

**Submission
No 115**

INQUIRY INTO POUNDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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SUBMISSION – INQUIRY INTO POUNDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

The leading cause of death for companion animals in NSW is being killed in a pound or shelter. The NSW Government is not only failing vulnerable animals but as a publicly funded community service, it is also failing NSW communities. NSW pounds and shelters kill thousands of impounded animals, there is a high level of non-compliance and conditions in many impounding facilities are deplorable with management practices also contributing to extensive animal suffering. The pound system and also our animal welfare laws are not protecting the most vulnerable animals in the community at their time of greatest need. Animals should be seen as individuals and not as property. All animals are capable of feeling fear, loneliness, pain and suffering, just as they can also experience companionship and joy.

If they are young, unweaned, old, unwell, suffer a disability, timid, or have a behavioural problem their chances of being killed increase substantially with most not making it out alive.

I have spent many years rescuing animals from NSW pounds, primarily cats and dogs. I have been utterly appalled at some of the conditions in pounds and at the heartless way impounded and surrendered animals have been treated in some facilities. Pounds should be a safe haven and refuge for the most vulnerable pets in our community but they are anything but. Instead a pound is often where they spend their last days or weeks before they are killed, (not euthanased as that refers to animals being put out of their suffering). I have seen many healthy and young dogs, cats, puppies and kittens killed in the pound system

Then there are those that are elderly or have a disability or health problem that is not life - threatening and could easily be managed in the right home, yet these animals too are let down by the pound system. I volunteered looking after 17 puppies from different litters, all bright and appeared healthy only to be told that one was suspected to have had ringworm (a treatable condition) so all 17 were killed as they had been together.

Sadly I have seen and heard many animals being killed in my local pound, in the early days by rangers but thankfully it is now done by veterinarians. I know of cats that were heart-sticked. One cat was killed by an unauthorised person and there were no consequences. However it is the reasons for killing that stands out the most. Reasons can be as trite as being timid, scared, a certain breed, called busy or active, jumps fences, lack of training and one dog had killed a guinea pig. Another beautiful dog was healthy when first in the pound and then developed blisters all over his mouth from the bleach used for cleaning, as the dogs weren't removed when the kennels were cleaned out. They killed him because he had blisters in his mouth. With the decisions being made by a pound keeper and the veterinarian the decision is often already made by the pound keeper. I have witnessed 3 separate pound keepers who hated certain breeds of dogs and therefore they were always killed. One hated working breeds so they were just called busy and were usually always killed. Another didn't like Bull Terriers so even a beautiful young Bull Terrier x pup called Jake was killed. At a later date another didn't like Staffies so all the staffies were killed. For no other reason than these people, one who had never worked with animals before getting a job as a pound keeper, didn't like a certain breed or type of dog. I particularly remember an elderly and very timid Pomeranian who was surrendered in her basket. She was terrified in the pound situation but was not aggressive. But that didn't help her, she was killed as she was deemed to be a possible fear-biter. This dear little dog, frightened out of her wits in a cold noisy pound wasn't given a chance. None of these poor souls were given a chance at life, or to be given training or to be given to a rescue group to train, socialize, or treat or to even be away from a frightening, noisy, cold, terrifying place like a pound to be assessed properly.

On one occasion 60 dogs were killed after a Parvovirus outbreak in the pound. When Parvovirus was first found they decided to quarantine all animals in the pound which was

appropriate. However they continued to allow new dogs from the community to be impounded until there were 60 dogs in a facility designed to hold 18. Then after 6 weeks and even having vaccinated dogs in the facility for Parvovirus they decided to kill all the dogs despite the fact that many of the dogs had been perfectly healthy for the entire 6 weeks and had shown no signs of illness. It is reasons like this why volunteers helping at pounds decide they can't continue. It is no wonder there is such a high turnover of volunteers when they have to bear witness to such unnecessary cruelty and suffering.

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 governments

Most pounds are facilitating the return of animals back to their owners, although not many actually do a good job at this and also do not advertise these animals on their website or social media. However the majority are not actually doing what they are meant to be doing and rehoming the animals. They conveniently pass this onerous task onto volunteer run not-for-profit groups. These groups scramble to find volunteers, foster carers, homes and also then have to fundraise to pay for all the expensive vet bills. So the system is failing miserably. Most of these volunteers are women and a good majority of them are also older. Many like myself have devoted decades to helping homeless animals and suffer severe emotional stress from what they witness in pounds. So funding needs to be given to the bodies doing the work. If a council is not rehoming animals then the rescue group that is, should be given funding. Councils need to be funded to provide adequate staff to exercise the dogs and if volunteers are exercising them then funding should be given to the rescue group.

