

**Submission
No 89**

INQUIRY INTO POUNDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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Submission in response to the New South Wales (NSW) inquiry on pounds

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OVERVIEW

Over near two decades, my experience has been gained helping with animal welfare organisations, rehoming organisations and small rescuers (individuals or groups) with dogs, cats and small animals. I provide this submission for your consideration.

The main concerns I have for the current council pound approaches and strategies appear

- not to consider the holistic system for animal welfare and care of the animals, that is, an understanding of all the stakeholders especially those involved in delivering animal welfare services (taking in surrenders, lost or abandoned; caring and desexing; and rehoming); such as rescuers (who are not rehoming organisations) and vet practices.
- to currently include an apparent hard separation between local councils when the responsibility for animal welfare is primarily at the NSW state level - while each local government area has characteristics to that area, is it not limited expectations for each council to determine and fund the appropriate responses, where it is most likely that limited funding will drive the solutions which most often will not be humane for the animals?
- to be limited to viewing animals on a monetary value, and constricting funding to animal welfare, most likely as animal welfare (even for companion animals) is under the accountability of the Department of Primary Industry, for which the primary goal appears assisting agricultural businesses.

Last year, I provided input into the NSW pound review for increasing rehoming and decreasing euthanasia rates. This email was sent to the NSW Local Government, email address on Friday 28 October 2022 at 3:52 PM. I am pleased that the scope of this inquiry has been extended beyond the pound review in 2022.

ISSUES & RECOMMENDATIONS

Issues and recommendations are provided under the most applicable Terms of Reference (TOR) points.

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

ISSUE: FUNDING & SCOPE & POLICIES OF COUNCIL POUNDS NEED TO BE IMPROVED TO REFLECT CURRENT ANIMAL WELFARE STANDARDS

ISSUES & CURRENT IMPACTS

Each council determines the funding to be applied to pound / animal management facilities, which is often limited by the “wealth” of the residents (rate payers) in the local government area, with the need not being adequately quantified by out-of-date estimates. Part of the latter challenge tends to be the lack of registered pets, ie quantifying what cannot be tracked.

I understand that the two main forms of funding from the NSW government are:

- around 80% of pet registration funds are routed to councils where the animals reside
- grants, which generally need to be raised as requests or applied for by each council.

I understand that each council will determine the funding that is drawn from rate payers for animal management services.

This limits the scope of services, the number of people/staff resources, the capacity for the number of animals who may be housed, and the capacity of care ie quality of care provide to each animal.

Anecdotally we see councils engaging “enforcement” experienced animal management officers, rather than proactive community engagement teams. Our state and local council governments need to consider improving animal management services to be aligned with One Welfare providing solutions over punitive enforcements.

RECOMMENDATIONS & BENEFITS

- a) It is recommended that the two main forms of funding from the state government are increased under a new scheme based on the need, rather than each council’s determination of what the community (rate payers) will bear for animals and being limited to known registered pets. This will shift focus from minimum services which are usually enforcement focused, to more proactive services addressing the issues and providing solutions.
 - Some LGAs have a much more significant number of unregistered pets and with increased funding will be better positioned to address ensuring pets are registered etc.
 - Some councils have yet to provide an animal management plan, ie the current status within their LGA, prioritised needs, risks and issues, with a roadmap of initiatives, and

mapped to a funding arrangement (business case). Some animal management plans are dated; some are generalised; most are not measurable, nor tracked in detail, nor reported to the community.

- b) It is recommended that an audit of all existing pound facilities is performed. This will provide information and highlight where a significant lack of pound facilities occurs, including the date of construction and most recent updates, compared against a shared defined standard of care.
- c) It is recommended that an audit of all council pounds and their scope of services, with measurable benefits and outcomes is performed, compared to current international standards and practices. This will provide and enable a state wide plan and funding for improving services, rather than decided by each council based on limiting the burden to the community/ rate payers.
- d) It is recommended that each council and their council pound has a detailed financial business case or business model to achieve results with the animal issues in their areas, and satisfying humane treatment of animals. This financial business case will include objectives, tangible and intangible benefits, costs upfront and ongoing, and be supplemented with an issue log and risk register. This financial business case should be transparent to the community of the LGA as the pound provides a service to its residents. This will provide the “value for money case” for each council for the funds necessary to provide adequate animal welfare services and solutions.
- e) It is recommended that the NSW government provide a pro forma animal management plan and case, that may be completed by each council with the relevant detailed “numbers” and information. This will provide a shared framework and structure for the NSW government to review and assess shared issues and synergies that may be gained across 128 councils, rather than each council spending resources and funds on variations of this information.
- f) The Animal Liberation recommendations for Pound Reform are fully supported:

“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”

<https://www.al.org.au/nsw-pound-shelter-reform/>

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

ISSUE: LACK OF NSW STANDARDS ETC & HOW MANY OF THE COUNCIL POUNDS MEET OVERSEAS MINIMUM STANDARDS ESTABLISHED OVER 10 YEARS AGO?

ISSUES & CURRENT IMPACTS

It appears that each of the 128 councils has been allowed to determine themselves the facilities each provides based on their own terms and interpretations of capacity and animal welfare standards. It is suspected this is also driven by the funds that the council allocates, rather than animal welfare needs.

I understand there is no shared set of standards for animals in council pounds in NSW. This issue has been raised for several years.

Anecdotally, by visiting a range of council pounds in the Sydney and regional areas, a range of facilities can be seen, such as concrete dog stalls, small crates for cats, through to more modern facilities enabling both dogs and cats areas to roam for limited periods (eg Blacktown pound).

Some councils outsource to vets, which theoretically may have a good intention, however the facilities are most often limited to a vet practice and enclosures set up for ill animals not animals who are well and active. Vet practices are often busy and noisy establishments with limited onsite facilities for animals with contagious diseases.

It is noted that the more advanced shelter facilities have been constructed by the RSPCA NSW and Animal Welfare Organisation NSW Kemp's Creek. However, it is also noted, that RSPCA NSW has had an organisational strategy since 2018 to exit from shelter services and has been closing their animal shelter pounds in NSW, as has RSPCA Vic.

- The DPI webpage does not include animal welfare standards for shelters.
<https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/animals-and-livestock/animal-welfare/animal-care-and-welfare/other/dogs-and-cats>
- DPI provides codes of practice for dogs and cats but only for those in boarding facilities, and these do not include minimum building facility sizes for each type of animal.
<https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/animals-and-livestock/animal-welfare/animal-care-and-welfare/other/companion-animal-files/nsw-animal-welfare-code-of-practice-no-5-dogs-and-cats-in-animal-boarding-establishments>
- There has been a general set of standards and guidelines by the Australian Veterinary Association provided in 2013 for animal shelters and municipal pounds, though these do not include minimum sizes for enclosures
<https://www.ava.com.au/policy-advocacy/policies/companion-animals-management-and-welfare/animal-shelters-and-municipal-pounds/>
- Dogs NSW provides a set of standards etc for breeders of dogs and cats which does include facility minimum sizes for enclosures for dogs and cats

https://www.dogsnsw.org.au/media/1075/animal_welfare_standards_and_guidelines_code_of_practice-re-drafted.pdf

The first version of The Association of Shelter Veterinarians' Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters, published in 2010 included a range of practices. The second version published in December 2022, contains specific minimum enclosure sizes for dogs and cats.

<https://jsmcah.org/index.php/jasv/article/view/42/19>

RECOMMENDATIONS & BENEFITS

- a) It is recommended that the NSW government establish a shared set of policies, standards, and processes for all 128 council pounds. This will provide a benchmark for minimum areas of facilities and related services that may be targeted and measured at each council pound.

The first version of The Association of Shelter Veterinarians' Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters, published in 2010 included a range of practices. The second version published in December 2022, contains specific minimum enclosure sizes for dogs and cats.

<https://jsmcah.org/index.php/jasv/article/view/42/19>

- b) The Animal Liberation recommendation for Pound Reform is fully supported.

