

**Submission
No 97**

INQUIRY INTO POUNDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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Dear Committee

The NSW Government is failing vulnerable impounded animals and NSW communities. Not only are NSW pounds and shelters killing thousands of impounded animals, but the level of non-compliance in many facilities and poor management practices is also contributing to extensive animal suffering and misery. Our inadequate and antiquated animal welfare laws are **not** protecting these vulnerable impounded animals. Being killed in a pound or shelter is still the leading cause of death for companion animals in NSW with most animals not making it out alive.

The killing of impounded animals is morally and ethically wrong! How much taxpayer money we waste in repeated government reviews with minimal progress to improve or correct mistakes. Subsidies using taxpayer money to support fossil fuel industries and use of taxpayer money to support government logging of NSW native forests that destroys native wildlife habitats, exacerbates climate change and fuels increased natural disasters. The savings on subsidies would be of greater benefit addressing issues around animal welfare that has been neglected for decades. Reforms are well overdue in the Pound and Shelter System which we hope eventuates from this inquiry.

Pounds and shelters are a publicly funded community service paid for by local communities. The shooting of 15 dogs and puppies falls far short of community expectations. Bourke Shire Council was responsible for this animal cruelty and failed to exercise required duty of care in 2021. Dogs at the time were underweight obviously denied food, too weak to stand, denied vet care (riddled with ticks, some with the deadly parvovirus), denied beds and blankets and warmth on cold concrete pens, hosed down whilst in the kennel, treated cruelly and dragged on leashes. The NSW Department of Primary Industries says, 'all pounds and shelters must comply with animal welfare laws.' **However, our current animal welfare laws are outdated and well below the benchmark for an advanced country like Australia and certainly do not reflect community views on how animals should be cared for properly. These dogs were neglected and abused whilst in the care of this pound. No excuses are acceptable.** The pound and shelter system lacks systematic and regular audits and checks on the treatment of animals housed in these facilities across the entire state. With no regular assessments on pounds this abuse is likely widespread. Despite the NSW government proclaiming it takes 'animal welfare seriously', I see no evidence of this when there are no regular checks, no compliance and poor welfare standards are in place. If the government are slack about their oversight and regulation of this system how can they state they take animal welfare seriously if they do not even know what is going on in this system? Breaches and fines for animal cruelty seldom occur because the checks are seldom done if ever and our impounded animals continue to suffer in silence. The government is obligated to back up their words with action and funding to show that they actually do take animal welfare seriously. We don't excuse a poorly performing hospital or homeless refugees by saying people shouldn't get sick or become homeless. Neither should we justify the appalling poor performance of NSW's pounds and shelters by saying pets shouldn't end up there, and it's the community's fault.

Initiatives that the Committee could include as recommendations.

There are many challenges that exist because the pound and shelter system has been neglected for decades and starved of proper funding and a commitment by any government to improve outcomes for these poor animals. Local pounds despite the fact that they are paid for by local communities need a large injection of funds from the state government to repair this broken neglected system. The main challenges are-

- resourcing challenges and funding- channel money that the government continually wastes on subsidies.
- inadequate infrastructure-pound buildings and facilities need improvements- addressed with more funding.
- welfare challenges and provisions (housing/bedding/healthy food etc)- addressed through more funding.
- questionable adequacy of laws, regulations, codes- improved legislation standards as the laws and regulations are inadequate.
- factors influencing animals ending up in pounds- helping people who surrender their animals.
- euthanasia rates- decrease by setting much lower limits and giving a longer time period for animals to have the opportunity to be rehomed. Develop a different mindset that they are not 'waste' but living sentient beings that deserve a chance in life.
- role and challenges of behaviour assessments- proper funding to provide professionals.
- relationship between pounds and rescue organisations- needed improvements to create a closer working relationship where both are working towards the common goal of improving the chances of each and every

animal of being rehomed not euthanised. For too long both these systems have worked independently- better outcomes for all animals could be achieved by working in unison.

- homeless cats living in pounds and rescue organisations- specific rescue organisations that specialise in cat sanctuary and rehoming should and must be sourced by pounds. Establishing workable relationships between the two would lead to better outcomes for cats. Also a state neuter program must be established to reduce cat populations. This will solve much of the problem.
- improving the treatment, care and outcome for animals- proper funding by the government to pounds and shelters to provide more staff and accessibility to vets to improve animal health.

Legislation must include proper regulation and compliance to ensure that these pounds and shelters meet the standards of care that are defined in the legislation and code of practice. It is suggested that regulation by an independent body (not RSPCA who are already overworked) be created by the NSW government to ensure compliance through regular checks of pounds and shelters. This has never existed, and these pounds have operated independently with no accountability resulting in poor welfare conditions and outcomes for all animals.

