

INQUIRY INTO POUNDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Sutherland Shire Council Animal Shelter

Date Received: 18 August 2023



SUBMISSION:

Inquiry into pounds in New South Wales

August 2023

STATE
INVESTIGATIVE
COMMISSION

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SUTHERLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

Sutherland Shire Council (SSC) is in the southern region of Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, 26 Kilometres from Sydney CBD. The council encompasses an area of 370 square Kilometres with a community population of 230,903 people.

Animal Shelter - Background

Sutherland Shire Council manages an animal shelter dedicated to providing care and shelter for stray, lost and abandoned animals. With a strong focus on animal welfare, the shelter serves as a temporary home for these animals until they can be reunited with their owners, adopted by loving families or fostered by a suitable rescue organisation.

Sutherland Shire Council animal shelter is the only Council run shelter in Southeast Sydney region. We also facilitate the impounding and management of animals from the City of Sydney.

Staff at the animal shelter diligently tend to the animals, ensuring they receive food, shelter, medical attention, and socialisation whilst in their care.

Sutherland Shire Council animal shelter actively participates in community education and awareness programs focusing on responsible pet ownership, microchipping, desexing and encouraging the adoption of animals from the shelter.

Submission – Inquiry into Pounds in New South Wales

Sutherland Shire Council's submission will address all the Terms of Reference outlined in the document. Sutherland Shire Council is not willing to give evidence at a hearing. This submission should be published under the name Sutherland Shire Council or SSC only. This submission is not confidential.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

a. Resourcing challenges affecting New South Wales pounds, including the adequacy of funding given towards the operation of pounds by local and state government

Resourcing challenges affecting animal shelters, are multi-faceted. Some of the key challenges are as follows:

Non-Profitability: The sale of animals does not cover the cost involved with the long-term care and maintenance of animals impounded at the shelter. SSC's animal shelter relies on income from animal registrations to assist in cost recovery. Despite income from registrations and the sale of animals, the animal shelter relies on funding from SSC in managing day to day activities, upgrading facilities, and providing regular care and maintenance of animals.

High Demand: Due to our proximity, the large area managed and the only Council animal shelter within Southeast Sydney, there is a high demand for our services. This demand can put additional strain on resources, including staff and facilities when shelter is overcapacity.

Fig 1. Map outlining Sutherland Shire Council's proximity to other shelters in Greater Sydney and surrounds:



Service to Multiple Councils: The animal shelter not only serves Sutherland Shire LGA but also facilitates the housing of animals from other areas, such as the City of Sydney. This regional responsibility can further stretch resources and impact the ability to meet all demands effectively.

Increase in Animal Intake: The number of animals entering the facility has increased, leading to additional staff requirements to care for and manage the expanding intake when overcapacity. This increase can lead to resource challenges and impact the ability to rehome these additional animals back into the local and broader community. As a result, the animals stay longer in the shelter which attributes to additional cost and resource challenges.

Enquiries and Impounding: SSC Animal Shelter faces challenges in handling enquiries from the public both within the Sutherland Shire LGA as well as those from the wider community regarding surrendered animals, lost animals, general impounding enquiries, registrations enquiries and adoptions. This process consumes staff resources and time, diverting attention from other tasks.

Nil Registration Fee Impact: The nil registration fee for animals adopted from an approved pound or shelter affects animal shelter fundings, as the reduction in income adds to financial challenges.

Inadequate Fee Increases: Even with annual fee increases, the additional revenue generated is not sufficient to cover the overall increased costs of running an animal shelter at or over capacity, including the rising expenses for veterinary services, food, and cleaning products.

High Veterinary and General Costs: The costs of veterinary services have noticeably increased post-COVID, impacting the overall financial burden. Additionally, general expenses, such as food and cleaning products, have also risen significantly during this period, further straining budgets.

To address these resourcing challenges impacting SSC's animal shelter, advocating for increased government funding, grants and/or support and conducting state-wide awareness campaigns on responsible pet ownership may help in managing animal intake and reducing the strain on resources.

b. The adequacy of pound buildings and facilities in New South Wales

While the Sutherland Shire Council Animal Shelter can accommodate dogs at its capacity with 34 kennels and 9 runs, it is currently experiencing challenges with an overcapacity of cats. The facility holds 40 cat condos, and additional holding cages are available as a temporary overflow, which accommodates approximately 100-120 cats, depending on litter sizes. SSC animal shelter also includes an Isolation Room with 10 condos for sick or diseased cats.

