

**Submission
No 125**

INQUIRY INTO POUNDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Clarence Valley Council

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23 August 2023

Hon Emma Hurst
 Committee Chair
 Portfolio Committee No 8 – Customer Service
 NSW Legislative Council
 Sydney NSW 2000

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NSW Pounds Inquiry – Clarence Valley Council submission

Dear Hon Emma Hurst

Clarence Valley Council is appreciative of the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry and the extension of time that has been granted. The Inquiry's Terms and Reference have been reviewed and this submission addresses matters of relevance to the Committee's Inquiry.

Clarence Valley Pound facilities – Council operates two animal pound facilities – one at South Grafton and a secondary shelter at Townsend, near Maclean. These facilities are summarised in **Table 1**.

Features	South Grafton Pound	Townsend Pound
Construction date	1982 (extended in 2001 & 2007)	1980's
No of dog kennels/cat cages	Kennels = 8 inside, 5 outside (3 grassed) + 1 isolation pen Cat cages = 17	Kennels = 6 Cat cages = 2
Outdoor exercise areas	Yes. No shade	No
Staffing	2 FTE Animal Control officers	As needed. Usually not used.
Public access	Yes + on-site parking spaces	No. Site unattended + no on-site parking
Viewing/adoption space	No	No
Security system	No	No

Table 1 – Summary of features at Clarence Valley Councils pound facilities.

Council is preparing an Animal Control and Animal Shelter Strategy this financial year to understand, coordinate and more efficiently manage animal shelter and animal management needs for the future.

There are a range of upgrades needed to ensure Council's pound premises are easy and efficient to maintain and provide better working conditions for animal control staff. Significant increases in the number of animals, particularly dogs (refer to **Appendix 1**), coming into the Council's pound presents challenges in providing sufficient accommodation (in terms of capacity) and securing rehoming opportunities when demand is high. In the Clarence Valley, the distances and costs for transport involved in effective animal rehoming outcomes for both Council and the rehoming organisations is a significant burden.

Companion animal handling and management – Council employs 2 dedicated FTE animal control staff who manage all aspects of the day-to-day operations of the Council's pound. In addition, six (6) general purpose rangers conduct activities in the field that often relate to companion animal matters. These include picking up stray/roaming dogs, managing/investigating dog attacks (on persons and other animals), dangerous/menacing/nuisance dogs, general nuisance, and other companion animal compliance. Council's rangers vary in their experience and skills and the provision of adequate training and protective equipment remains a constant need. Throughout the COVID pandemic, active and in-person training for animal control staff was very limited and hence, demands on training opportunities and providers is now high.

Data on numbers of dogs and cats that have attended Council's pound over the last 3 financial years is provided at **Appendix 1**. The figures show an increase in dog numbers from 2020/21 to 2022/23 of over 200% (204 up to 422 dogs), with a step change increase since autumn 2022. Over the same 3-year period cat numbers have fluctuated with an overall decline of 18% (263 down to 216 cats) and for cats there is no particular trend of note. Euthanasia rates have declined overall from 16.7% in 2020/21 to 11% in 2022/23 even with a significant growth in numbers of incoming animals over the same period. This is evidence of the effort that Council's staff and rehoming organisations put into maximising opportunities for impounded animals to be rehomed with numbers of animals leaving our pounds to be rehomed over the 3-year period increasing overall from 389 in 2020/21 to 568 in 2022/23, comprising almost a 150% increase (refer also to 'Rehoming challenges and relationships with rehoming organisations' later in this submission).

Anecdotally, the COVID pandemic resulted in companion animal ownership increasing as more people were spending more time at home in both work and play. Now that the COVID situation is cooling off and employers are requiring that workers spend more time in the workplace it is possible that the increases in dog numbers that Council has experienced since autumn 2022 are partly contributed to by owners no longer having the time to properly and responsibly look after their dogs. Some owners are surrendering their animals to our pound. While dogs that are allowed to roam or stray are at a risk of being reported by the public and picked up and impounded by Council's rangers.