By introducing a fully funded, mandatory and legally enforceable NSW pound and shelter 'duty of care' regime the focus must be on proactive life-saving initiatives and solutions, and best practice animal welfare outcomes, rather than just killing and quick disposal of animals because they were just unlucky enough to end up in a pound or shelter. Consistent welfare standards across all pounds in the state must be enforced.

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. This is appalling that we as such a strong developed country view these poor abused abandoned animals as waste. They deserve a chance of life and we as a state have failed them. Rehoming and adoption must be the ultimate goal.

To achieve the above-

- Immediately halt all NSW pound and shelter shooting and discontinue all 'euthanasia' methods apart from intravenous injection for compassionate reasons.
- Immediately end all pound and shelter 'euthanasia' procedures being undertaken by anyone apart from qualified and licensed veterinary practitioners.
- Urgently conduct a public online survey (8 weeks) and openly publicise (majority of the public are unaware of these forums for public comment) to engage the community and harness a broad range of views and expectations about the management of NSW pounds and shelters.
- Publicly exhibit (for 4 weeks) a tailored, stand-alone Code of Practice for all impounded animals in NSW pounds and shelters.
- Carry out comprehensive and independent audits of:
 - all NSW impounding facilities to identify the level of compliance/non-compliance and
 - all NSW impounding practices, procedures, policies,
 - actual 'no kill' performance.
- Introduce mandatory Local Government Council Strategic Companion Animal Management Plans ('SCAMPs') with attached policies and KPI's to enable ongoing 4 yearly 'local' public consultation periods, reviews and improvements in line with evolving public expectations.
- Enact a 'No Kill' Bill or sweeping changes to POCTAA to include all impounded animals (of all species) and **outlaw the killing of otherwise healthy homeless animals**. These reforms must incorporate the full suite of 'No Kill' programs and principles as mandatory, forming a highly effective lifesaving plan.
- Substantially overhaul the NSW Companion Animals Act to include a revised focus on all impounded animals, regardless of species.
- Establish a new OLG NSW Pound and Shelter Reform website, including an online complaint form and 1800 'hotline' tailored specifically for public pound and shelter complaints and concerns.

- Enhance inspection and enforcement powers for agencies authorised under POCTAA to undertake routine and regular NSW pound and shelter inspections and enforcement. ***If this role is to be performed solely by RSPCA and Animal Welfare League funding to both agencies must be increased to employ more inspectors.***
- Introduce an annual grants program for NSW not-for-profits, including self-funded and volunteer rescue, rehoming and advocacy organisations. These organisations do a wonderful job in trying to save as many animals as possible from these pounds and shelters that are tagged on 'death row'. They need financial support and recognition to continue their great work.
- Introduce NSW pound and shelter initiatives to support vulnerable or at-risk animal owners or caregivers during periods of intense need, in order to keep animals in homes and ensure the welfare and wellbeing of both humans and animals. This should include those experiencing:
 - Financial stress, homelessness or are at risk of homelessness
 - Domestic violence
 - Emergency management incidents (e.g., bushfires and floods) and
 - Physical or mental health issues, including hospital stays or other medical needs. Many pets end up in these pounds or shelters simply because their owners are doing it tough. Compassion, understanding, and solutions to try to keep their pets with them is strongly supported.

Many of the points cited above were raised in the 'Discussion Paper on Animal Welfare Reforms in NSW' a few years ago which I participated in. This problem needs serious commitment by the government with proper funding. For far too long it has been ignored, underfunded and propped up by financial support through community donations and rescue groups and volunteers to solve a problem that must be addressed properly by the state government.

I sincerely hope this is just not another submission process to appear to the public that something 'may' be done. The public have had serious concerns about this broken pound and shelter system for years and hope that something positive comes out of this inquiry to improve animal welfare standards like providing adequate staff to care for abandoned animals, better infrastructure to house animals where they feel safe, fed, provided with appropriate vet care and given a real chance through fostering to modify behaviours that have developed due to utter neglect, abuse or abandonment. All abandoned companion animals or those surrendered because of hard times are all deserving of a chance of a better life, even though they may be old, young, unweaned, unwell, suffer a disability, or even timid or have other behaviours as a result of their past suffering.

Reforms in this sector are well overdue and are urgent. Animals are living in miserable conditions, frightened, anxious and scared, and many on 'death row'. Please show compassion and institute urgent well managed and properly funded reforms that focus on care, rehoming and adoption.

Yours sincerely

Janice Haviland