on PetRescue remain steady at approximately half the number of those from Victoria in in the last 18 months (NSW-7659 vs VIC-14077 in 2022, and NSW 5028 vs VIC 11997 in 2023 to date), and are comparable to cat listings from Queensland.

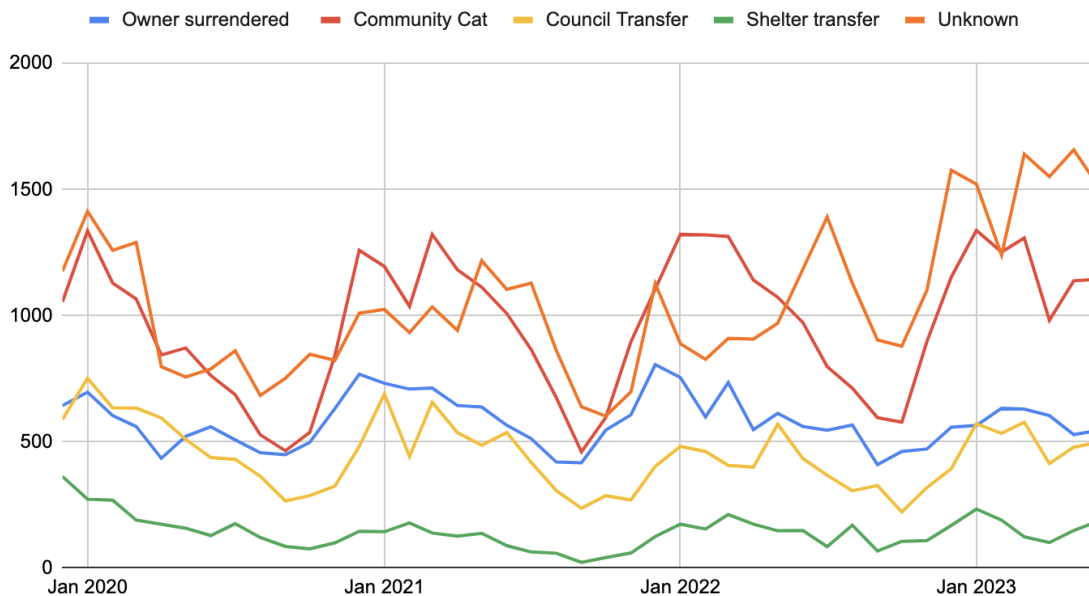


Figure 2. Sources of cats advertised for adoption on the PetRescue website from December 2019 to June 2023. Note: 'Unknown' category includes all pets listed through integrations with shelter management software and primarily represents populations from medium and large shelters.



Additionally, median days to adoption for cats listed on the PetRescue platform is still below pre-pandemic levels (see Figure 3, below).

This illustrates that cat adoptions have not changed appreciably over the last 12 months or longer, however the humane killing of community cats in the system has reduced, leading to the current and significant capacity issues.