“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, and

actual ‘no kill’ performance”

“Enhance inspection and enforcement powers for agencies authorised under POCTAA to undertake routine NSW pound and shelter inspections and enforcement.”

<https://www.al.org.au/nsw-pound-shelter-reform/>

[TOR \(c\) welfare challenges facing animals in pounds across New South Wales, including the provision of housing, bedding, feeding, exercise, enrichment, veterinary treatment, vaccination and desexing](#)

ISSUE: LIMITED BY FUNDS ALLOCATED RATHER THAN MEETING COMMON STATE WIDE STANDARDS

ISSUES & CURRENT IMPACTS

Similar to the previous focus area, the internal “housing” and medical care will be determined by each council rather than a set level of standard that should be common across all 128 councils.

Refer TOR (b) the adequacy of pound buildings and facilities in New South Wales, **ISSUE: LACK OF NSW STANDARDS ETC & HOW MANY OF THE COUNCIL POUNDS MEET OVERSEAS MINIMUM STANDARDS ESTABLISHED OVER 10 YEARS AGO?** Page 6

RECOMMENDATIONS & BENEFITS

- a) Similarly, it is recommended that the NSW government establish a shared set of policies, standards, and processes for all 128 council pounds including care of the animals, veterinary services etc. This will provide a benchmark for minimum care etc and related services that may be targeted and measured at each council pound.

The first version of The Association of Shelter Veterinarians’ Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters, published in 2010 included a range of practices. The second version published in December 2022.

<https://jsmcah.org/index.php/jasv/article/view/42/19>

- b) The Animal Liberation recommendations for SCAMPs & duty of care is fully supported:

“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.”

“Introduce a fully funded, mandatory and legally enforceable NSW pound and shelter 'duty of care' regime which focuses on proactive life-saving initiatives and solutions, and best practice animal welfare outcomes, rather than killing and disposal”

“Enhance inspection and enforcement powers for agencies authorised under POCTAA to undertake routine NSW pound and shelter inspections and enforcement.”

“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.”

“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”

<https://www.al.org.au/nsw-pound-shelter-reform/>

TOR (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

In summary, there are many disincentives, loopholes, and open to interpretation clauses in the NSW legislation etc that has contributed to issues and problems with animal welfare becoming worse not better.

A personal view is that the legislation has become a “dog’s breakfast” over time as more bandaide type changes (to mix metaphors) have been applied, usually with the approach of trying to motivate owners and the community through avoiding penalties.

Anecdotally, it is well known that the penalties and charges are also more expensive to enforce than the value of the penalty. This just forces extra costs onto councils or motivates the councils not to bother following up on any animal welfare issues.

It is recommended that the legislation is totally replaced.

ISSUE: CLARIFICATION OF COUNCIL RESPONSIBILITIES FOR ABANDONED OR STRAY ANIMALS IS REQUIRED ASAP AS TOO MANY ARE BEING ADVISED TO LEAVE ANIMALS ON THE STREETS & NOT GET INVOLVED

ISSUES & CURRENT IMPACTS

There are many anecdotal instances of the community and rescuers being advised to either put pets out on the streets or leave pets on the streets and not provide care. Some councils refuse to assist, some council pounds refuse to accept intakes. This is surely a failure of duty of care for animal welfare?

The AVA included a number of issues in this area in their submission to government, and these situations are also being experienced by the community/ residents and small rescuers not just the vets:

“Some councils are refusing to collect strays (especially stray cats) and deflecting the responsibility and cost onto vets. This problem is compounded by some councils directing members of the public (or rate paying constituents) to take stray to veterinary practices. Furthermore, several councils have told practices that once an animal is presented to the clinic they become their responsibility, including treating the animal for free.

Many veterinary practices have reported issues of being unable to contact council after hours, on weekends, public holidays, or during the Christmas/New year break. This results in the practice having to house the animal until council can be contacted.

Councils frequently take days to collect strays from veterinary practices. Furthermore, when councils take longer than 72hr to collect the animals it can place the veterinary practice in breach of section 63A of the Companion Animals Act 1998.

Often councils are telling veterinary practices to release the stray back onto the streets. This request is contrary to the welfare of the animal and could be considered abandonment under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act. In addition, releasing strays back onto the streets goes against veterinarians good conscience and is in contradiction of the NSW Veterinary Oath to “practise veterinary science ethically and conscientiously for the benefit of animal welfare, animal and human health, and the community.”

<https://www.ava.com.au/member-updates/nsw/ava-submission-to-nsw-rehoming-practices-review/>

RECOMMENDATIONS & BENEFITS

- a) It is recommended that the NSW government provide clarity on the expectations for all councils, and that adequate funding is provided for
 - i. One Welfare solutions for responding to issues before maintaining pets becomes an issue,
 - ii. finding council to a shared standard of facilities and animal welfare care in both an animal management plan and a council pound/shelter operation plan to be set for all 128 councils, and
 - iii. providing solutions for humane treatment of pets rather than condemning pets to a short time frame in a council pound before euthanasia.

These responses have been described in other sections of this submission, including to address the number of pets, and especially the high number of cats, being abandoned on the streets, parks, churches, shopping centres, school etc.

In this submission, please refer to:

ISSUE: FUNDING & SCOPE & POLICIES OF COUNCIL POUNDS NEED TO BE IMPROVED TO REFLECT CURRENT ANIMAL WELFARE STANDARDS., page 4

ISSUE: POUND & ANIMAL MANAGEMENT OFFICERS REFORM & TRANSFORM FROM ENFORCEMENT TO PROACTIVE SOLUTIONS (ONE WELFARE), page 17

ISSUE: LACK OF NSW STANDARDS ETC & HOW MANY OF THE COUNCIL POUNDS MEET OVERSEAS MINIMUM STANDARDS ESTABLISHED OVER 10 YEARS AGO?, page 6

ISSUE: REMOVE OR CHANGE THE CHARGE FOR NOT HAVING DESEXED A CAT BY 4 MONTHS OF AGE AS THIS IS JUST PENALISING RESCUERS WHO DESEX & REHOME COLLECTIVELY HUNDREDS IF NOT THOUSANDS OF CATS PER YEAR ACROSS NSW

ISSUES & CURRENT IMPACTS

This policy and charges were implemented in July 2020. Many organisations, councils and individuals have raised that this is unreasonable when a person is desexing and registering a cat 4 months of age or older.

This petition was raised and sent to the minister and the OLG team.

<https://www.change.org/p/nsw-minister-for-local-government-shelley-hancock-stop-nsw-s-unfair-fee-tax-fine-levy-on-desexed-cats?>

This unreasonable extra charge hurts the cat rescuers the most who are saving many cats every year.

It is noted that the NSW government did relieve the designated rehoming organisations of these obligations, I believe this was in late 2021. However, the NSW government did not provide any relief to the small rescuers or individual owners.

RECOMMENDATIONS & BENEFITS

- a) It is recommended that this charge is not applied when any owner has desexed their cat and is completing lifetime registration. This removes a punitive charge for people who have done the correct thing in desexing their cat, and now registering it.

ISSUE: RECTIFY SEVERAL CURRENT OBLIGATIONS IN NSW LEGISLATION

ISSUES & CURRENT IMPACTS with RECOMMENDATIONS & BENEFITS

- a) These issues and recommendations have been raised by AVA and are fully supported:

“The identification and registration system be revised to:

- a) remove the annual permit fee for non-desexed cats
- b) waive registration fees for cats through Community Cat programs similar to the waiving of registration fees for rehoming organisations
- c) waive registration fees for animals that are returned to owners from pounds, where this is needed as an incentive for return to owner
- d) make registration (i.e. payment) for an animal occur at the same time as identification. This would mean people selling or giving away animals would be responsible for registration. Note that we would like stakeholder feedback on whether this would reduce animals being microchipped
- e) [refer AVA document as desexing vouchers were not supported]
- f) require any animal sold or given away to be registered”

https://www.ava.com.au/globalassets/authors/ava_submission_draft-report-rehoming-of-companion-animals-in-nsw.pdf

- b) In September 2021, the Australian Pet Welfare Foundation (APWF) provided a set of recommendations to improve cat ownership and management within NSW. These were presented to the minister's team, and the findings and recommendations are fully supported.