The shelter is often over capacity due to the high number of impounded and surrendered animals, and especially cats during the breeding season. Addressing overcapacity issues is crucial to ensure the well-being of the animals whilst in the shelter.

Fig 2. Sutherland Shire Council Animal Shelter main office



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

The welfare challenges facing animals encompass various aspects:

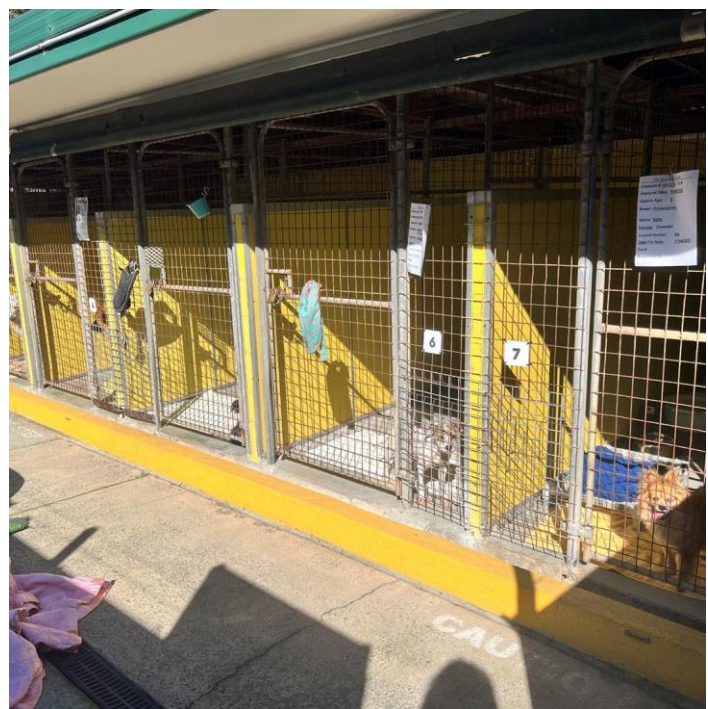
Staffing Levels: Adequate staffing is required to manage the animals at the shelter and to accommodate fluctuations in numbers. Our Shelter is adequately staffed for its capacity, but the over demand and over capacity is the challenge when ensuring suitable care for the animals.

Care and Maintenance: With increased numbers of animals, there is a need for an increase in services provided to properly care for them. This includes ensuring animals have access to proper housing, bedding, feeding, exercise, and enrichment activities, which can be challenging at times when there is an over capacity of animals housed at the shelter.

Fig 3. Examples of Sutherland Shire Council animal housing facilities



Cat condos



Dog Kennels

Financial Constraints: The increasing costs of veterinary treatment and general supplies, have placed additional strain on the shelter's finances. Providing quality medical care, vaccinations, food and desexing services for all animals has become increasingly challenging as the veterinary industry is facing the same resourcing issues.

Assistance from Rescue Organisations: The shelter reaches out to rescue organisations for support in providing treatment for sick or injured animals. Partnering with these organisations helps ensure animals receive necessary medical attention and increases their chances of finding homes. SSC have identified that rescue organisations are also overwhelmed with animals.

Addressing these welfare challenges requires collaborative efforts from the government, community, and animal welfare organisations. Ensuring appropriate staffing levels, securing sufficient funding, and fostering stronger partnerships with state-wide rescue organisations are essential steps to enhance the well-being and care of animals in shelters across New South Wales.

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

While the laws and regulations have some positive influences, it is essential to ensure the compliance regime is robust and consistently enforced to effectively address issues related to animal welfare, responsible ownership, and population control.

The increasing numbers of surrendered and feral, colony or unowned cats necessitate the strengthening of laws and regulations. Effective measures are needed to address the challenges posed by the growing cat population and the impact of dumped and surrendered cats on animal shelters.

Identification and Registration: This requirement for companion animal owners is a positive step towards responsible pet ownership and accountability, aiding in reuniting lost animals with their owners, and providing funding to assist animal shelters, education, and rehoming initiatives.

Compliance Inspections: Conducting compliance inspections of dangerous, menacing, and restricted breed dogs is essential for ensuring public safety. These inspections identify and address potential risks associated with these dogs and verify if the animal is still present at the registered location.

Annual Permits for Cats: The requirement for annual permits for cats is aimed at reducing accidental cat litters and encouraging the desexing of cats. This is a proactive approach to managing the feline population and promoting responsible pet ownership.