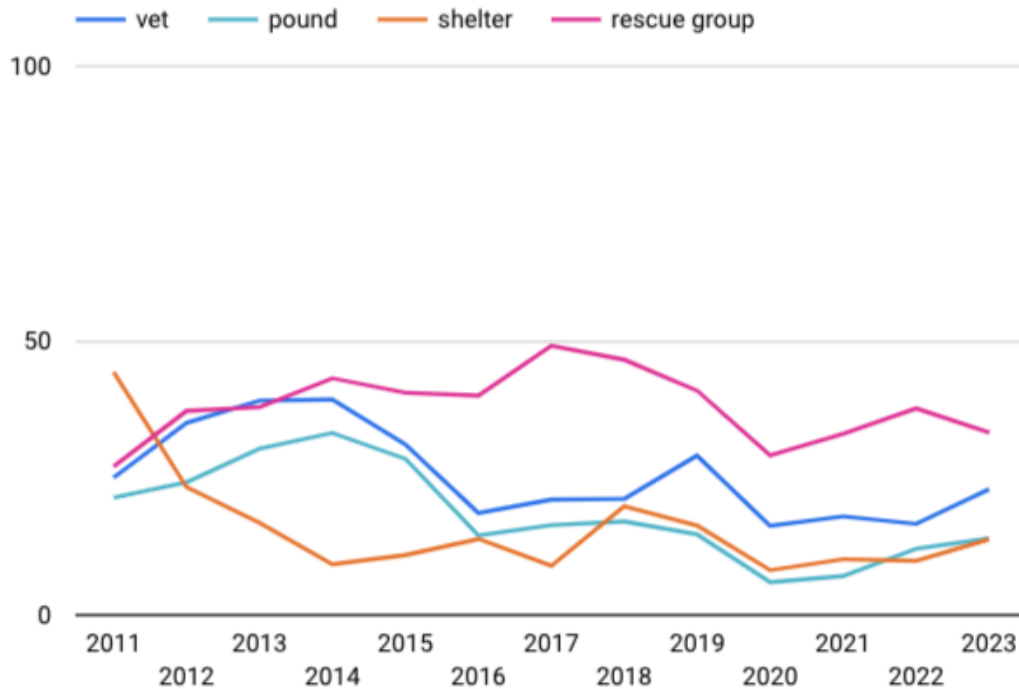


Figure 2. Median days to adoption for cats from New South Wales, listed on the PetRescue platform over time, by different member types.

Again, we encourage everyone involved to consider whether these cats genuinely need to enter the system, or if there is a more effective, more financially sustainable, and more socially acceptable pathway to gaining reproductive control over community cat populations, and stemming the flow of kittens and young adult cats into the system.

International and Australian examples provide evidence of how this can be achieved through working together with the community to desex, microchip and vaccinate community cats, and where possible, adopt out sociable cats or have caretakers become cat owners. We have three robust Australian examples of how effective this approach can be:

- The [Banyule Desexing Program in Victoria](#) which demonstrated a two-thirds reduction in intake, a greater than 5 fold reduction in euthanasia, and improvements in relationships between animal management staff and community members, through targeted free desexing of cats from high intake areas.
- The [Community Cat Programs](#) led by the [Australian Pet Welfare Foundation](#) with the initial pilot area in the greater Ipswich area of Queensland, where microtargeting of cats from high intake properties reduced cat intakes by council by 30-50% within one year.
- The RSPCA NSW '[Keeping Cats Safe at Home](#)' program in which RSPCA partners with councils to implement proactive and targeted desexing of cats cared for by local community members, using microtargeting to quickly reduce free-living cat populations.

Similarly to other proactive approaches to pet animal management, local government report (internal data, PetRescue 2023 State of Pet Adoption survey) their primary barriers to implementing proactive programs for managing community cats are two-fold; lack of funding and staff time, and the perception that these services are being provided by volunteer-run rescue organisations and Not For Profit shelters. Based on responses to our annual State of Pet Adoption survey, only 42% of respondent organisations rehome sociable urban stray kittens and cats, 33% of organisations provide access to reduced-cost desexing, and less than 30% provide other forms of informal support for urban stray cats. The majority of this support is provided by volunteers who self-fund through private income or use donations to provide care when possible.

Of the 47 organisations providing cat desexing services, 27 required carers to take ownership by registering and microchipping pets, and only 16 provided these services at no cost to cat carers. Barriers reported by Not-For-Profit shelters and volunteer-run rescues were overwhelmingly a lack of time, money and other resources required to run the programs while keeping up with animal care and rehoming commitments; essentially, rehoming organisations are focused on rehoming, and do not have the capacity or resources to also provide proactive animal management services.

In order to progress beyond the current situation of overwhelmed capacity in all areas of the sector, clarification is required about who is responsible for providing proactive companion animal support services and a system for supporting and resourcing this sector

of the workforce (or all sectors of the workforce, if these services are best delivered by everyone).

This would involve revision of existing companion animal legislative and regulatory tools, communication of changed expectations to the relevant parties, and funding and resourcing to ensure that the required work can be done.

Additionally, the broader conversation around increasing access to veterinary services and provision of [High Quality, High Volume Spey/Neuter](#) for local governments needs to be had with the veterinary sector. In particular, universities training veterinarians and existing large shelter medicine teams who may have the capacity to mentor vets in these practices should be engaged to determine if and how the state can assist in the development of these programs.

## TOPIC 2 - Quality of care within municipal shelters

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

*(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*

*(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*

### General care of pet within municipal shelters

When addressing concerns about quality of care within municipal shelters, an overall understanding of what constitutes good welfare within a companion animal shelter is, and how compromises in facility design, staffing, daily interaction and care protocols, length of stay, and health care all affect the physical, emotional, and cognitive health of the animals housed in the facility.