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

When I first volunteered at my local pound there were no exercise yards, no shade from sun, no hot water, the kennels were dark, dreary and cold, with kennels hosed out in the early mornings whilst dogs were in them. There were no quarantine facilities. The cattery was dark, damp and appalling. A group of us formed a rescue group because of these conditions and because the local RSPCA was putting dogs and cats into the pound to be killed and very few animals left the pound alive. My first visit to the pound saw dogs being left in kennels surrounded in vomit and diarrhoea, and dying of parvovirus. It was horrendous. It was only due to the efforts of the volunteer group paying for exercise yards, hot water system, washing machine, and shade cover and then pushing the council to improve the pound that eventually additional kennels, a new cattery and a quarantine area were finally built by council. These should all be mandatory in all pounds. Quarantine areas for disease control are particularly important. As is the requirement for exercise yards. But they also need to be used. So adequate staff need to be employed. All animals should have access to dry and soft bedding. And every pound should also have proper accommodation and facilities for animals other than dogs and cats. I have seen all sorts of farm animals put into the cattery or next to dogs and it is totally unacceptable. No pound facility is appropriate for newborn puppies and kittens or birthing mothers, the sick and the elderly. These animals should be fostered out into appropriate homes with rescue groups.

My shire has not had a pound building for 4 years now. The council had such a low priority for the pound that the local tip took priority when it had to expand and the pound was demolished. A new pound is proposed but is still at least a year away as plans are yet to be approved. So we will have had 5 years with no public access to a private boarding kennel

being used as the pound. When I last visited this boarding kennel it certainly would not have been compliant as a pound and as the public are denied access I have no idea what standard of housing is being provided. I have heard that there are issues with ventilation. This facility is on flood plain and when we had the major flood event in 2022 the property including kennels flooded and there was no disaster management plan. Dogs and cats were moved onto a verandah of the house and there was a call-out on social media for people to assist with boats.

(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

There are many welfare challenges in the majority of pounds and particularly the rural and remote pounds. Firstly the hours of operation and accessibility to the public with many having limited hours open or the public refused access altogether.

Housing can be bare concrete floors with no bedding provided at all. Many have some type of basic bed of boards or hessian or canvas without any soft bedding. The reason often given for not providing soft bedding or not even allowing volunteers to provide soft bedding is the fact it needs to be washed. In my local pound it was the volunteer group that paid to install hot water and a washing machine so that bedding could be washed, not by the staff but by the volunteers. It can get bitterly cold in many pounds with some sides not even having protection from the elements. In this instance some dogs would need a warm coat. And this is not a suitable environment at all for an elderly or sick dog/cat or young puppies/kittens or a pregnant dog/cat about to give birth.

Water bowls attached to walls are good but many don't have that where water bowls can be knocked over.

I have seen many dogs and cats who needed medical attention that they never received. One little pup only about 10 weeks of age badly limping yet put into a kennel with another dog. He was not seen by a vet for six days when the vet did a weekly visit to assess dogs and euthanase. In this instance the vet recommended euthanasia as they thought it might be a cruciate ligament. I just happened to be there at the time and said I would adopt the puppy. I took the puppy straight to the vet. This poor puppy had languished in the pound with another dog and he had a broken leg, and two breaks in his pelvis. He would have been in excruciating pain. But the council offered no assistance to him, and were quite happy to just keep him in pain and then kill him rather than pay any vet bills. Another puppy who was blind was never given any vet assessment either. The RSPCA happily put him in the pound also. Another beautiful older dog was savagely attacked by another dog in the pound and her face swelled up like a football. She was left for days without veterinary assistance and then killed on the next scheduled vet day.

Puppies and kittens have been left to languish and die without even given any warmth, bedding or adequate care. Dogs and cats left to birth in the pound on a cold concrete floor or wire cage without due care. These are not isolated cases as I continue to see this on facebook posts in other pounds as well. And sadly volunteers who give their valuable time to help animals in pounds are often held to ransom by the Pound Management who threaten to kill all the animals or not continue to work with their rescue group if they speak out. Indeed some volunteers have to sign non-disclosure agreements.

The puppies below were left to freeze to death in a NSW council pound. Their mother nowhere in site.