“On 1 July 2020, amendments to the CA Act came into force which reduced the registration fee for all cats and introduced an annual permit scheme for undesexed cats. The addition of the annual permit fee has compounded issues for cat owners on low incomes who acquire kittens from friends or family whose cats have accidental litters, semi-owners who acquire ‘stray’ cats, and cat rescue groups who are currently doing significant work in desexing and rehoming cats that would otherwise need to be managed by local councils. These new owners often acquire undesexed cats older than 4 months and promptly arrange for the cat to be desexed, but under the current provisions are unable to avoid an annual permit fee for the first year.

The fundamental legislative obligations with which cat owners in NSW must comply (identification, registration, annual permits and, to avoid the obligation for an annual permit, desexing) can result in significant financial burdens. Even though there exists legal authority, local councils may be discouraged from reducing or waiving fees for their residents in need of support, because these fees must still be remitted in full to the OLG.³ Further, the various late fees and unavoidable offences for people acquiring unowned or previously owned undesexed cats older than 4 months result in punitive financial penalties imposed on those least able to afford them.”

The document Review of NSW Companion Animal Regulatory Issues, Recommendations for Effective Cat Management, Final Version, 29 September 2021, may be downloaded from the Referenced Sources at the end of this page:

<https://loverescuecollaborate.org/2022/09/30/recommendations-for-improvements-for-cat-ownership-management-with-the-nsw-companion-animal-legislation/>

- c) The recommendation from Animal Liberation in relation to Pound Reform is fully supported:

“Substantially overhaul the Companion Animals Act to include a revised focus on all impounded animals, regardless of species”

<https://www.al.org.au/nsw-pound-shelter-reform/>

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

ISSUE: THERE IS A RANGE OF ECONOMICAL & OWNERSHIP FACTORS INFLUENCING PETS BEING SURRENDERED DIRECTLY TO POUNDS OR ABANDONED IN STREETS ETC WHO ARE THEN DIRECTED TO THE COUNCIL POUND SYSTEM

ISSUES & CURRENT IMPACTS

It does not appear that council pounds collect and report data on reasons for animals being directly surrendered. Therefore the following factors are provided based on experience and feedback from shelters and rescuers:

- the current rental crisis following Covid stay at home restrictions
- the lack of rental properties open to pets with their owners
- pets being abandoned just prior to school holidays (dogs, cat and especially rabbits)
- the elderly not having alternative options established prior to relocations to retirement or care facilities who do not allow pets with their owners or may only allow one pet per owners with the pet not to be replaced
- people needing to relocate nationally or internationally and not able or not willing to take their pets with them
- breeders surrendering or giving away breeding animals when the animals are no longer reproducing at a high rate

All of these factors can be seen on social media pet pages. The number of requests increased dramatically late last year 2022 with the “end” of Covid restrictions. However, most of these factors are always occurring.

We need better “education” on the value of pets and that pressure placed on council pounds, shelters and rescuers when the community does not have alternatives established ahead of time.

RECOMMENDATIONS & BENEFITS

- a) It is recommended that all the NSW government provide a procedure for all council pounds to gather information on the most likely reasons for animals being surrendered, and potential related factors for specific time periods such as school holidays, rental crisis etc. This will provide information, that while may not be 100% reliable from previous owners, may provide confirmation of perceptions and assumptions of influencing factors.
- b) It is recommended that the NSW government review this data and assist with responses to minimise pet owners abandoning their pets either directly to council pounds, or on the streets etc. This will provide a synergy across all councils and be a more efficient way of addressing common community issues rather than expecting each council in isolation to establish these initiatives.
- c) It is recommended that the NSW government implement OSCAR’S LAW with related initiatives to stop backyard breeding, for example:

- stopping factory farming of dogs & cats,
- restricting pet shops to only sell rescued pets,
- funding action on pets given away for free on online market platforms (eg Gumtree) etc, and
- proactively ensuring pets are desexed & microchipped before transferring ownership

This will provide minimising undesexed pets and decrease the number of animals surrendered/ abandoned and placed in the council pound systems; and will increase transfers of animals for adoptions from council pounds, ie rehoming rates.

Refer www.oscarslaw.org

Refer <https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/animals-and-livestock/animal-welfare/animal-care-and-welfare/other/dogs-and-cats/selling?>

ISSUE: DO NOT SUPPORT MANDATORY CAT CONTAINMENT as it has not been shown to be successful and results in increased pound surrenders, increased euthanasia, and increased community complaints

ISSUES & CURRENT IMPACTS

Promoting cat enclosures has a greater impact on cat owners, than the enforcement actions under mandatory cat containment in legislation or regulations, by the state or local government.

Refer Australian Pet Welfare Foundation Position Paper [loverscuekitties .files.wordpress.com/2022/09/apwf-mandated-cat-containment.pdf](https://www.loverscuekitties.files.wordpress.com/2022/09/apwf-mandated-cat-containment.pdf)

The APWF position on mandated cat containment includes:

- key findings from three Australian councils: Yarra Ranges; Casey; and Hobsons Bay, the latter who, after 20 years, rejected cat curfews/containment in 2014 [LRC understanding is that information from councils is limited due to each council’s available information]
- that a “number of USA jurisdictions have repealed their cat leash laws because they were unenforceable”, and as a result of “more cats being impounded and then killed but without reducing the overall number of roaming cats”,
- RSPCA Australia in 2018 noted: “Overall, councils with cat containment regulations have not been able to demonstrate any measurable reduction in cat complaints or cats wandering at large following the introduction of the regulations”.

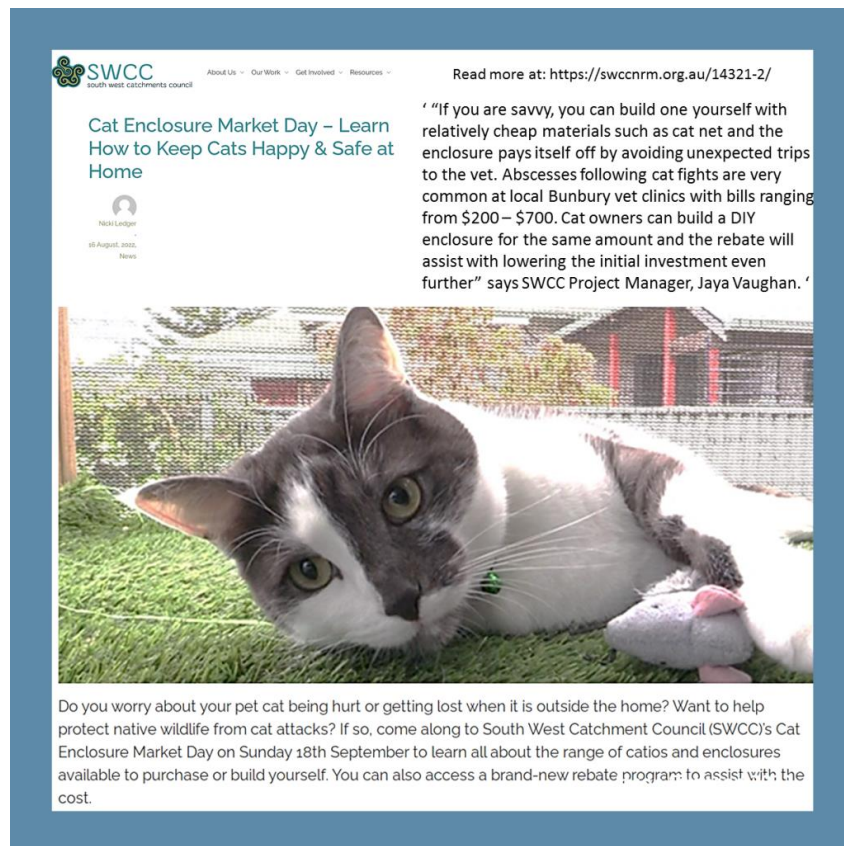
APWF summarises “Based on data from councils, 24/7 cat containment regulations would not provide any measurable benefit in reducing complaints, cat impoundments, potential wildlife predation... and would instead increase costs to local governments.”