The [ASV Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animals Shelters](#) provide referenced, evidence-based recommendations for minimum and best practice short-term (up to 14

days) care of animals in shelters, and these should be used to guide recommendations and standards of care for animals in NSW municipal shelters.

According to the Standards, where pets are held for longer than two weeks, alternative arrangements for housing should be prioritised. Typically, foster placement is considered most appropriate for the longer-term care of all pets. Where that is not feasible, larger enclosures and a higher level of daily interaction, socialisation with people and conspecifics, and enrichment must be provided to ensure that behavioural deterioration is minimised while the animal is held in the shelter.

Additionally, in order to function effectively, all facilities should be using population management software and data collection systems to facilitate an understanding of their [Capacity for care](#), including the ability to monitor this in real-time and make adjustments to internal processes as required.

Currently, standards of care detailed in the NSW Animal Welfare Code of Practice No 5 - Dogs and Cats in Animal Boarding Establishments do not meet the ASV Guidelines and are not aligned with good practice in Shelter Medicine in relation to infection control and provision of care to potentially ill or distress animals.

In addition to working out of facilities that are not fit for purpose, NSW local governments are reporting that they are functioning well above their Capacity for care (where this is known), and for some facilities, beyond their capacity to humanely house dogs and cats for any period longer than 24 hours (e.g. using short term holding pens and cages to house animals for days or longer).

This is despite few municipal facilities in NSW having functioning volunteer and foster care programs and only approximately half of all NSW councils rehoming animals directly (internal PetRescue data and publicly available information on council websites).

Of the councils who do adopt pets directly, more than a third list available pets only on their own low-trafficked website or social media, failing to make use of freely available services to advertise adoptable pets, such as the PetRescue platform, which receives over 25,000 potential adopters per day visiting the website, speeding up animal pathways to adoption.

When municipal shelters are not making optimal use of all pathways available to them to achieve live outcomes for pets, it is simply unacceptable for these same facilities to be

functioning beyond their Capacity for care, or for humane killing to be considered as an option to address overcrowding.

In addition to concerns about animal care in outdated and poorly maintained animal facilities, the shift towards developing large municipal shelters that service multiple councils, often in lower socioeconomic communities, for 'economy of scale' is of concern.

Research by Andrews (2021) showed that four factors predicted live animal outcomes from shelters in the United States, including:

- Economic status of the community in which the shelter is located, with shelters located in communities experiencing poverty being less likely to achieve live outcomes;
- Shelter size, with larger shelters less likely to achieve live outcomes than smaller shelters;
- Shelter type, with private organisations being slightly more likely to achieve live outcomes than comparable municipal shelters; and
- Existence of transport networks with shelters, who utilise transport to move animals to and from rehoming partners being more likely to achieve live outcomes.

'Warehouse' style facilities with large animal wards housing the majority of an animal cohort also [increase the risk of infectious disease transmission and limit outbreak responses](#); housing that is suitable for a boarding kennel full of healthy animals with a known disease status differs significantly from humane housing for sheltered animals of unknown disease status.

In short, multiple-council shelters taking in large numbers of animals with limited ability to manage infectious disease effectively and comparatively few resources to provide quality individual care are simply less able to achieve live outcomes than smaller, better-designed facilities with a full suite of animal care programming.

Alongside well-designed facilities is the requirement for educated, trained staff to ensure that animal care and outcomes are maximised. Currently, few Australian options exist for training specific to animal shelter workers, and there are no providers for the [Animal Shelter Worker Skillset](#) nationally. Less than 10% of organisations who participated in the 2023 PetRescue State of Pet Adoption survey report formally training volunteers and foster carers beyond in-house practical demonstrations of tasks, and 10 out of 142 organisations

report providing regular training and education opportunities for their teams (internal data, PetRescue). The sector as a whole suffers from a lack of professionalisation and does not support continuing education of staff, volunteers, or foster carers, and NSW is no exception to this. Practical training and continuing education are imperative to ensuring that animal care tasks are completed correctly (Howard et al., 2015), [animal welfare is prioritised](#), and [team morale remains positive](#).