- (c) 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

There appears to be no enforcement and compliance in regard to council pounds or for boarding and breeding establishments. This seems to be left to whistle blowers who are brave enough to speak out. There needs to be a specific Code of Practice for pounds. Our animal protection laws are lacking and there needs to be a Commissioner for Animal Welfare where animal welfare is taken seriously.

Any person dealing with animals in any capacity needs to be taught the correct handling methods and taught to have respect and compassion for the animals in their care or they will face adequate consequences.

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

I see this as the easiest thing to fix and the thing that is most ignored by Government. The Government must outlaw puppy farms which is factory farming of dogs and is seething with unscrupulous people purely motivated by profit. They can house hundreds of breeding dogs on one property causing suffering and a total lack of quality of life for the inhabitants and often causing environmental harm and also harm to their neighbours. These dogs are sold undesexed and only perpetuate the cycle of breeding. When puppy farming was outlawed in

Victoria some of the puppy farmers just moved across the border into NSW increasing the number of dogs being born in NSW to then enter our pound system when no longer wanted.

How often we hear that, young people paid a pittance to work in Puppy farms which are still allowed in NSW who are brave enough to speak out about the cruel conditions and suffering that goes on behind closed doors in those cages where dogs are confined for years. This is what needs to stop, all the unscrupulous breeding, be they puppy farms or back yard breeders. Not one puppy should be born until all the homeless ones find a loving home. These people are motivated by greed alone and animal welfare goes out the door once profits are involved. The NSW Government needs to urgently crack down on the source of where all these animals that are impounded are coming from. Pounds will continue to be full of dogs and also cats whilst the overbreeding goes unchecked. Another source is from farmers breeding working dogs and getting rid of the surplus. The same applies to dogs used in hunting and of course the greyhound racing industry who also factory farms dogs. All these poor dogs are just expendable to these uncaring people. Just one look at all the regional and remote pounds to see what breeds proliferate and you will see they are all large dogs, working breeds and greyhounds

Sadly I have seen many greyhounds killed at my local pound. I was also a founding member of a group set up to rescue greyhounds because so many were being taken to the pound to be killed. If you look on social media at the many sites that try to rescue dogs and cats from rural pounds you will see many greyhounds still being dumped in pounds. So end the despicable greyhound racing industry who breed thousands of dogs, injure and kill dogs on track and when no longer profitable and also ruin lives with gambling. The Government props up this industry so is actually contributing our tax payer dollars towards putting more dogs into pounds. Backyard breeding also needs to stop as does the breeding of farm dogs of which many are discarded into the pound system. All dogs and cats need to be desexed and this includes ones being sold from the pound and also ones being returned to owners after being impounded. Dogs and cats should not be allowed to be sold in pet shops or online. There definitely needs to be a cap on breeding of any dogs and cats. Free desexing should be provided to anyone who wants it for their pets, any pets including rabbits and other animals. The breeding cycles need to be drastically reduced. For the sake of our wildlife cats and dogs should also be contained at night.

The current cost of living crisis, homelessness crisis and the rental crisis are major contributors to dogs and cats entering the pound at the moment. Laws need to change to allow pets in rental accommodation. Crisis centres and retirement villages should also be pet-friendly. And we need lots more pet-friendly affordable housing but not in koala habitat !! I am working with a charity at the moment to help the homeless and at risk of homeless with their pets to help avoid them also being surrendered to the pound. Community organisations need core funding to help these people and their pets. Every member of our community deserves a safe and secure place to call home.

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

Despite the availability of many evidence-based and life-saving programs designed to stop the killing and suffering, our NSW pound and shelter system continues to actively support and enable the killing of impounded animals with little or no public transparency or accountability. A perfect example of this is when in 2021 Bourke Shire Council shot 15 impounded homeless dogs including ten puppies. The NSW Minister of Local Government at the time, Shelley Hancock, was not even aware that shooting of dogs in pounds was legal. And to my utter dismay it still is. Changes were made after this incident whereby Councils must contact 2 rescue groups to give them the opportunity to rescue an animal before they

can be killed. This change only happened because of the bravery of a whistleblower from a volunteer rescue group speaking up but sadly the group she volunteered with were not prepared to speak out for fear of reprisals. But councils need to work with more than 2 rescue groups if that is what it takes to rehome an animal.