RECOMMENDATIONS & BENEFITS

- a) It is recommended to follow APWF information on these techniques that have been proven successful, including:
- Community cat programs, where cats are managed, fed, desexed etc in a controlled manner
 - Nightly routine “bed time feeding” to effectively bring cats indoors when cats and wildlife re more likely to “mix” – not currently widely promoted

These techniques will provide benefits of keeping cats safely at home in a proactive way through education.

- b) It is recommended that cat containment policies should be promoted in a constructive manner, such as Bunbury Council in WA providing many small rebates to those who construct new cat enclosures and facilitating “market days” to bring suppliers and cat owners together. These techniques will also provide benefits of keeping cats safely at home in a proactive way through facilitated awareness of products with many suppliers and small \$ incentives. The information may no longer be available from the council webpage, the following was copied at the time.



ISSUE: SUPPORT COMMUNITY / COLONY CAT PROGRAMS SUCH AS PROVIDED BY APWF AS THESE WILL REDUCE THE NUMBER OF ANIMALS ENDING UP IN NSW POUNDS & REDUCE COMPASSION FATIGUE FOR CARERS

ISSUES & CURRENT IMPACTS

Currently across NSW, and has been seen in Sydney metropolitan area and Newcastle, rescuers as individuals or groups are caring for cats abandoned by residents. These groups largely operate independently from councils and council pounds, yet provide animal welfare benefits and reduce the number of animals being surrendered to council pounds.

This burdens the rescue groups in several ways, financially, time and labour, and also in terms of compassion fatigue. These rescue groups have been threatened by the cat hating public and have deep emotional attachment to the cats under their care.

One Newcastle group has been researched, and includes “the severity of the adverse psychological impacts, and the morbidity rate amongst the cat caregivers we interviewed, was far greater than would be expected as a risk to the community if the cats had remained at the site. We therefore suggest that potential legal ramifications should be considered before authorities intentionally choose a method of management that is likely to inflict substantial harm on community members.”

The Impact of Lethal, Enforcement-Centred Cat Management on Human Wellbeing: Exploring Lived Experiences of Cat Carers Affected by Cat Culling at the Port of Newcastle
<https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/13/2/271>

Port of Newcastle’s Stockton breakwall cat cull sparks fury after animals maimed
<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-12-20/port-of-newcastles-stockton-breakwall-cat-cull-sparks-fury/13001868>

Alley Cat USA Video of Newcastle Port Shooting <https://www.alleycat.org/new-video-horrific-cat-massacre-at-port-newcastle-australia/>

RECOMMENDATIONS & BENEFITS

- a) It is recommended that community cat programs such as that by APWF are supported. These will reduce the number of new cats/kittens born, include a level of managed care, reduce the number of roaming cats, impacts on wildlife, reduce the number of animals entering pounds, and the reduce the number of animals euthanased at council pounds with the related compassion fatigue for council pound vets and staff.

Refer [petwelfare .org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Community-Cat-Program-poster.pdf](https://petwelfare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Community-Cat-Program-poster.pdf)

- b) It is recommended that the state and local councils consider the “potential legal ramifications” before assessing and deciding on lethal management of “stray” cats that will likely “inflict substantial harm on community members” who are caring for those cats. Refer <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/13/2/271>

ISSUE: POUND & ANIMAL MANAGEMENT OFFICERS REFORM & TRANSFORM FROM ENFORCEMENT TO PROACTIVE SOLUTIONS (ONE WELFARE)

ISSUES & CURRENT IMPACTS

The current scope of animal management and pound services appear to have become minimal and enforcement oriented, for which the value to residents and community is questionable. Pets are

acknowledged and considered of great value to people, especially to those alone, vulnerable or with physical or mental challenges.

Refer <https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/what-are-the-benefits-of-companion-animals-to-human-health/>

Yet the usual council approach to encourage responsible ownership appears limited to council webpages, with little effort/investment in face to face workshops.

The Northern Beaches Council appears to have outsourced the pet/dog day events that were held annually which included a range of service providers, and events during the day to encourage responsible ownership with advice from behaviourists.

It appears that few councils do more than the very minimal with a focus on warnings or enforcement of legal obligations.

RECOMMENDATIONS & BENEFITS

- a) It is recommended that funding from the state and local government be invested in transforming council services to assist pet owners, and offer solutions when individual pet ownership problems arise. This aligns with the One Welfare approach.

This will most beneficial to the vulnerable, and those in the low socio economic bracket who are financially constrained when seeking help/ options.

The Animal Liberation 15 point plan for pound reform which includes “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” [www .al.org.au/nsw-pound-shelter-reform/](http://www.al.org.au/nsw-pound-shelter-reform/)

Banyule Council community cat program involved proactive animal management services over enforcement, refer APWF “After 4 years of a free, high intensity, targeted desexing program for owned and semiowned cats, in 2020/21 the City of Banyule (pop 130,000) impounded only 1 cat/1000 residents compared to the Victorian average of 7 cats/1000 residents and euthanased just 25 cats (0.2 cats/1000 residents compared to the Victorian average of 2 cats/1000).” <https://petwelfare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Aust-Community-Cat-Program-Dec-2021.pdf>

Refer RSPCA Australia “Community health programs for pet owners – The bond between owners and their pets can decrease social isolation, increase a person’s sense of purpose and bring joy to someone’s life. This is especially true for more socially isolated groups such as elderly people or people struggling with homelessness. However, these circumstances can also make it difficult for these people to give their pets adequate care.”

[kb. rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/what-is-one-welfare/](http://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/what-is-one-welfare/)

- b) It is recommended that the NSW government lead, and each council delivers cultural education and change management programs to respect and care for companion animals. The councils and their animal management officers (AMOs) may work collaboratively with community leaders on solutions for the vulnerable / low incomes

“One Welfare serves to highlight the interconnections between animal welfare, human wellbeing and the environment.”

[www .onewelfareworld.org](http://www.onewelfareworld.org)

Refer: Punishment to Support: The Need to Align Animal Control Enforcement with the Human Social Justice Movement

[www .mdpi.com/2076-2615/10/10/1902](http://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/10/10/1902)

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

ISSUE: LACK OF STANDARDS, FEW SPECIFIC OBLIGATIONS, VARIATIONS IN REPORTING WITH 128 COUNCILS – NEEDS TO CHANGE

ISSUES & CURRENT IMPACTS

On viewing the council reported Pound Data Reports on the NSW OLG webpage, the lack of reporting and inconsistencies across councils is fairly obvious. Some councils appear to be only reporting the minimal data that are included in firm obligations set upon them.

Refer to the spreadsheets on <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/public/dogs-cats/responsible-pet-ownership/pound-and-dog-attack-statistics/>

It is also understood that in some councils these numbers are manually collected and merged, and that likely in most of the 128 councils there is any audit nor independent verification.

Until firm new standards are set by the NSW government, is it likely the quality or quantity of data will be improved, or offer a reliable view?

RECOMMENDATIONS & BENEFITS

- a) The AVA recommendations that data is improved not just for euthanasia events, but for all council activities involving measurable points during care and rehoming for animals is fully supported.