Codes governing Pounds: NSW Code of Practice No 5 sets standards for the care and management of cats and dogs when in boarding establishments including Council pound services. This applies to the welfare of cats and dogs held and cared for whilst in the facility.

e. Factors influencing the number of animals ending up in New South Wales pounds, and strategies for reducing these numbers

Fig 4. Sutherland Shire Council (SSC) Impounding Stats – Last 5 years

SSC IMPOUNDED	FY 2018/19	FY 2019/20	FY 2020/21	FY 2021/22	FY 2022/23
Cats	439	413	375	386	450
Dogs	162	136	105	107	112
TOTAL	601	549	480	493	562

Fig 5. City of Sydney Council (CoS) Impounding Stats – Last 5 years.

CoS IMPOUNDED	FY 2018/19	FY 2019/20	FY 2020/21	FY 2021/22	FY 2022/23
Cats	108	48	59	29	65
Dogs	111	101	55	51	80
TOTAL	219	149	114	80	145

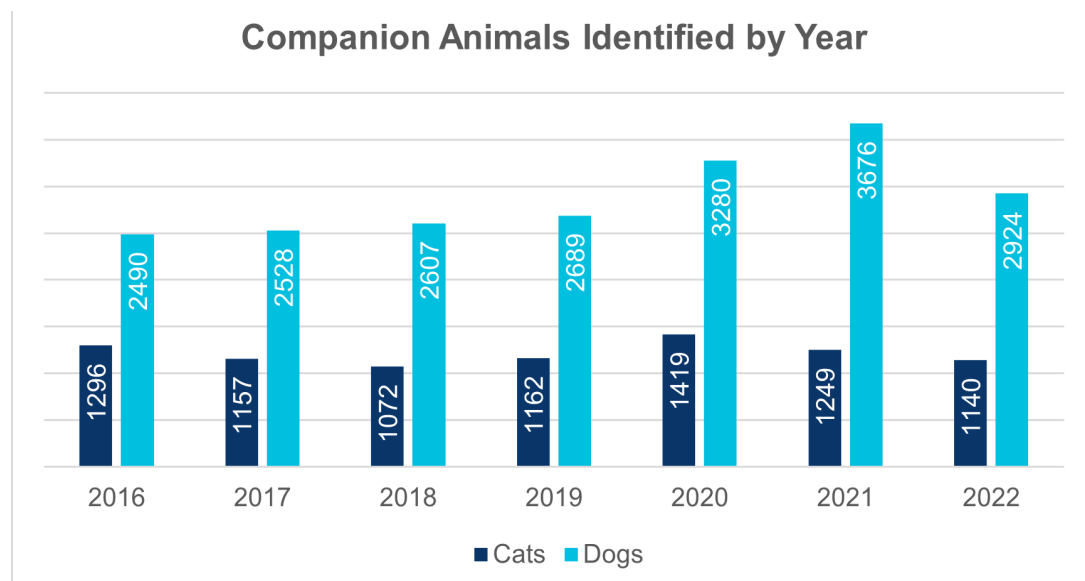
Note – Sutherland Shire Council has entered a contract with the City of Sydney to house and manage their impounded animals at Sutherland Shire Animals Shelter.

Factors Influencing Animal Numbers

Dog Management: Adequate management and controls for dogs, including those stipulated in the *Companion Animals Act 1998* (Part 3, Div. 1 General Responsibilities) have been effective in controlling numbers and managing responsible pet ownership with dogs. However, the same level of controls is lacking for cats, leading to higher impounding numbers for felines over the last five years. For example, Cats are permitted to roam in public with minimal restrictions.

Increase in Dog Ownership During COVID: The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a surge in dog ownership, which has contributed to the increase in dogs being surrendered or abandoned.

Fig 6. New Companion Animals indentified in Sutherland Shire LGA by year



Un-desexed/Unwanted Cat Litters: Un-desexed and unwanted cat litters contribute significantly to the growing population of cats in animal shelters. This issue is exacerbated by the presence of feral and colony cats, resulting from the reproduction of undersexed cats. Addressing these factors through responsible ownership and state-wide targeted efforts may help reduce the burden on shelters and promote better cat population management.

Strategies to Reduce Animal Numbers

Tighter Controls of Companion Animal Breeders: Imposing tighter controls and licensing requirements for all breeders would assist in managing excessive breeding and expanding numbers of unregistered and un-desexed animals in the community.

Legislative Change to Reduce Roaming Cats: Enforcing legislation that limits cats' ability to roam freely can help reduce their numbers in pounds and minimise the impact of feral colonies including changes in legislation surrounding unowned cats.