The reporting of kill rates varies with councils and needs to be transparent and consistent. My local council tries to make the kill rates look much better by putting down the dogs killed as a percentage of all the intake of dogs, including the dogs that have been returned to their owners so it makes them look better. However one has to really question these figures as we have not had a local pound for 4 years now and the private boarding facility which is being used as the pound is not accessible to the public.

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

Assessments should never be done in the pound situation, which is a noisy and fearful place for many dogs and cats, not to mention any farm animals that might end up in the pound. They should never be done within the first few days of an animal arriving at the pound as they will be extremely stressed. It shouldn't be done when there are distractions from other dogs, people and noises. A quiet natural setting away from the pound should be used and only be someone trained to assess the behaviour of dogs. Pound staff who are employed without any previous experience of working with animals should certainly not be assessing animals and that is exactly what happened in my local pound.

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

The majority of NSW pounds are totally dependent on volunteer rescue organisations to rehome dogs and cats. My local council used to rehome all the dogs and cats in the pound and only if ones hadn't sold after a month or ones that needed special care were released to a rescue group. However since closing the pound and operating out of a private boarding kennel they have ceased rehoming animals and have passed this service over to the local rescue group. If you search social media you will see many groups dedicated to rescuing dogs and cats out of rural and remote pounds. They often ask for pledges to pay for transport and possibly towards desexing. These costs can sometimes be huge and the public are making donations towards these costs when the pounds themselves are not doing a thing to rehome the animals in their care. These animals are often being held in decrepit and outdated pounds which are not catering to the needs of the animals or volunteers. And the rescue groups are often told at the last minute that a n animal needs to be saved or they will be killed the next day. These pounds are not doing what they are supposed to do and are literally using and abusing dedicated volunteers to do their work. And the volunteers are witnessing horrific conditions for the animals and horrible stories such as puppies dying due to being born onto a cold concrete floor of a kennel. And these same dedicated volunteers are loath to say anything to change the circumstances because they are scared of reprisals. So often on these pledge pages on social media they will not disclose the exact location of the pound.

- (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

The Government needs to trap and desex cats and where possible rehome them. People that are feeding homeless cats need to be assisted to trap and to desex these cats. To avoid more homeless cats it is imperative that all cats are desexed at point of sale and free desexing is provided to anyone with a cat. People need to be forced to keep their cats contained to their property just as dog owners are required to do. And they should provide safe outdoor enclosures if allowed outside. Our wildlife cannot afford having cats or dogs roaming at night in particular. So there should be cat curfews. I do not believe in inhumane baiting and killing of cats but stopping the breeding at the source is what is needed. I met a man the other day who is at risk of homelessness and has a cat that just had kittens. He cannot afford desexing and he cannot even afford subsidized desexing. It needs to be free.

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

Pounds should be a safe haven and refuge for the most vulnerable pets in our community, not a place where they go to die. All pounds in NSW need to adopt the No-Kill philosophy where only those animals deemed to be suffering or aggressive are euthanased. Even dogs and cats that are terminally ill can still find a loving home if given the chance. The old, young and the disabled animals should not be in a pound situation and need to go into foster care. If pounds are going to hand over the responsibilities of rehoming animals to rescue organisations then these organisations need to be paid to do this service.

All staff employed at pounds should be qualified in animal studies and have compassion and empathy for the animals they are responsible for. This is something that is sadly lacking in pounds across NSW. All animals should be given sufficient exercise and stimulation with enrichment.

All councils should advertise the animals for sale on their website and on social media. Very few pounds promote the animals in their care properly. Not all rescue groups are equal here either but those that promote the animals in their care get the best results. Adoption fees need to be realistic. At the moment some organisations are charging \$600 to \$1000 for dogs which is ridiculous. I know a local rescue group who has had at least 4 dogs in kennels for over a year yet are still asking huge prices for these dogs.

Euthanasia should only be done if the animal is suffering and/or beyond medical treatment. Euthanasia should only be performed by a vet. Shooting in pounds needs to be outlawed. All pounds should provide appropriate dry and also soft bedding, with facilities for washing. Dogs and cats housed separately, with proper and suitable housing provided for farm and other animal species.

It is crucial when a dog/cat is surrendered to a pound that as much information on that animal is recorded. The surrender form itself is a problem. In my local pound the Surrender form does not have a lot of room for specific information about the dog/cat which will make it much easier to rehome. Sometimes a name is not even recorded. And the very first thing the owner has to do is tick a box if you want your dog euthanased!!! I find that appalling that the council are actually inviting people to have their dogs killed. If a dog is in serious ill health and it does warrant humane euthanasia then the council pound is not where the poor animal should be left. Sometimes if it is genuinely ill and does need to be humanely euthanased this may not happen for 6 days as a vet may only come out once a week. In a case like this where the person cannot afford euthanasia fees the council should help facilitate an immediate euthanasia by a vet if warranted.