AVA has included these recommendations:

“For annual information reporting to OLG, the NSW Government make the following revisions:

- a) the reason for euthanasia currently classified as ‘feral/infant’ be split into ‘feral’ and ‘infant’
- b) euthanised cats and dogs are entered into a future Companion Animal Register (CAR) if they are not already identified so that all animals are tracked within this system. These animals would have an identifier but would not actually be physically microchipped
- c) approved rehoming organisations report separately for cats and for dogs
- d) consideration be given to reporting of animal complaints
- e) consideration be given to being able to prepare automatic reports to councils on rehoming outcomes from rehoming organisations through the redeveloped CAR”

https://www.ava.com.au/globalassets/authors/ava_submission_draft-report-rehoming-of-companion-animals-in-nsw.pdf

These recommendations are fully supported as being sensible improvement of the quantity and quality of data.

- b) Animal Liberation has been calling for pound reforms, and their recommendations are fully supported, and include:

“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”

“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”

“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, which, when combined, form a highly effective life-saving plan”

<https://www.al.org.au/nsw-pound-shelter-reform/>

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

ISSUE: MANY POUNDS ARE INADEQUATELY FUNDED, INADEQUATELY STAFFED, WITH LITTLE TO NO BEHAVIOUR TRAINING EXPERIENCE & EXPERTISE

ISSUES & CURRENT IMPACTS

Many current pound facilities do not provide a calm environment for animals to decompress from being lost, surrendered or abandoned. Having “lost” their previous families and home, the only environments they knew, many animals are placed onto the pound system which most likely includes a harsh and sometimes hostile environment with many other animals. It can be a daunting environment, in sometimes quite small cages, enclosures or condominiums which do not resemble a home environment or backyard.

Few councils have active fostering families and homes, even to take the most timid, scared or physically vulnerable animals.

[Assessing an animal’s behaviour in a busy shelter is far from appropriate.](#)

“It is critical that behaviour assessments undertaken by council are not conducted immediately. A dog or cat will be stressed by being in an unfamiliar environment or not having basic needs met which may lead for it to be incorrectly classified in the behaviour assessment. Dogs and cats should be provided enough time to acclimatise and recover before an assessment is undertaken. The AVA is supportive of recommendation 5c for council staff to be trained to undertake behaviour assessments if the training provided is robust and conducted on a regular basis. Furthermore, to ensure council staff are suitably skilled to undertake behavioural assessments such training could be linked to an annual certification scheme with ongoing requirements for continued education and training.”

https://www.ava.com.au/globalassets/authors/ava_submission_draft-report-rehoming-of-companion-animals-in-nsw.pdf

“It is virtually impossible for a shelter to assess 'temperament' via a one-time test. Temperament is something that we learn about someone by watching their reactions (or questioning them about them) over a broad range of environments and experiences. Most shelters do not have the time or the resources to do this, and thus they are assessing behavior at a point in time, and not true temperament.

...

As much as we try to enrich shelter pet lives, shelters are a stressful place to be. Stress changes a pet's behavior. Some pets will behave more aggressively when stressed, some more fearfully, and some will be quieter and more inhibited. It is important to recognize the role of stress on our behavioral evaluation results. If a dog is aggressive, is it because she is really stressed? If he is NOT aggressive, is it because she is inhibited due to stress?”

<https://www.maddiesfund.org/behavioral-assessment-in-animal-shelters.htm#Behavioral%20Assessment>

“...behaviour problems, such as aggression, food guarding and separation-related behaviours, were not reliably predicted by the standardised behaviour assessment. We recommend that dog behaviour assessments in shelters are used only in conjunction with other monitoring tools to assess behaviour over the whole shelter stay, thus facilitating increased safety/welfare standards for dogs, shelters and the wider community.”

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7401658/>

RECOMMENDATIONS & BENEFITS

- a) It is recommended that the NSW government develop shared resources, including policies and procedures (not just guidelines) and training for a range of behavioural related activities. This will provide a shared set of resources that may be tailored for each animal, rather than each of the 128 councils developing and maintaining their own framework of documents. It will also provide more consistent approaches to responding to behaviour issues with animals, which should be more reliable with better outcomes for the animals.

For example from Maddies Fund:

“The goals of the behavior program should be to: increase the likelihood that a pet will be adopted and stay in its new home, decrease the likelihood that a pet who is a public safety risk will be placed in a home, increase the quality of life of the pets in our care, and decrease the likelihood that pets will be surrendered to the shelter in the first place.”

Resources including:

- A Shelter Behaviour Program applicable for 128 council pounds
- Behavioural Guidelines/Plan for animals in care
- Behavioural Guidelines - Classification and Outcome Decisions
- Behaviour and Training Programs
- Behavioural Modification Program (BMP) for each animal in need
- Adoption Screening for pets under BMPs
- Adoption and Behaviour Counselling & Followup sessions for animals with treatable-manageable behaviours

<https://www.maddiesfund.org/behavioral-assessment-in-animal-shelters.htm#Behavioral%20Assessment>

- b) It is recommended that council pounds are allocated adequate funding for fundamental behaviour resources and activities. This should be one component of the council pound business cases (ie business model to achieve results with the animal issues in their areas, and satisfying humane treatment of animals). This investment should be reflected and aligned with other animal welfare activities in an LGA such a general pet welfare and responsible ownership to minimise the surrender or abandoning of pets by residents. That is these two initiative will overlap with shared components. This will provide better outcomes

for animals when in a pound, and after being adopted. This is a better outcome than euthanasia at the pound.

- c) It is recommended that behaviour assessments are completed by veterinary staff until council pound staff receive training and experience. The Australian Veterinary Association recommendations are supported, including those related to animal behaviour assessments:

- “behaviour assessments undertaken by council are not conducted immediately. A dog or cat will be stressed by being in an unfamiliar environment or not having basic needs met which may lead for it to be incorrectly classified in the behaviour assessment. Dogs and cats should be provided enough time to acclimatise and recover before an assessment is undertaken.”

- “for council staff to be trained to undertake behaviour assessments if the training provided is robust and conducted on a regular basis... to ensure council staff are suitably skilled to undertake behavioural assessments such training could be linked to an annual certification scheme with ongoing requirements for continued education and training”

<https://www.ava.com.au/member-updates/nsw/ava-submission-to-nsw-rehoming-practices-review>

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

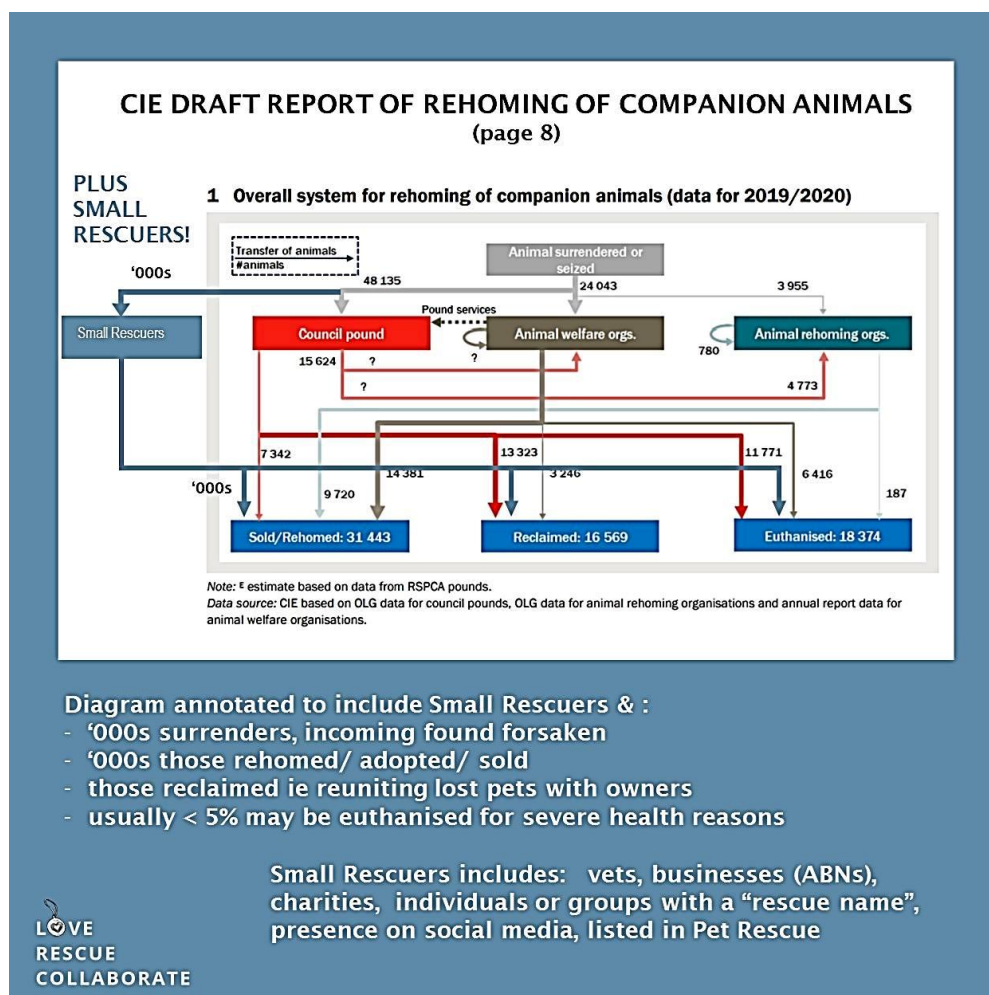
ISSUE: RESCUERS MINIMISE ANIMALS BEING SENT TO COUNCIL POUNDS & ALLEVIATE RESOURCES AND COSTS AT POUNDS

