

INQUIRY INTO POUNDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Penrith City Council

Date Received: 18 August 2023

16 August 2023

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

Dear Chairperson,

Subject: Response to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Pounds in NSW

Submission by Penrith City Council

(a) Resourcing Challenges affecting New South Wales Pounds:

Penrith City Council has a long-standing Agreement with the Hawkesbury City Council Companion Animals Facility, as do a number of other Councils in Western Sydney.

It is Council's view that the Hawkesbury facility and indeed other pounds in NSW are critically under-funded, and this is reflected in the quality of and standard of the pound facilities. There is also insufficient capacity due to a range of reasons which are outlined under (b).

Revenue delivered via Companion Animal registrations is insufficient to cover the activities required over the lifetime of an animal.

Revenue is also spread evenly across Councils regardless of whether they operate a pound or not, so there is little incentive for Councils to construct and operate new pounds.

We encourage the NSW Government to explore options to enhance funding allocation for NSW pound facilities (noting the recent funding allocations granted to welfare and rescue organisations – but not to councils). Council believes this will reduce the reliance on registration fees.

Adequate funding is vital to support the essential functions of pounds, and ensuring the well-being of animals. We urge the government to consider some other actions:

- Allocate 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.

- Work in partnership with NSW pound facilities to identify and address the specific resourcing challenges faced by individual pounds across New South Wales, tailoring solutions to meet their unique needs.
- Allocate funds for comprehensive training and development programs for pound staff to enhance their skills, knowledge, and work health and safety practices.

(b) Adequacy of Pound Buildings and Facilities in New South Wales:

The overall condition of pounds in New South Wales is generally very poor in regard to ageing infrastructure and limited space, leading to overcrowding and adverse effects on the well-being of animals. This is a major issue for operators of pounds and the organisations (incl Councils) that use them.

Pounds are generally over-capacity across the NSW due to the following:

- The introduction of section 64 of the Companion Animals Act regarding rehoming animals in shelter has created pressure for rescues to take animals that should not otherwise be rehomed. This had led to significance increases in holding periods, which is an animal welfare issue, and has cost implications for a number of Councils.
- Under the above legislation, there are requirements now of Councils requiring to re-home aggressive dogs which is problematic. There is the option of declaring dangerous/menacing dogs, however this provides additional administrative burden on councils
- RSPCA has closed at least 8 facilities in NSW
- COVID driven demand for puppies/kittens which are now being surrendered and/or now breeding
- Community perceptions about what breeds are desirable

Due to pounds being overcapacity, the opportunity for exercise and enrichment is limited. Cleaning and maintenance form a large part of the staff's daily tasks and take priority over other activities.

The adequacy of facilities in smaller LGA's, and rural/remote areas have challenged with providing adequate pound facilities and staff.

Most facilities are old and in a state of disrepair. Quick fixes and repairs are being completed, but there aren't enough funds to build new shelters that align with today's standards. Older buildings are also more exposed to extreme temperatures and have limited climate control impacting on the animal's welfare.

Pounds and shelters run on limited funding therefore, quality food is not always an option. Poor quality food leads to a number of health and welfare issues for the animals. There are no minimum requirements for monitoring of health (weight).

There is also a lack of qualified staff in shelters that are capable of identify behavioural concerns. This issue may impact and animals' ability to be rehomed.

Staff shortages can also result in general maintenance and upkeep of the facility to fall behind.

We would support the investment in regional based facilities which could serve to provide enhanced pound infrastructure, modern facilities, improved collaboration across multiple council areas, centralisation of facilities and focal point for community engagement, education and awareness.

(c) Welfare Challenges Facing Animals in Pounds Across New South Wales:

Animal care and welfare are of the utmost importance to pound facility operators in NSW. We believe the NSW Government should be taking more responsibility for the welfare of animals in pounds.

Some of the challenges as follows:

- Insufficient capacity meaning pounds are sometimes unable to accept surrenders
- Access to vets is challenging, particularly finding vets willing to provide at cost/discounting
- The cost of feed
- The Animal Welfare Code of Practice has not been updated since 2014

If industry standards are to be set by the NSW Government, there would be a necessity for Government contributions to make these standards achievable and to bridge the gap between rural and city pounds. Many rural councils do not have access to the same resources of those in higher populated areas.

Additionally, animal welfare is currently managed by many different industries and organisations. This ranges from government, welfare organisations and community groups. There would be improved welfare and consistency for animals in pounds if the Government were to implement overarching standards, regulations and guidelines.

(d) Adequacy of Laws, Regulations, and Codes Governing New South Wales Pounds:

The Companion Animals Act 1998 (NSW) and the NSW Animal Welfare Code of Practice No 5 – Dogs and Cats in Animal Boarding Establishments (1996) are the main laws governing pounds.

As referred to above, a draft ‘Code of Practice’ for pounds was completed in 2014 but is yet to be implemented.

The introduction of section 64 of the Companion Animals Act regarding rehoming animals in shelter has created pressure for rescues to take animals that should not otherwise be rehomed. This had led to significance increases in holding periods, which is an animal welfare issue, and has cost implications for a number of Councils.

We also believe there should be amendments to the Companion Animals Act 1998 to introduce changes to euthanasia rules to allow councils to frame their own policies in this regard.