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

SSC is known for being a low kill facility and have implemented alternative initiatives aimed at minimising the number of animals euthanised and focus on finding suitable homes through adoption and fostering programs.

g. The role and challenges of behavioural assessments in New South Wales pounds

The role of behavioural assessments is crucial for understanding the temperament and behaviour of animals, which helps in making informed decisions about their care and potential adoption.

To conduct these assessments effectively, some animal shelters seek to employ staff with animal behavioural training or experience and utilise the services of qualified assessors. However, one of the challenges faced is the limited availability of qualified assessors. Finding qualified personnel to handle these assessments is an ongoing concern that needs to be addressed to ensure the welfare, managing of animals effectively and successful rehoming of animals in shelters.

h. The relationship between New South Wales pounds and animal rescue organisations

The relationship between animal shelters and animal rescue organisations is cooperative and beneficial. SSC has established strong connections with a few rescue organisations, which assist with fostering, medical procedures, and adoptions. Additionally, SSC actively seeks to expand its relationships with other rescue organisations, fostering a collaborative effort to enhance the welfare and adoption opportunities for animals in our shelter.

The NSW Office of Local Government provides and maintains a state-wide list of 'Approved Rehoming Organisations' that are exempt from the lifetime registration fees under Section 88B of *Companion Animals Act 1998* to be able to rehome companion animals (dogs and cats) with less financial burden. SSC regularly contacts Rehoming Organisations from this list in working together to rehome companion animals.

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

Overall number of homeless, colony cats: The large volume of homeless cats creates a strain on resources and facilities, making it difficult for shelters and rescue organisations to manage and find homes for all of them.

Inadequate controls on cats: Limited regulations and enforcement regarding cat ownership and population control contributes to the overpopulation problem.

Number of cats in the community not desexed: Many non-desexed cats in the community result in continuous breeding of unwanted litters, carrying on the cycle of homelessness and feral cats, further burdening pounds and rescue organisations.

Strategies for addressing these issues include:

Increased funding for desexing programs: State-wide funding to councils for their continued and increased promotion of affordable or subsidised desexing programs to encourage responsible pet ownership and reduce the number of uncontrolled cat populations. State-wide desexing programs targeted at feral, colony and unowned cat populations.

Tighter restrictions on cat breeders: In order to be a breeder of cats, there should be a registration requirement that regulates and manages the number of breeders and animals within a local area.

Public awareness and education: Educating the public on the importance of responsible pet ownership, the benefits of desexing, and the consequences of abandoning cats, to encourage more responsible behaviour.

j. Strategies for improving the treatment, care, and outcomes for animals in New South Wales pounds

Volunteer and Staff Training: An effective training and induction program for staff and volunteers to ensure sufficient service level within the shelter with focus on skill development in animal care, behaviour management, and adoption counselling. Well-trained and motivated personnel can provide better care and support for the animals, increasing the likelihood of successful adoptions.

Fig 7. Photo of dog training session at Sutherland Shire Animal Shelter 2019



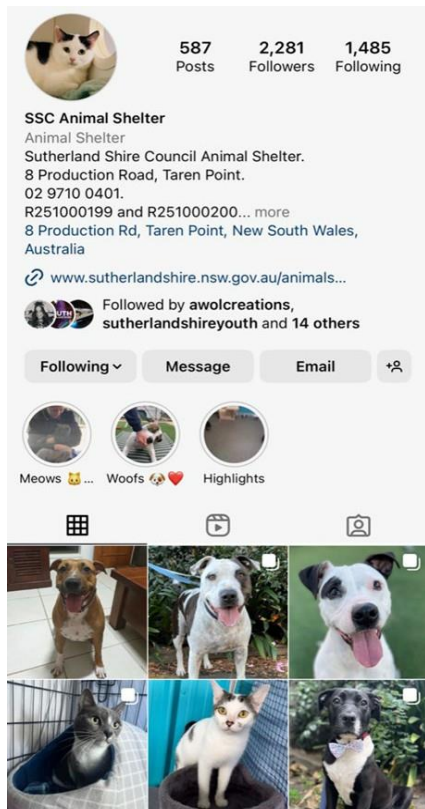
Enhancing Existing Programs: Continue to strengthen and expand the quality procedures for animal care, including regular veterinary checks, volunteer programs, and foster care initiatives. These efforts ensure that animals receive proper medical attention, socialisation, and individualised care, leading to improved health and well-being.