We encourage the Portfolio Committee to consider the following actions at state level:

- Provide councils with access to a library of accurate, evidence-based reference materials and resources for [facility design](#), [animal care](#), [infectious disease control](#), [animal behaviour](#), development of internal processes such [foster care](#) and [volunteer programs](#), and [community support programs](#) that directly affect the welfare of animals and staff.
- Provide councils with access to (and a requirement to use) [shelter population management software](#) with the capability to assess and monitor [basic intake and outcome statistics](#), Capacity for care, and [other companion animal services provided by council](#) outside of the municipal shelter.
- Issue a guidance statement to local governments advising against the development of large, multi-council 'warehouse-style facilities that limit individualised care and create conditions conducive to poor animal outcomes.
- Consider a framework for supporting existing Registered Training Organisations to provide shelter-specific training or providing regular, affordable education opportunities for municipal shelter teams.

## TOPIC 3 - Socially Conscious sheltering: Improving outcomes for pets and people

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

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

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

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

While NSW shelters are reporting a lack of adoption interest combined with high intakes as being the primary driver for increased length of stay and capacity issues, data from the PetRescue platform indicates that in NSW, the time between listing of pets online and their adoption has steadily dropped throughout 2023 (see Figure 3, below). Meaning pets are being adopted faster than they were in 2021 and 2022.

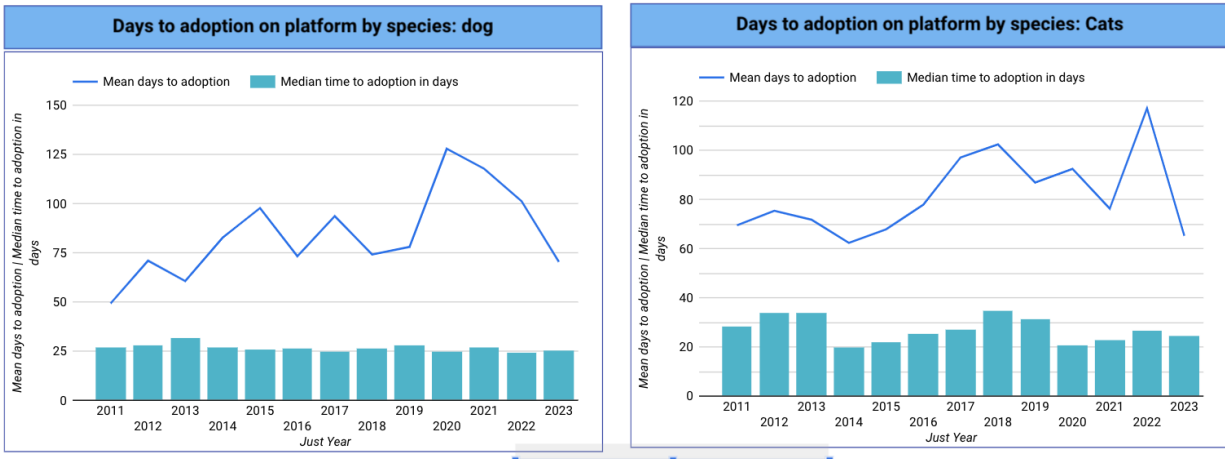


Figure 3. Average and median time to adoption from listing of pets on PetRescue for dogs and cats in NSW

The exception to this is pets with firm restrictions on placement, in particular those reported as incompatible for placement in homes with dogs (see Figure 4, below); length of time to adoption for these pets has been steadily increasing for 12-18 months.

