

**Submission
No 117**

INQUIRY INTO POUNDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: DoggieRescue
Date Received: 19 August 2023

Subject: Submission addressing resourcing and welfare challenges affecting NSW pounds

Dear Sirs

This submission is on behalf of DoggieRescue.com to address the resourcing challenges affecting pounds in New South Wales (NSW), as well as the welfare challenges faced by animals in these pounds. These times are unprecedented, with the post covid dumping of unwanted companion animals coupled with the current credit squeeze which is seeing more dogs and cats being offloaded as never before.

(a) Resourcing Challenges: The inadequacy of funding provided by local and state governments towards the operation of pounds is a significant concern. Insufficient funding often leads to understaffing, limited resources, and compromised animal care. It is crucial that an adequate allocation of funds be made to support the day-to-day operations of pounds, including staffing, veterinary care, and essential supplies. Additionally, increased funding would enable pounds to implement educational programs, promote responsible pet ownership, and facilitate successful rehoming initiatives.

(b) Pound Buildings and Facilities: The adequacy of pound buildings and facilities in NSW is another pressing issue. Inadequate infrastructure impacts the overall health and wellbeing of animals and staff in pounds. We always hear of the doubling up of animals in cages/runs due to space. This results in mauling and injuries overnight when no-one is in attendance as well as matings of dogs. We have just taken on a large breed dog who was mated in the pound who gave birth to 15 pups. That is ONE example of how inappropriate council facilities are. So instead of taking 15 more dogs from the pounds, we needed to care for the pups and find them homes.

The standards of pounds varies significantly throughout NSW. We have experienced much poorer disease control in rural pounds. Staff have many roles and only drop in for a few hours to feed and clean animals and veterinary care is unheard of. Parvo is still rampant compared with better controls in most Sydney pounds. So many pound dogs are still not given basic vaccinations to keep common diseases at bay.

We urge the Government to invest in the improvement and upgrade of pound facilities, ensuring that they meet appropriate standards for animal care, hygiene, and safety. Pounds generally lack suitable facilities for animals to exercise freely and safely. Good exercise is paramount for all dogs.

(c) Welfare Challenges: The welfare challenges facing animals in pounds across NSW are multifaceted. Provision of housing, bedding, feeding, exercise, enrichment, veterinary treatment, vaccination, and desexing are all crucial aspects of ensuring the wellbeing of pound animals.

When dogs are put together and a fight breaks out, quick decisions are made to euthanise certain dogs without adequate attention given to mitigating the circumstances in the first place. People without animal welfare and dog behaviour experience are quick to make euthanasia decisions.

Many of the dogs who end in pounds have had very poor upbringing with a limited range of experiences, often only experiencing someone's backyard with little or no socialisation or even walking on lead. They are thrown into a pound, often dumped in a "deposit box" overnight so the owner can remain anonymous and then the dog is expected to deal favorably with a pound (prison) environment surrounded by stressed anxious noisy dogs.

Animals experience stress, physical and mental discomfort, and increased susceptibility to illness. A very high proportion of dogs in pounds are staffy types which are high energy, high stress breeds that are more sensitive and reactive to high stress environments.

(d) The adequacy of the laws, regulations, and codes governing NSW pounds:

While the Companion Animals Act 1998 (NSW) and the NSW Animal Welfare Code of Practice No 5 - Dogs and cats in animal boarding establishments (1996) provide a framework for the welfare and management of animals in pounds, we believe there is room for improvement. These laws and codes should be regularly reviewed and updated to reflect the evolving understanding of animal welfare and best practices in animal care.

Specific areas that require attention include:

Capacity and resources of pounds: All pounds in NSW are operating beyond their capacity and are under-resourced.

Education and training: There is a need to invest in educational programs and training for pound staff, volunteers, and the community to ensure a high standard of animal welfare. This includes training in animal behavior, handling, and enrichment, as well as education campaigns on responsible pet ownership and the benefits of adoption. Staff handling and caring for animals need appropriate skills but staff also need to innately have compassion.

Collaboration and partnerships: Building stronger collaborations between pounds, rescue organisations, and other animal welfare stakeholders is crucial. This can help facilitate the transfer of animals from pounds to rescues, as well as promote community engagement and support for pound animals.