Fig 8. Example of Council's microchipping and responsible pet ownership outreach program

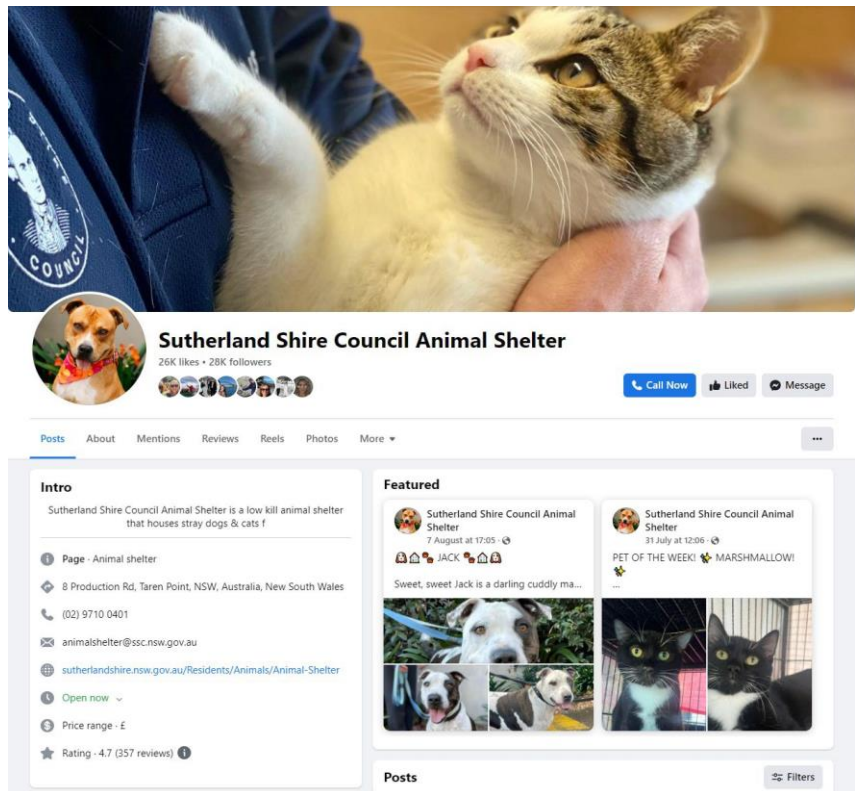


Social Media & Adoption Campaigns: Capitalise on the successful social media presence to further promote animal adoption campaigns, raise awareness about responsible pet ownership, and showcase success stories of rehomed animals. This can help increase adoption rates and create a sense of urgency to find suitable homes.

Fig 9. Snapshots of Sutherland Shire Council Animal Shelter's social media pages



Instagram Page August 2023



Facebook Page August 2023

Fig 10. Examples of advertised adoption campaigns 2023



16 JAN AT 11:00 – 21 JAN AT 15:00

CAT ADOPTION WEEK - Half price cats and kittens

Sutherland Shire Council Animal Shelter



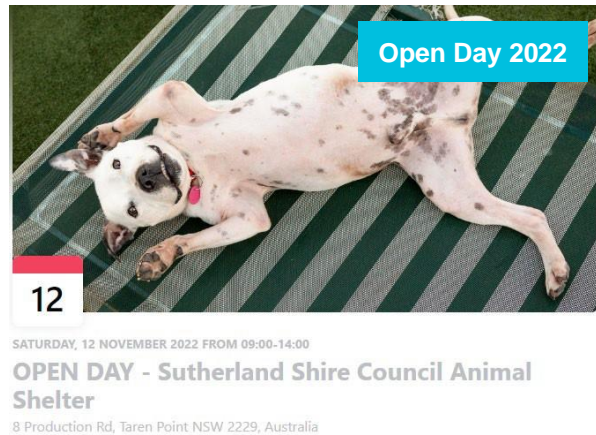
SATURDAY, 8 JULY 2023 FROM 11:00-15:00

CAT-URDAY SATURDAY!

Sutherland Shire Council Animal Shelter

Examples of SSC Initiative/Campaigns: Library talks on responsible pet ownership, shelter open days, attending community and local business events to promote the shelter, social media campaigns, website promotions, targeted discounted animal adoption weeks and attending media promotions are all initiatives SSC currently undertakes.

Fig 11. Picture collage of Council Initiatives and Strategies



k. Any other related matter

Increase in Dog and Cat numbers in Sutherland Shire Local Government Area

The below graph demonstrates the consistent increase in animal numbers within Sutherland Shire Local Government Area. With a consistent increase in animal population, it is doubtful whether there will be any future declines in animals to the shelter.