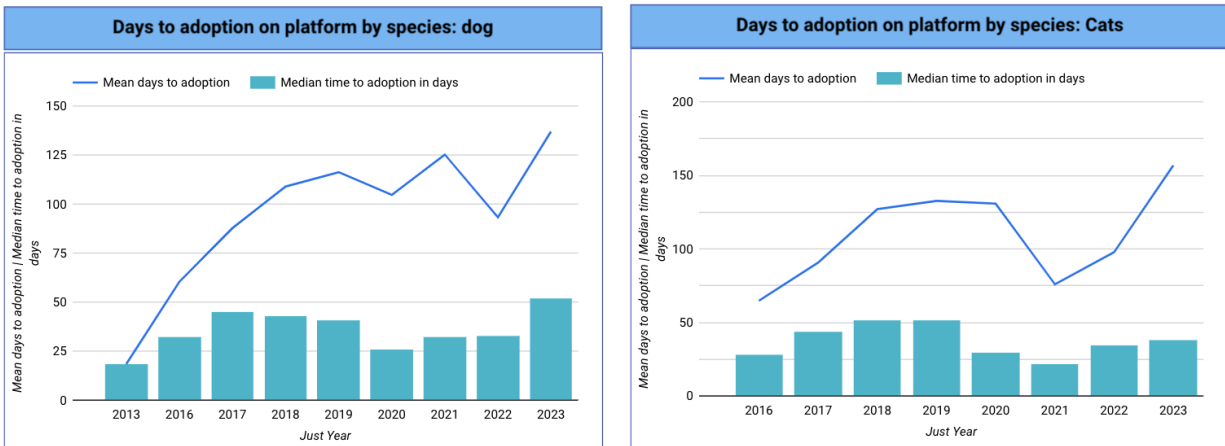


Figure 3. Average and median time to adoption from listing of pets on PetRescue for dogs and cats in NSW who are labelled as incompatible for placement with dogs.

Examination of PetRescue listings from municipal shelters in NSW shows that shelters in adjacent councils can vary significantly in the prevalence and degree of restrictions they place on dogs available for adoption, with one specific facility consistently having 'only dog' restrictions on the majority of dogs available. Few facilities follow ['good practice' guidelines](#) for advertising and matching pets, such as lowering or removing adoption fees for longer stay pets. It is clear that standards of behaviour assessment, and common adoption advertising and placement practices vary widely across NSW, and are not informed by current evidence-based practices in the sector.

In order to improve rehoming speed and success, municipal shelters need to learn about and embrace modern sheltering practices including:

- Systematic assessment of animal behaviour over time and across multiple contexts, involving improved training of general staff in objective behaviour observations and note taking, improved assessment processes around dog-dog sociability, and increased literacy in the limitations and caveats of using applied behaviour assessments in a shelter environment ([Rayment et al., 2015](#); [Rayment, 2017](#); [ASPCA Position Statement on Shelter Behaviour Assessments](#))
- Improved understanding of the factors influencing success of shelter pet marketing (Zadeh et al., 2022; Becerra et al., 2021), pre-adoption matching (O'Connor et al., 2017), adoption meets (Minnis et al., 2022), and long term placement in adoptive homes (Dinwoodie et al., 2022; Thumpkin et al., 2022; Moss et al., 2020)
- The importance of foster care for potential high-risk placements (Thumpkin et al., 2022) and post-adoption support in the success of adoptive placements (Griffin et al., 2022; Gates et al., 2018)
- Improved management of pets in shelter environments including the benefits and safe, effective provision of enrichment (Dare and Strasser, 2023), [training and behaviour modification](#) (and Luescher and Medlock, 2009) and [conspecific socialisation programs](#).

While the above concepts are important for municipal shelters to improve their care for and placement of available pets, these do not address widespread concerns about the placement of pets who may present a community safety concern. Of 142 respondents to the 2023 State of Pet Adoption report, 75 reported that their organisation considered untreatable or unmanageable behaviour concerns when making euthanasia decisions, and only 35 considered the capacity of an adopter to safely and effectively manage behaviour



or physical problems experienced by the pet; it is clear that we are far from a consensus in the sector regarding the importance of behaviour concerns when placing pets back into the community.

Organisations also vary widely in their ability to assess, train and perform behaviour modification for pets within the system; a private foster-based rescue who works with a qualified and experienced behaviour trainer has a far greater capacity to work with and successfully place a dog with behaviour concerns that do not present a significant risk to community safety, compared to a municipal shelter with basic human housing and no foster program (regardless of the availability of specialist staff).

Healthy relationships at any scale have common features, including open and transparent communication, a clear understanding of roles within the relationship, and trust that the system underlying the relationship is integrous and credible.

It is unreasonable to expect individuals from the spectrum of organisations that make up the sector to put aside relevant and meaningful concerns about how pet management and rehoming is conducted by others within the sector and simply 'get along', when we currently have no accurate, objective, and transparent information to assess performance.

In order for the sector to move forward together when discussing this topic, the current lack of trust and desire to work together between local government and rehoming organisations, must be addressed. In the 2023 State of Pet Adoption survey, 34 of the 62 NSW respondents to the 2023 State of Pet Adoption agreed that lack of trust is a significant challenge for better working relationships within the sector, and 22 respondents agreed that a lack of desire to work together was a challenge.

