

INQUIRY INTO POUNDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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To: Portfolio Committee No 8 - Inquiry into pounds in New South Wales

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

I have had firsthand experience of the urban pound system in NSW having adopted or rescued, fostered, and rehomed cats from high-kill Sydney region pounds over a period of 4 years. I understand the situation has improved at some pounds since I moved away from Sydney in 2016. However, there are still clearly issues that need to be addressed including the need for the legalisation of Trap Neuter Vaccination Release (TNVR) and support for street cat rescuers. In some parts of western Sydney, the street cat situation is reportedly overwhelming rescuers. The situation at some rural pounds also needs to be urgently improved. I trust the Committee will be receiving submissions and feedback from animal rescuers and animal welfare organisations dealing on the ground with the current situation.

This submission will focus on the need for legal reform, my experience of euthanasia practices in the pounds I dealt with and known strategies for addressing the challenges posed by homeless cats. It will respond to Terms of Reference (d), (f) and (i).

(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

The *Companion Animals Act 1998* (NSW) was created at a time when convenience killing underpinned the paradigm for the management of unwanted or lost animals in pounds in NSW. This was specifically enabled through sections 64¹ and 64A². Community expectations of how pounds should manage animals has radically changed since this Act was introduced. These two sections of the Act are arguably archaic, cruel, and totally unacceptable in a more enlightened society and should be removed. In fact, the whole Act should be re-written. If the licence to kill contained in these sections no longer existed, councils and pounds would be forced to immediately introduce all the strategies that are known to work in both the No-Kill Equation³ and the G2Z⁴ model. I would suggest that all the questions regarding animal management listed in the Terms of Reference are already answered by these two models. I refer you to the websites of both those approaches and suggest they be assimilated into new legislation.

In my experience the *NSW Animal Welfare Code of Practice No 5 – Dogs and cats in animal boarding establishments* (1996)⁵ was not adhered to in full at the pounds I visited prior to 2016. Animals were often not automatically provided with veterinary care when needed unless community members pushed for this to happen. Animals who became sick in the pound due to lack of hygiene measures were often simply euthanised. It also is not hygienic to only change and disinfect a cat litter once a week. In my experience this should be done daily.⁶ Perhaps the Code should be updated regarding

¹ <https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/whole/html/inforce/current/act-1998-087#sec.64>

² <https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/whole/html/inforce/current/act-1998-087#sec.64A>

³ See <https://www.nokilladvocacycenter.org/>

⁴ See <https://www.g2z.org.au/>

⁵ <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>

⁶ See *NSW Animal Welfare Code of Practice No 5 – Dogs and cats in animal boarding establishments* (1996), 4.4.2.

this hygiene issue. I have also noticed the Code does not take into account the risk of pesticides to cats, as it only refers to dogs and humans in this regard.⁷

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

When I followed the “kill lists” of pounds in outer western Sydney it was truly horrifying to see the number of animals who lost their lives every week. Rescuers were always under pressure of a 3pm deadline to rescue animals or otherwise see them killed. Likewise, the broader community was under the same pressure to adopt animals or see them suddenly disappear off pound websites. I recall several frantic journeys from inner west Sydney to literally save the lives of cats before the deadline.

I remember that on one kill day at western Sydney pound, many beautiful cats who had been photographed for adoption promotion by volunteer rescuers were killed en masse much to the distress of those who had been trying to get them out safely. This happened just before that same council’s Animal Committee meeting I attended with other rescuers who were trying to convey their concerns. It was a tense meeting, and many people were clearly very distressed. That is not how a pound should be run or how the animals or rescuers should be treated.

The ongoing and repeated distress and frustration felt by those trying to save the lives of animals often led to PTSD. It was an appalling model of animal management both cruel to the animals and highly disrespectful and, at times, almost contemptuous of the community who cared.

The euthanasia statistics issued by the Office of Local Government (OLG) did not include a breakdown of individual pound data. I once managed to obtain spreadsheets with raw pound data on direct application to the OLG. This did show the statistics for each individual pound. I recall sharing it with other rescuers at the time. However, this breakdown of data was not normally publicly available. It should have been publicly available, so communities had a better idea of exactly what was happening in their local pound. I know that one pound did not even always record the euthanasia of cats deemed unsocialised or feral when rescuers knew from experience these were often cats who were simply terrified to be trapped and taken out of their familiar surroundings to a pound environment.

(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.

I will focus on strategies for addressing the number of homeless cats living in NSW. The first is the funding of ongoing not-for-profit community desexing clinics for owned and/or stray/community cats. There are excellent precedents in Victoria,⁸ Queensland,⁹ and the USA.¹⁰

The second strategy is implementing ongoing funding and support for incorporated street cat rescue organisations in areas where there is a documented high street cat population.

⁷ Ibid, 4.2.3.

⁸ See Westside Community Desexing <https://www.westsidedesexing.org.au/>

⁹ See the Australian Pet Welfare Foundation’s Community Cat Programs at <https://petwelfare.org.au/community-cat-programs/>

¹⁰ See the Feral Cat Spay/Neuter Project, Lynnwood, Washington State, USA <https://www.feralcatproject.org/>

The third strategy is the creation of an ongoing multicultural outreach program focused on education about responsible care of companion animals, including the need to desex, targeting NSW's diverse linguistic and cultural communities. There is a need for trained people to actually go into those communities and work proactively with them.

Thank you for considering my views.

Yours sincerely

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