Qualified Council staff have traditionally completed euthanasia of companion animals on our pound premises. Recent staff welfare concerns have resulted in Council seeking an external veterinary practitioner to perform euthanasia, albeit on Council's pound premises. Despite this, there will be times when limited availability of the veterinary practitioner and/or the immediate welfare and humane needs of an individual animal require euthanasia to be completed by Council staff. The outsourcing of euthanasia generates an additional financial cost for Council, however it is expected that this should

also result in a reduced risk of psychosocial stress, workers compensation claims and associated impacts on individual staff, their colleagues and Council.

Council also needs to ensure that any rehomed animals are microchipped, registered and desexed prior to leaving Council's pound facilities. Trained staff can conduct microchipping, however desexing is conducted off-site by registered veterinarians at cost to Council.

Public access and security – Owners of companion animals can be very passionate and at times will go to some lengths to protect their pets from being impounded or held at Council's pound. Unfortunately, this passion can degenerate into physical and verbal threats against Council staff, either at our pound, in Council service centres and when staff are in the field. Attempts by person/s to break and enter our pound facilities to 'rescue' impounded animals also occur from time to time. A number of these incidents have been reported over time and can involve Police action as a number of recent events of this type in the Clarence Valley have done.

Council pounds are the front line of companion animal impounding and hence, where this unwanted attention is most likely to be directed. This generates additional resourcing needs for security management and training of staff to reduce the risk and manage difficult customers. The isolated location of many local Council pounds away from urban areas can exacerbate these risks. It is suggested that animal rehoming organisations are less likely to receive such threatening behaviour or security breaches as owners of impounded animals would not be provided details of the organisation or facility where their animal has been transferred to the care of.

Community expectations and promotion of rehoming – There is a clear and reasonable expectation that effort will be made to rehome suitable animals. To be 'suitable for rehoming' an individual animal must not be a restricted breed or declared a dangerous or menacing dog and otherwise complete and pass a behavioural assessment undertaken by Council's staff. Animals that do not meet these pre-suitability criteria are more likely to be euthanised, as are animals that are medically unwell and unable to be treated, eg due or disease. Animals that do not pass the behavioural assessment and have potential for any sub-standard behaviours to be corrected through training can be taken and managed by rehoming organisations to improve rehoming opportunity.

Contemporary media and television programs, such as the series *The Dog House Australia* as filmed at the Animal Welfare League facility in western Sydney, and even pet segments on shows like *Better Homes and Gardens*, promote the benefits of pet ownership and the opportunities of rehoming companion animals and giving both the animals and their adopters a better quality of life. However, the quality and spacious facilities and pet viewing opportunities promoted through such media have potential to create a community expectation about how local Council animal pound facilities should be established, operate or look like that exceeds the resourcing capacity and required companion animal management standards of many local Council's. This is not to say that there is no need for upgrading of some local Council pounds, however the difference between meeting required standards for pounds and satisfying community expectations may well be significant and the Committee is requested to consider this. In the event that the standards required for pound facilities increase then there would need to be added resourcing provided to local Councils. Funding for Council pounds is typically sourced from Council's own rating income and with allowable increases to rates not keeping up with inflation and costs of doing business the NSW Government needs to find ways to assist Council's with funding.

Council's Animal Control and Animal Shelter Strategy (for preparation this financial year) will contain recommendations that guide Council's management of the pound facilities and related animal control

activities for the next 10-20 years. By necessity, the Strategy will need to consider requirements for fulfilling Council's obligation to accommodate companion animals as well as the related management requirements. Our current pound premises are in the order of 40 years old and are in need of new investment to upgrade and/or renew. Again, this requires capital works funding and our Strategy will identify funding levels, when funds will be needed, as well as where those funds may be obtained in order to implement recommended actions.