(e) Factors influencing the number of animals ending up in NSW pounds and strategies for reducing these numbers:

Lack of accessible and affordable desexing services: The cost and accessibility of desexing can be a barrier for many pet owners. Implementing initiatives that provide subsidised or low-cost desexing services, particularly in low-income areas, can help reduce the number of unwanted litters and stray animals.

Education and awareness: Promoting responsible pet ownership through education campaigns can help reduce the number of animals ending up in pounds. This includes educating the public on the importance of desexing, microchipping, and providing proper care and training for their pets.

Support for community initiatives: Providing support for community initiatives such as trap-neuter-return programs for feral cat colonies can help control their population and reduce the number of stray cats entering pounds.

Enhanced rehoming efforts: Increasing efforts to facilitate the adoption and rehoming of pound animals is essential. This can include improved marketing and promotion of pound animals, extended opening hours for public access, and partnerships with rescue organisations to increase the chances of finding permanent homes for these animals. Engaging more vet clinics to manage pounds should be an important strategy. Many pounds are operating this way in the Sydney region.

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

DoggieRescue with its no kill policy is deeply concerned about the recent rise of euthanasia rates in New South Wales pounds. We believe euthanasia should only be utilised as a last resort for animals that are suffering or deemed dangerous beyond rehabilitation.

We would like accurate, transparent and up to date statistics in pounds. Clear and comprehensive data is necessary for effective monitoring, evaluation, and improvement of animal welfare practices in pounds.

(g) The role and challenges of behavioral assessments in New South Wales pounds:

Behavioral assessments play a vital role in determining the temperament and suitability of animals for adoption. Monikas Doggie Rescue recognizes the importance of behavioral assessments as a tool to ensure the placement of animals in suitable and loving homes.

However, we acknowledge that there are challenges associated with conducting behavioral assessments in pounds. Limited resources, time constraints, and varying expertise levels among staff can impact the accuracy and consistency of these assessments. We recommend that proper training and support be provided to pound staff to enhance their understanding and proficiency in conducting behavioral assessments.

We need to remember that assessment is CONTEXT SPECIFIC and TIME SPECIFIC and no indication that the same behaviour will be observed in a different setting. Dogs behave very differently away from high-stress environments where there is little or no exercise or stimulation for the dog.

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

The relationship between New South Wales pounds and animal rescue organizations is crucial for the successful rehoming and rehabilitation of animals. Animal rescues like DoggieRescue, work closely with pounds to help alleviate the burden on their resources and provide a second chance to animals in need.

When pounds reach out to a rescue organisation, it is important that the animal is held for their arrival. We have experienced pounds who ask for help and then give the dog to someone else in the meantime. Volunteers and organisations feel very disheartened by these actions. In some cases, drivers travel great distances to rural pounds to collect animals and then get advised to just turn around!

Transparency of pounds also varies re euthanasia dates. Rescue organisations would appreciate knowing dates so that bigger efforts can be made for more urgent animals. Some pounds are very secretive. This attitude is extremely counter-productive.

(i) The challenges associated with the number of homeless cats living in New South Wales for both pounds and animal rescue organizations:

The issue of homeless cats in New South Wales is a significant concern for both pounds and animal rescue organisations. The overpopulation of cats poses challenges in terms of adequate shelter, veterinary care, and finding suitable homes for these animals.

More support is needed for the Trap Neuter Release programs to stop breeding and enable local communities to support care and feeding of these street cats. Support is needed with food and medical assistance and these groups need to be encouraged to watch and care for these cat communities. More education is needed as in many local communities people destroy or hinder the efforts of these volunteers as they try to feed or trap cats. This work is difficult, often done at night and can at times be dangerous. There is so little support given to these volunteers who work tirelessly 365 days a year– even food and vet costs are usually borne by private individuals.

DoggieRescue supports and encourages efforts to promote responsible pet ownership, including desexing programs, community education, and awareness campaigns. We believe that proactive measures such as these can help address the challenges associated with the number of homeless cats in New South Wales.

In conclusion, we believe that reviewing and updating the laws, regulations, and codes governing NSW pounds, as well as implementing targeted strategies to reduce the number of animals entering the pounds and euthanasia rates, will result in better outcomes for animal welfare in our community. We appreciate the opportunity to provide input and would be happy to engage in further discussions on these matters.

Sincerely,

Monika Biernacki OAM
CEO
DoggieRescue