We suggest that the Portfolio Committee considers existing models for how communities approach and manage the support, assessment and placement of sheltered pets, such as the [Socially Conscious Sheltering](#) movement, and attempt to form guiding principles that can be agreed to and applied by the majority of organisations in the NSW sector. This approach is similar to other movements within the border sheltering movement, such as the [Asilomar Accords](#) where a diverse group of organisations were brought together to find common ground, and through that, pathway forward.

To support these guidelines, we suggest that the NSW government expand the existing reporting structures for NSW local governments to include all registered organisations in

the sector and align with modern reporting standards such as the [Shelters Animals Count Basic Matrix](#). Furthermore, data collected should be made publicly available and used by the NSW state government to inform funding, compliance and regulation actions related to companion animals.

## TOPIC 4 - Funding and facilitating a holistic approach to companion animal management

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

The challenges of funding animal management have been a topic of discussion in the broader local government sector for an extended period, with repeated acknowledgement that the basic premise of companion animal management being a ‘user pays’ service is flawed (e.g. [Pert, 2001](#)).

The core goal of companion animal management services is for animals and people to live safely and well together within our communities; this benefits all community members, not pet owners in isolation, and as such, should be treated as a core service that councils provide to their communities. It also cannot be ignored that a large portion of animals, particularly [urban stray cats](#), do not have a registered owner to pay for services provided by local governments, despite the management of these populations positively contributing to community amenity.

We accept that general ratepayers contribute to other council services that support parks, sporting and recreational facilities, libraries, and other family-centric services that only a portion of the community will benefit directly from as part of living within a society that benefits as a whole from these services and opportunities. Companion animal management is no different and should not be treated as such.

However, recent estimates of cost for all NSW councils of \$34 million for animal management provided at the current level ([Centre For International Economics 2022](#)), with approximately \$1.9 billion spent on public order, safety and health. When compared to the \$2.1 billion spent on recreational and cultural services, and \$2.3 billion on environmental management services, including waste management ([NSW OLG, 2023](#)), it is clear that local government animal management departments are problematically under-funded. Councils

have raised the issue of cost shifting for regulatory services related to animals, with shortfalls in funding for companion animal regulation and significantly limited ability to recover costs through the existing Companion Animal Act framework ([Local Government NSW, 2018](#)).

The existing framework for financing companion animal management services provided by local government is currently focused entirely on regulation and enforcement, and even so, is falling short, leaving no room for councils to invest or even investigate more proactive ways to achieve compliance and improve outcomes for people and pets in NSW communities. We strongly recommend that the Portfolio Committee examine how other family and community services provided by local government are funded and shift funding for companion animal management away from a 'user pays' system using existing systems for other services as a model for funding companion animal management.

## Conclusion

PetRescue strongly recommends that the Portfolio Committee consider the following actions as part of the Inquiry:

- 1) Form guiding principles for the provision of animal management and rehoming services that can be agreed to by the majority of organisations in the NSW sector (or all of them), such as the Socially Conscious Sheltering model.
- 2) Expand the existing reporting structures for NSW local governments to include all registered rehoming organisations, and align reporting standards with the Shelters Animals Count Basic Matrix.
- 3) Make all data collected publicly available and provide guidance to NSW Local Governments on the use of this data to inform animal management practices, secure funding, and monitor progress over time.
- 4) Overhaul the current 'user pays' funding model for companion animal management services and align funding of these with other community-wide, State and Local Government funded community services.
- 5) Clarify responsibility for the provision of owner support services that keep pets out of the system, and provide regulatory support and untethered funding for the provision of these services.

- 6) Consult with the veterinary sector on their capacity to provide broadscale High Quality, High Volume Spay/Neuter services to the sector, and communities more broadly.
- 7) Consult with existing Registered Training Organisations on their capacity to provide shelter-specific training to the sector, and explore ways to support this to ensure it is accessible and available to all local governments and approved rehoming organisations.
- 8) State provision of the following services to Local Governments:
  - a) Access to a reference library of accurate, evidence-based reference materials and resources, and associated continuing education opportunities for development of evidence-based, progressive animal management and rehoming services.
  - b) Access to, with the requirement to use, shelter management software with the capability to produce compliant reporting for animal services and outcomes.
  - c) Issue a guidance statement to local governments against the development of large, multi-council 'warehouse-style' facilities conducive to poor animal outcomes.
  - d) Compulsory, in-depth training on animal modern, systematic behaviour assessment, in-shelter care, and adoption of pet dogs and cats.

## References

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