(e) 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:

- Surrender – Owners can no longer care for them due to various reasons such as financial difficulties, relocation, or changes in lifestyle.
- Irresponsible ownership – animals being abandoned, leaving Council with the obligation to collect them and transfer them into the pounds.
- Stray litters – unplanned litters born to stray cats.
- Lack of identification – This could be un-microchipped animals or details not being updated when re-homed. A link to service NSW could provide an easier way for details to be kept up to date.
- Back yard breeding – Staffy and Staffy Cross breeds form a high number of animals that are a result of backyard breeding. They are the predominate breed found in shelters and are difficult to re-home due to their large numbers.
- Covid – The return to ‘normal’ has seen a huge increase in requests for surrender or animals being dumped. As people return to the

workplace, they are finding the lack of time for the animals and resulting in behavioural issues such as separation anxiety.

- Cost of desexing – Desexing can become very expensive. Offering affordable desexing services to owners can help reduce the number of unwanted litters.
- Registration costs – Due to changes in registration requirements, people are not registering their animals as required. Reduced rates for desexed animals should be applied regardless of when the animal was desexed. The aim should be to promote desexing, not punish owners who desex later than recommended.
- Housing crisis – has caused an increase in people having to move and the inability to take their animals with them.
- Currently, the NSW Companion Animals database is not user friendly – Updating details can be difficult and therefore many animals' records are out of date.
- Lack of knowledge about owning animals and the commitment required – In particular medical costs (sick or injured animals) and ongoing care. Owners often don't consider future changes such as relocation or renting restrictions.

Education is critical to reduce/avoid animals ending up in pounds as surrendered or lost. It is important to address issues at the breeder stage, more responsible breeding will result animals homed well, desexing, and owners understanding their responsibilities.

(f) Euthanasia Rates and Practices in New South Wales Pounds:

We recommend further effort to collate statistics from the draft Rehoming Practices review which was conducted by the NSW Office of Local Government (OLG). The Rehoming Practices Review was commissioned to reduce unnecessary euthanasia of companion animals and to increase successful rehoming of companion animals to demonstrate how council pounds have reduced euthanasia rates over time.

We also call upon the NSW Government to consider the following actions:

- Provide additional funding opportunities for pound operators in comprehensive adoption and rehoming programs
- Encourage collaboration and knowledge sharing among pound operators, animal rescue organisations, and animal welfare experts to develop effective strategies for reducing euthanasia rates.

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

The NSW Government should 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, there can be improvements in the adoption process, enhanced animal welfare, and promote responsible pet ownership.

We recommend that a nationally recognised, validated behaviour assessment training/accreditation program be developed. This would ensure everybody is doing the same thing and there is reliability in all assessments.

(h) Relationship between New South Wales Pounds and Animal Rescue Organisations:

We believe there generally are good relationships with re-homing organisations that are well known or where a council has established a working arrangement. However, some smaller organisations may be well meaning but have inappropriate or inadequate facilities. They are generally over capacity as well.

We recommend there be some accreditation or a Code of Practice for all rescue/rehoming groups and there be mandatory basic training for all those personnel working with animals.

(i) Challenges Associated with the Number of Homeless Cats in New South Wales:

Reducing the number of cats in the pounds requires a collaborative approach consisting of a review of legislation, community education, outreach programs, responsible pet ownership and state-wide management plans such as:

- Free or subsidised Microchipping
- Free or subsidised Desexing
- Community cat programs
- State-wide cat management program
- Cat containment laws – Cats are the only domestic animal without a requirement to stay on private property (as long as they are not causing a nuisance) Penalties apply to all other animals (including livestock) if they roam from their property.
- Review legislation re cats – very different to dogs

- Changing behaviour for owners – provide incentives for owners to build cat enclosures.
- State-wide cat ownership education programs
- State-wide feral cat survey (providing information to councils about feral cat populations in their LGA's)

(j) Strategies for Improving Treatment, Care, and Outcomes for Animals in New South Wales Pounds:

We recommend the following:

- Increase the funding to councils for more holding/upgrade facilities, training/behaviour programs and educational campaigns to improving re-homing potential for companion animals
- Subsidise desexing as well as registration, for example give people a chance to get a dog desexed (e.g., 2weeks) before finalising registration
- Combine identification and registration into a single process, and strengthen enforcement
- Combine regulatory oversight for companion animals (e.g., merge Animal Welfare and Companion Animal legislation)
- Improve pet registry/database, with owners able to update details via Service NSW

Finally, as mentioned earlier under (b), we recommend the implementation of a Regional based Animal Care Model by the NSW Government. This strategic approach would entail the establishment of a series of large, purpose-built regional Animal Care Facilities overseen by the government. Such a model would streamline services, foster collaboration, and ensure the provision of comprehensive and efficient care for companion animals across the region.

Conclusion

We trust this submission serves as a valuable contribution to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry.

If you would like to discuss this submission, you can contact me

Yours faithfully,



Greg McCarthy
Environmental Health and Compliance Manager

Penrith City Council
PO Box 60, Penrith
NSW 2751 Australia
T 4732 7777
F 4732 7958
penrith.city