(k) any other related matter.

Breed specific bias. An 8 month old dog named "Buddy", microchipped as an American Staffy x was recently impounded at my local pound where the owner was not in a position to take him back. Council decided that due to the colour of the dog and in particular his nose that they questioned whether he was a Pitbull type dog and he was refused release to rescue organisations who had applied to rescue him. Not only did the council not reply to the rescue groups and treat them with utter disdain, but the council decided after a month of Buddy being impounded that they would kill him. Buddy lost his life not due to any aggression or act but purely because of how he looked. Both animals and the rescue groups that try to help them should be treated with respect.

The lack of transparency needs to be addressed. People are given the opinion that if they surrender an animal to a pound that they will find a good home. One lady heard that her cat had been killed at the pound and came to put flowers on the cats grave. She was not told the truth that her cat's body had been dumped at the tip.

The work of rehoming impounded animals which is supposed to be done by council, is most often carried out by volunteer not for profit rescue organisations, who frantically try to find foster carers and homes for as many dogs and cats as possible before they are killed and often without much notice and also with little information about the animals. They then have to fundraise for much needed funds to pay for expensive vet bills and food and parasite control.

As recommended by Animal Liberation these are the steps needed to reform pounds in NSW

1. 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;
2. 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;
3. Immediately halt all NSW pound and shelter shooting and discontinue all 'euthanasia' methods apart from intravenous injection for compassionate reasons;
4. Immediately end all pound and shelter 'euthanasia' procedures being undertaken by anyone apart from qualified and licensed veterinary practitioners;
5. Urgently conduct a public online survey (~8 weeks) to engage the community and harness a broad range of views and expectations about the management of NSW pounds and shelters;
6. Publicly exhibit (for ~4 weeks) a tailored, stand-alone Code of Practice for all impounded animals in NSW pounds and shelters;
7. 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;

8. 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.
9. 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;
10. Substantially overhaul the Companion Animals Act to include a revised focus on all impounded animals, regardless of species;
11. 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;
12. Enhance inspection and enforcement powers for agencies authorised under POCTAA to undertake routine NSW pound and shelter inspections and enforcement.
13. 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'
14. Introduce an annual grants program for NSW not-for-profits, including self-funded and volunteer rescue, rehoming and advocacy organisations;
15. 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.

There is ample evidence to suggest a high level of public dissatisfaction with the adequacy of the standard of care and kill rates for stray, surrendered or seized animals under the control of the approved charitable organisations; and an increased public demand for the introduction of No Kill Programs which have achieved significant success. The majority of stray, surrendered or seized companion animals fall under the responsibility of local government councils, many of which continue to operate in a non-compliant manner.

I have had decades of experience rescuing dogs and cats out of pounds in NSW and have seen firsthand the lack of care and consideration given to these poor animals by local Government bodies, where even the most basic needs are not met and where killing is used as the first option rather than rehoming. Pounds with successful rehoming outcomes are often dependent on volunteers and funds from the community rather than any effort by the local Government body themselves. Pound reform is desperately needed in NSW and killing should never be the first option. All pounds and shelters in NSW should be adopting the "No Kill philosophy. My local council currently does not even have a pound despite having a population of 90,000 people. It is operating out of a boarding kennel with public access denied and in recent years the kill rates have climbed. Public access is also denied to the

Pound facility in the adjoining LGA. All these pound statistics should be consistent and readily available to the public not manipulated and shrouded in secrecy.

I look forward to there being significant changes in our pound system for the most vulnerable animals in our community.

Facebook is full of pledge groups where hundreds of dollars are raised to rescue the lucky few and transport animals out of rural and remote pounds sometimes by air so lives can be saved. The following are just some examples of social media posts which show how broken the pound system is.





Note the condition of the floor and bowl that can be knocked over.

“Tanner”

Female mastiff x, super friendly.
Came from a house with 13
dogs so fine with dogs. Only
young . Don't think she's
desexed. Rural west nsw



Lovely old kelpie boy dumped in deposit pen , not chipped . At least 10 + , love's just sitting in sun and getting pats . Needs a retirement home and out of pound asap. Rural west nsw