ISSUES & CURRENT IMPACTS

Last October 2022, feedback was provided that rescuers were involved in the animal welfare systems for the draft document “Rehoming of Companion Animals in NSW”. It is noted that the review last year included that the “overarching aim is to reduce unnecessary euthanasia of companion animals and to increase successful rehoming of companion animals”. OLG NSW webpage

These rescues may be registered charities (with Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission) and registered businesses (with Australian Business Numbers under the Australian Taxation Office). Some are neither, being a small home-based rescue.

Refer to the modified diagram below from the draft report, which has been edited to include small rescues. These rescues take in animals from “the streets”, or as surrenders from the public.



- Each year, these actions by rescuers minimise the load of surrenders etc to the council animal management facilities (pounds), and do not currently put any pressure on council funded resources nor facilities.
- Each year, by avoiding sending these thousands of animals to council pounds, the pounds are also relieved of increasing euthanasia rates. That is, if the intake numbers increase from the animals currently supported by small rescues, then so do euthanasia rates if the pound facilities are not increased with appropriate funding to take in these animals and care for these animals. And these costs for the council pounds increase.

RECOMMENDATIONS & BENEFITS

- a) It is recommended that the NSW government recognises the efforts of rescue groups who are not designated Rehoming Organisations, and the benefits of these group and individuals. There are hundreds of these rescues across NSW, who collectively help save thousands of animals each year. These are rescues who find the current obligations for being a designated rehoming organisation are burdensome for their volunteer efforts. Establishing a “light” version of communication and recognition will provide the NSW government will over sight of the numbers of rescuers working in multiple LGAs assisting with avoiding sending animals through the council pound systems.

- b) It is recommended that rescuers are offered support for free desexing, those who are working alike the councils and council pounds to take in abandoned animals, desex etc and rehome, currently without costs to the state and local governments, through initiatives such as:
 - VET GRANTS/FUNDING to vets who have historically and directly rescue abandoned animals, and help rescuers currently with reduced vet charges – we need the desexing provided free and assistance with other animal health bills

 Australian Veterinary Association has recommended “formal provisions for veterinary practices reimbursement when receiving stray cats” plus more

www.ava.com.au/member-updates/nsw/ava-submission-to-nsw-rehoming-practices-review/

 - CLARIFYING TNR UNDER MANAGED COMMUNITY CAT PROGRAMS IS NOT ABANDONMENT

 Refer to Australian Pet Welfare Foundation (APWF) Community Cat Programs “We have Australia’s first permit to desex stray cats and return them to their home location. This means that colonies of cats who are being fed by one or several residents can be desexed, to stop the cycle of kittens being born.”

<https://petwelfare.org.au/community-cat-program-news-2/>

 Refer to A Long-Term Lens: Cumulative Impacts of Free-Roaming Cat Management Strategy and Intensity on Preventable Cat Mortalities, which includes “reducing

abandonment and, where possible, immigration in conjunction with high-intensity TNR could improve outcomes more than for any other management option tested.

5) Culling is likely to be ineffective and inefficient in terms of cumulative preventable deaths and population size reduction.”

www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fvets.2019.00238/full

Refer to the many research papers under the Sustaining Innovation in Compassionate Free-Roaming Cat Management Across the Globe: A Decadal Reappraisal of the Practice and Promise of TNVR

www.frontiersin.org/research-topics/7389/sustaining-innovation-in-compassionate-free-roaming-cat-management-across-the-globe-a-decadal-reappraisal-of-the-practice-and-promise-of-tnvr

- ENSURING RESCUERS AS SEMI OWNERS HAVE AVAILABLE FREE DESEXING COMMUNITY INITIATIVES WITHOUT MICRICHIPPING & REGISTRATION

Refer to Liverpool Council & Campbelltown Council free desexing initiatives in 2022/2023.

All of these initiatives will provide assistance to reduce the number of kittens being born each year, and by reducing the number of cats, so will the number of roaming cats be reduced and so will the number of complaints to councils be reduced, and so will the intakes, euthanasia and costs at council pounds.

- c) It is recommended that the NSW government and local government councils increase the designated funding for animal management teams and shelters to enable more animals to be taken in from the public, without increasing euthanasia rates and relieve the pressure on small rescuers and communities. This will benefit rescuers as they tend to primarily Rescuers avoid sending animals to council pounds due to the harsh environments and high euthanasia rates at council pounds.
- d) It is recommended that governments need to consider before reducing adoption charges in council pounds that this negatively impacts the rescuers and ROs who are not able to dramatically cut their charges. It may help the council pounds clear their shelters, but it stalls adoptions for the animals with small rescuers. This will benefit small rescuers in not being “forced” to carry animals for longer periods until the council pounds and shelters clear their loads of animals. This is an unfair financial and emotional burden on small rescuers.
- e) It is recommended that when a council pound or large animal welfare organisation changes their approaches, then they need to recognise that the “pain” mainly in terms of costs is often transferred to others, ie small rescuers. This will ensure that the holistic system is “healthy” and fair, no part of the system should operate in isolation and just what is best for the council pounds in isolation of the whole system and stakeholders. Otherwise, that is a false successful outcome and false economy.

TOR (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

ISSUE: THE SIGNIFICANT RISE IN ABANDONED CATS/KITTENS, THE LACK OF RESPONSES/HELP FROM COUNCILS, THE EXCESSIVE REGISTRATION \$CHARGES FOR A DESEXED CAT, & HAVING TO PAY VET DESEXING ETC BILLS... & THEN THE RISE IN CAT HATERS AND COMPASSION FATIGUE

ISSUES & CURRENT IMPACTS

These are just some of the challenges which have become even more significant over recent years:

- the significant rise in abandoned cats/kittens
- the lack of responses/help from council teams and council pounds
- the excessive registration charges now \$85 plus late payment fees for desexing a cat who is 4 months of age or older
- vet bills, not every rescuer is able to obtain even reduced rates with local vets, some abandoned cats need medical help costing hundreds if not thousands of dollars
- the rise of cat hating neighbours trapping and either dumping owned cat far from their homes or in local or further afield council pounds
- the rise in cat haters and compassion fatigue

Prior to the end of the 2022 year, the large animal welfare organisations (eg RSPCA, AWL NSW, CPS etc) and most council pounds were declaring themselves at capacity and not able to take in more surrenders or abandoned pets. This was for both dogs and cats.

We have seen a long period over a year where people are abandoning their pets in high numbers, mostly due to the end of the Covid restrictions and associated factors, such as the rental crisis.