Whilst this increase in animal population does have some benefits for localised rehoming of animals into the community, it has also seen that SSC animal shelter has to further promote animal adoptions to other areas outside its LGA.

Fig 12. Total number of dogs and cats in Sutherland Shire LGA by year (as at August 2023)

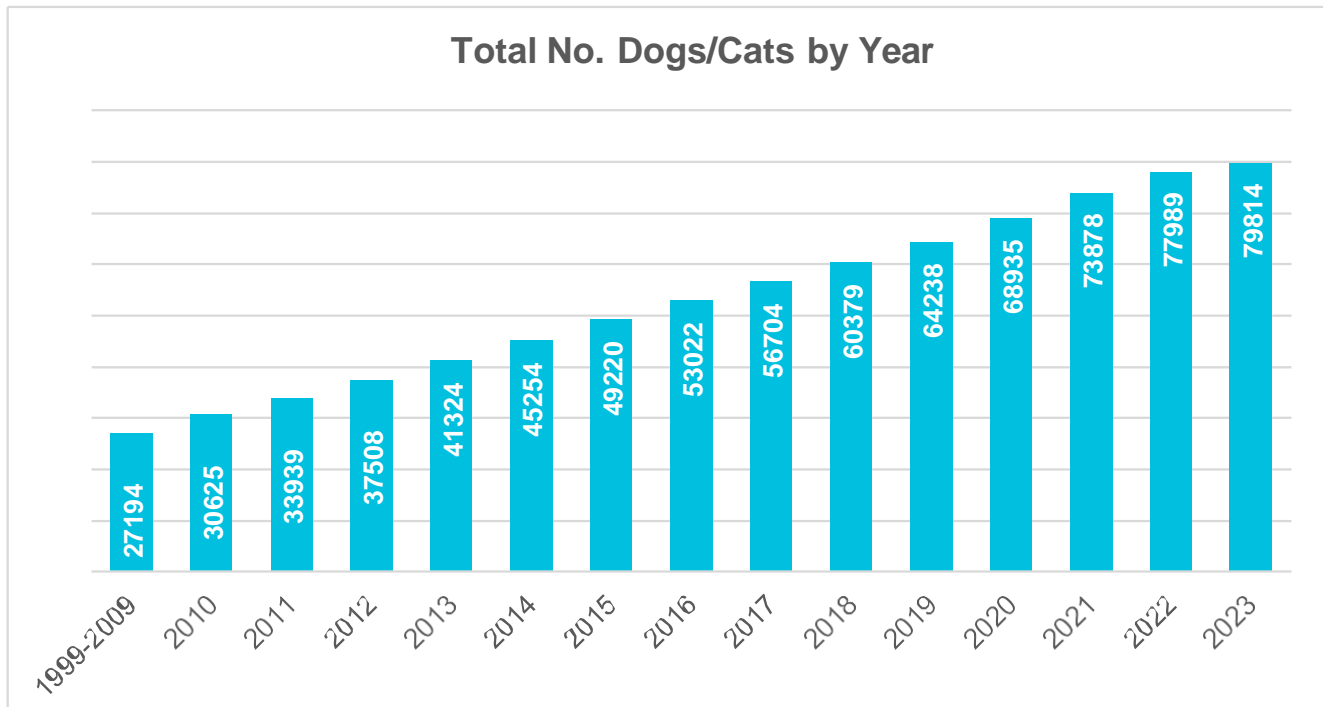
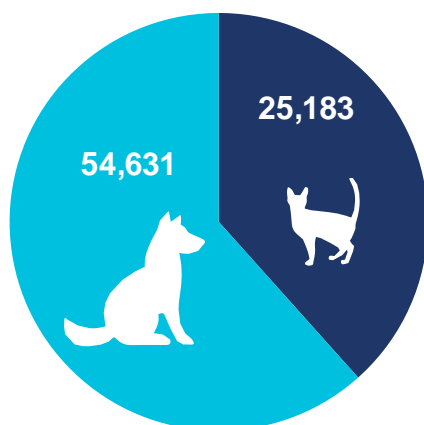


Fig 13. Total animals currently in LGA (as at August 2023)



	Identified with microchip only	Registered	Total
Cat	2,180	23,003	25,183
Dog	3,498	51,133	54,631
Total	5,678	74,136	79,814

SUTHER