With the major animal welfare organisations and pounds either are not taking in pets due to capacity or perhaps part of their normal restrictions, the burden fell to rescue groups to stretch their resources as it was the latter who were “at the coal face” on the streets witnessing the pets increasing and needing care.

While paid staff in animal welfare organisations and council pounds were raising concerns about compassion fatigue, they were at least protected in some way by their organisations.

Meanwhile, there were no large scale efforts to help the significant numbers of animals being abandoned. Unlike bushfire and flood responses, there were no large scale animal rescue efforts by the fairly well funded charity organisations (RSPCA, AWL NSW, CPS etc) nor council pounds, who all held fast to their capacity limits.

This has been the most severe 12 months on small rescues. When people can, they have stretched or rather compressed their resources to increase capacity in homes, and unfortunately the animals, especially cats, have increased on the streets in forms of groups, community cats or colonies.

It is also recognised that donations from the public had reduced over the last few years.

Basically, there has been little help for small cat rescuers, who have been using their own funds to care for cats on the streets.

This has not just happened in Australia, it is also occurring and evident in northern America.

Are small cat rescuers (individuals or groups) not respected as the majority are women? Or is it that personal animal preferences by the NSW government or councillors or council staff have been influencing decision making?

Meanwhile, the war on cats has increased under the Invasive Species Commissioner and Council, where the lines between feral and domestic stray abandoned cats blurred enabling the anger and aggression against cats and cat carers to also increase.

Small cat rescuers have been unfairly left alone to manage with bigger financial burdens, and for significant compassion fatigue in forms of primary and secondary trauma.

While there has been research for compassion fatigue with shelter staff etc there has to date only been one study on small cat rescuers with a colony of cats in Newcastle:

refer to the The Impact of Lethal, Enforcement-Centred Cat Management on Human Wellbeing: Exploring Lived Experiences of Cat Carers Affected by Cat Culling at the Port of Newcastle

<https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/13/2/271>

My opinion is that this has been one of the hardest periods of the state government and local council showing a total lack of duty of care for animals abandoned by their residents and for their residents who are volunteering their efforts, and homes, and finances to pick up that responsibility, even an increase in that responsibility and burden in the last eighteen months.

If the animals had lost their families and homes from bushfires or floods then there would have been an outpouring of support, as we have seen with many millions of dollars raised during the previous events for the large animal welfare organisations.

RECOMMENDATIONS & BENEFITS

- a) It is recommended that government decision makers for cat management approaches need to consider the potential risks to the carers of cats, that is, when decisions harm roaming/ stray/ abandoned cats then harm is also done to those who provide ongoing care for the cats.
- b) It is recommended that decision makers also consider that due to the significant primary trauma that can occur to carers or semi owners of cat groups/ communities /colonies when

the cats are physically harmed “the severity of the adverse psychological impacts, and the morbidity rate amongst the cat caregivers we interviewed, was far greater than would be expected as a risk to the community if the cats had remained at the site. We therefore suggest that potential legal ramifications should be considered before authorities intentionally choose a method of management that is likely to inflict substantial harm on community members.” <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/13/2/271>

- c) It is recommended that the state government and councils need an urgent cultural change to respect and assist small cat rescuers, to date there are only a few councils such as the City of Sydney who have developed respectful and effective relationships.
- d) It is recommended that the recommendations to improve the scope of services and outcomes for council pounds contained in the submission document are implemented, with a priority order for any “quick wins” to start to relieve the pressure on small rescue groups who are volunteers and currently relieving the council pounds of the use of their resources, facilities and funds.
- e) It is recommended that “quick wins” for small rescuers need to be prioritised and funded as soon as possible to enable a rapid relief to community volunteers performing animal welfare support with taking in, desexing, medical treatments, food and other care for animals who have been abandoned by residents. It is strongly suggested that providing urgent funding to vets who have historically been helping small rescuers with reduced prices for desexing etc will be the most effective and rapid step.
- f) It is recommended that communication channels are established with small rescuers to commence establishing better working relationships and knowledge for the state and local governments on the size, complexity and areas of the many hotspots to be prioritised for responses.
- g) It is recommended that the APWF community cat programs are assisted to more rapidly commence, especially if there are biodiversity concerns/ obligations or areas where endangered wildlife has been identified.
- h) It is recommended that each council’s biodiversity reports need to be completed to specifically identify where species may be under direct threat from roaming or stray cats, that these areas are essentially surveyed to properly assess the risks, and replace the fear mongering by broad brush estimates based on assumptions.
- i) It is recommended that clarity on the actual threat that cats pose in each LGA is properly studied. The studies completed under the Invasive Species Commissioner and Council have been largely based on assumptions and desk work in estimating numbers. It is well known that the biggest threat to native animals is land clearing, and with the current rental and housing crisis our state government is enabling massive land clearing for housing which involves the removal of natural habitat, with minimal green corridors. Yet the anger and aggressiveness against roaming cats in urban areas is rampant on social media and webpages.
- j) It is recommended that the state government and councils enable bridges between wildlife carers and cat carers (especially small rescuers), when it is evident that most councils give little care to possums and other native animals which are retuning in large numbers by adjusting to urban environments.

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

ISSUE: CURRENTLY FUNDING DRIVES OUTCOMES RATHER THAN DUTY OF CARE FOR ANIMAL WELFARE & RESIDENTS' PETS

ISSUES & CURRENT IMPACTS

It appears that over the last decade our council pounds have become commercial enterprises with a focus on minimising costs, and deferring responsibilities with the associated labour and costs.

We need to see beyond a council pound facility and assess the value in pets in our communities, and providing One Welfare solutions rather than hard enforcement of punitive laws, and killing pets in pounds.

It is viewed that the historical state government and local councils' approaches have been contributing to the number of abandoned and uncared for pets in our society. This has occurred in urban areas as well as regional/ country areas – no one wants to take responsibility for the abandoned pets.

RECOMMENDATIONS & BENEFITS

- a) It is recommended that our NSW animal welfare systems especially for companion animals needs reforming to one that will lead and be led by the welfare of animals, as these animals provide a significant contribution to society for those who associate with animals being sentient beings and companions.

Relevant strategies have already been provided in this submission include:

- One Welfare solutions with proactive animal management services from councils.

Refer to **ISSUE: POUND & ANIMAL MANAGEMENT OFFICERS REFORM & TRANSFORM FROM ENFORCEMENT TO PROACTIVE SOLUTIONS (ONE WELFARE)**, page 17.

- Increased funds from the NSW state government for council animal welfare services

Refer to **ISSUE: LIMITED BY FUNDS ALLOCATED RATHER THAN MEETING COMMON STATE WIDE STANDARDS** page 8.

- Audit of council pounds and facilities to assess where funding is most urgently needed.

Refer **ISSUE: LACK OF NSW STANDARDS ETC & HOW MANY OF THE COUNCIL POUNDS MEET OVERSEAS MINIMUM STANDARDS ESTABLISHED OVER 10 YEARS AGO?** page 6.

- NSW deliver a shared animal management plan for all councils, where each council provided the local characteristics and numbers, to enable evidence based decisions.

Refer Maddies Fund recommendations **ISSUE: MANY POUNDS ARE INADEQUATELY FUNDED, INADEQUATELY STAFFED, WITH LITTLE TO NO BEHAVIOUR TRAINING EXPERIENCE & EXPERTISE** page 22, and SCAMPS recommendation from Animal Liberation point that follows.

- NSW deliver a shared animal shelter plan including policies, processes etc for each of the 128 council pounds to which they should abide.

Refer duty of care processes and procedures recommendation from Animal Liberation in the point that follows.

These current barriers need to be replaced with a reasonable duty of care and strategies in the communities to address abandoned animals being less expensive than increasing pound capacities.

- b) It is recommended that independent vets are engaged by council pounds, as vets directly engaged are usually constrained by the council business model/case for capacity and level of care decisions. How else can vets be allowed to make decisions for the animals if they are constrained by confidential policies driven by set budgets a year or more ahead?
- c) The Animal Liberation recommendations for SCAMPs & duty of care are fully supported:

“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.”

“Introduce a fully funded, mandatory and legally enforceable NSW pound and shelter 'duty of care' regime which focuses on proactive life-saving initiatives and solutions, and best practice animal welfare outcomes, rather than killing and disposal”

“Enhance inspection and enforcement powers for agencies authorised under POCTAA to undertake routine NSW pound and shelter inspections and enforcement.”

“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.”

“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”

<https://www.al.org.au/nsw-pound-shelter-reform/>

TOR (k) any other related matter

ISSUE: MANDATORY CAT CONTAINMENT INCLUDES THE RISK OF INCITING MORE VIOLENCE / ANIMAL CRUELTY TO CATS

ISSUES & CURRENT IMPACTS

If mandatory cat containment is applied in any council, then there is a risk that any roaming cat may be allegedly deemed as illegal and may be culled / killed by members of the public.

There already is a strong presence of cat haters on social media, and there is often seen comments on the Threatened Species Commissioner, ABC Rural facebook pages, and on local community facebook pages that roaming cats are considered “fair game” for being killed.



Some councils are aware that disgruntled neighbours or cat haters will relocate a number of owned cats to different suburbs, (sometimes over 20km from their homes), or are surrendered to the council pound of their local government area or another local government area.

Anecdotally, I have been informed by rangers of one council, that for the above reasons the council has limited intakes at the local council pound.

Some social media posts indicate that if someone phones a council and just says that a cat is feral, then the council will just based on that verbal advice lend the person a trap for the cat to be surrendered to a council pound as a feral. That is, beforehand there does not appear to be any checking or verification by a vet or animal behaviourist, that a cat is actually wild (feral) before a council advising and assisting with helping trapping cats who are owned pets.



RECOMMENDATIONS & BENEFITS

- a) It is recommended that mandatory cat containment is not implemented, and that cat containment is promoted and assisted by council teams for residents. Proactive and supportive approaches are most likely to increase cat containment and reduce roaming cats, reduce impacts on wildlife, and reduce community complaints to the council.
- b) It is recommended for any council that implements mandatory cat containment that they include recognition of the cat haters and the violence against cats in their LGAs currently and post implementation of the new rules:

WHAT ACTIONS WILL THE NSW STATE GOVERNMENT & LOCAL COUNCILS TAKE TO ENSURE THEY DO NOT INCITE CAT HATERS HURTING / KILLING CATS UNDER MANDATORY CAT CONTAINMENT?

WHAT ACTIONS WILL THE NSW STATE GOVERNMENT & LOCAL COUNCILS TAKE TO ENSURE CAT HATERS ARE NOT TRAPPING ROAMING CATS THAT ARE OWNED BY RESIDENTS?

- c) It is recommended for any council that implements mandatory cat containment that they include recognition of the rescuers (carers and semi owners) of managed cat groups or cat communities or colonies; and ensure that these people and their cats are not targeted by cat haters.

Currently across NSW, and has been seen in Sydney metropolitan area and Newcastle, rescuers as individuals or groups are caring for cats abandoned by residents. These groups largely operate independently from councils and council pounds, yet provide animal welfare benefits and reduce the number of animals being surrendered to council pounds.

This burdens the rescue groups in several ways, financially, time and labour, and also in terms of compassion fatigue. These rescue groups have been threatened by the cat hating public and have deep emotional attachment to the cats under their care.

One Newcastle group has been researched, and includes “the severity of the adverse psychological impacts, and the morbidity rate amongst the cat caregivers we interviewed, was far greater than would be expected as a risk to the community if the cats had remained at the site. We therefore suggest that potential legal ramifications should be considered before authorities intentionally choose a method of management that is likely to inflict substantial harm on community members.”

The Impact of Lethal, Enforcement-Centred Cat Management on Human Wellbeing: Exploring Lived Experiences of Cat Carers Affected by Cat Culling at the Port of Newcastle <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/13/2/271>

Port of Newcastle’s Stockton breakwall cat cull sparks fury after animals maimed <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-12-20/port-of-newcastles-stockton-breakwall-cat-cull-sparks-fury/13001868>

Alley Cat USA Video of Newcastle Port Shooting <https://www.alleycat.org/new-video-horrific-cat-massacre-at-port-newcastle-australia/>

The state and local councils should consider the “potential legal ramifications” before assessing and deciding on lethal management of “stray” cats that will likely “inflict substantial harm on community members” who are caring for those cats. Refer <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/13/2/271>

ISSUE: DO NOT SUPPORT IMMEDIATE FERAL CAT EUTHANASIA IN THE FIELD DUE TO RISKS WITH PET CATS & LACK OF PROPER ASSESSMENT

ISSUES & CURRENT IMPACTS

There is a significant risk that social cats trapped will react poorly and will be confused with feral cats. And the practice when implemented is highly questionable when pest terminators are engaged rather than vets to assess a animal’s behaviour in a safe environment.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11636669/Hornsby-Shire-Council-slammed-euthanising-cats-deemed-feral.html>

RECOMMENDATIONS & BENEFITS

- a) It is recommended that culling, especially euthanasia immediately in the field of trapping, is ineffective, where other techniques will suppress the populations of cats.

Refer to A Long-Term Lens: Cumulative Impacts of Free-Roaming Cat Management Strategy and Intensity on Preventable Cat Mortalities, which includes “reducing abandonment and, where possible, immigration in conjunction with high-intensity TNR could improve outcomes more than for any other management option tested.

5) Culling is likely to be ineffective and inefficient in terms of cumulative preventable deaths and population size reduction.”

www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fvets.2019.00238/full

Refer to the many research papers under the Sustaining Innovation in Compassionate Free-Roaming Cat Management Across the Globe: A Decadal Reappraisal of the Practice and Promise of TNVR

www.frontiersin.org/research-topics/7389/sustaining-innovation-in-compassionate-free-roaming-cat-management-across-the-globe-a-decadal-reappraisal-of-the-practice-and-promise-of-tnvr

ISSUE: DO NOT SUPPORT MANDATORY DESEXING as it has also not been shown to be successful

ISSUES & CURRENT IMPACTS

“mandatory desexing of animals has not proven an effective strategy for reducing the number of unwanted companion animals. Mandatory desexing of owned animals also doesn’t account for the impact of semi-owned, stray and feral animals in pet overpopulation.” mandatory desexing of animals has not proven an effective strategy for reducing the number of unwanted companion animals. Mandatory desexing of owned animals also doesn’t account for the impact of semi-owned, stray and feral animals in pet overpopulation.”

Refer Australian Veterinary Association

ava.com.au/policy-advocacy/advocacy/unwanted-companion-animals/mandatory-desexing/

RECOMMENDATIONS & BENEFITS

- a) It is recommend to promote desexing in more proactive ways, and will short videos using humour to capture audiences/ ratepayers / community members. Humour, relatable themes, and well known celebrities will provide a more eye and thought catching promotion EG <https://www.vetstreet.com/our-pet-experts/new-ads-put-a-surprising-spin-on-spay-and-neuter>
- b) It is recommended to promote and provide free desexing to low socio economic areas and the vulnerable.

c) It is recommended that rescuers are offered support for free desexing, those who are working alike the councils and council pounds to take in abandoned animals, desex etc and rehome, currently without costs to the state and local governments, through initiatives such as:

- VET GRANTS/FUNDING to vets who have historically and directly rescue abandoned animals, and help rescuers currently with reduced vet charges – we need the desexing provided free and assistance with other animal health bills

Australian Veterinary Association has recommended “formal provisions for veterinary practices reimbursement when receiving stray cats” plus more

www.ava.com.au/member-updates/nsw/ava-submission-to-nsw-rehoming-practices-review/

This will assist with another delivery group of desexing abandoned cats, with numbers not being surrendered to council pounds, and avoiding costs to council pounds. The costs of finding desexing at vets will be less than the costs to house, assess, care, and attempt to rehome at council pounds.