Microchipping and registration to aid rehoming – In simple terms a companion animal that is microchipped is much easier to return home than an animal that is not. Owners of dogs have been required to microchip and register their dogs under the *Companion Animals Act 1998* for many years and hence, more roaming or lost dogs that are picked up by Council rangers can be scanned in the field and returned to their owners without the animal being returned to the pound for necessary processing and associated cost for Council (feeding, cleaning, exercise, pound maintenance, administration of Companion Animals Register, etc). Despite that, the majority of dogs that are brought into the pound are roaming or strays that are picked-up by Council rangers.

Conversely, based on observation, the majority of cats that are brought to the Council's pound are brought in by third party persons who do not own the cat and have caught or trapped the cat roaming on their private land. Cats have not been required to be microchipped and registered under the Act for as much time as dogs, and hence there is suggested to be less public awareness of the need to properly identify and register a cat. This combined with the propensity for cats to roam and breed with other cats results in greater wild or undomesticated progeny that can result in greater numbers of unidentified cats that come to the attention of the pound. In such cases, rates of rehoming cats are naturally lower as the owner cannot be identified. Additionally, the sub-standard behaviour of undomesticated or feral cats can lead to a greater number being euthanised. This rate of euthanasia will most likely increase when agencies like Local Land Services or local Council's engage in active trapping programs that target feral cats. Council has been involved in a small-scale program of this type in partnership with North Coast Local Land Services in October-November 2022. Media associated with that trapping program can be viewed at - <https://www.lls.nsw.gov.au/regions/north-coast/latest-news-and-newsletters/nc-news/2023/cat-control-effort-supports-recovery-of-native-wildlife>.

Cat management and legislative provisions – Public demand for owners of cats and organisations, such as local Council's and relevant State agencies (eg Local Land Services, National Parks and Wildlife, etc) to more actively manage cats is increasing. Previous NSW Local Government Annual Conferences have passed motions seeking legislative attention by the NSW Government to enable more effective and equitable management of cats through the *Companion Animals Act 1998*. To date, legislative reform has not occurred and cats continue to have much greater freedom than dogs in NSW. This freedom places the cat at risk as well as large numbers of local wildlife.

Typically, a cat can legally roam beyond the boundaries of the property at which it is normally kept, however a dog cannot. Restrictions on spaces where cats or dogs cannot roam, such as designated wildlife protection areas established under the *Companion Animals Act 1998*, are very limited and not sufficient to effectively managing roaming cats and the well-published and significant impacts of cats on native fauna across the broader landscape.

Information to educate the local Clarence Valley community about the impact of cats on wildlife and what cat owners can do to ensure safety and welfare of their cats has been distributed by the Lions Club of Clarence – Environmental in partnership with Clarence Valley Council. A copy of the Lions Club

brochure and a Council flyer that has accompanied the brochure is provided at **Appendix 2**. Containing cats at home, microchipping and registration as well as desexing cats are the key messages Council is promoting and greater legislative and resourcing support from the NSW Government to reinforce these messages would be welcome.

Council is keen to continue working with agencies such as Local Land Services and community groups to promote better pet management in the community and address the detrimental impacts of companion animals in the environment.

Rehoming challenges and relationships with rehoming organisations – The geography of the Clarence Valley LGA in both size and location creates challenges for our responsibilities in terms of companion animals. The LGA comprises 10,441 km² and as **Figure 1** indicates this area is comparable to the entire Sydney metropolitan area that is administered by 33 local Councils. Being located approximately 2.5 hours from SE Queensland and 7 hours north of Sydney, in combination with present high occupancy levels in our main pound facility and small staffing levels, we face extra challenges on a daily basis for managing and rehoming animals. Council and rehoming organisations often need to transport animals long distances to find suitable rehoming opportunities outside the LGA. Moving animals over longer distances, whilst benefiting the individual animal when it gets rehomed and it's new owner/s, consumes significantly more time and resources, results in greater costs and takes staff away from their pound management routines resulting in reduced productivity for animal control staff and other staff in the wider team.

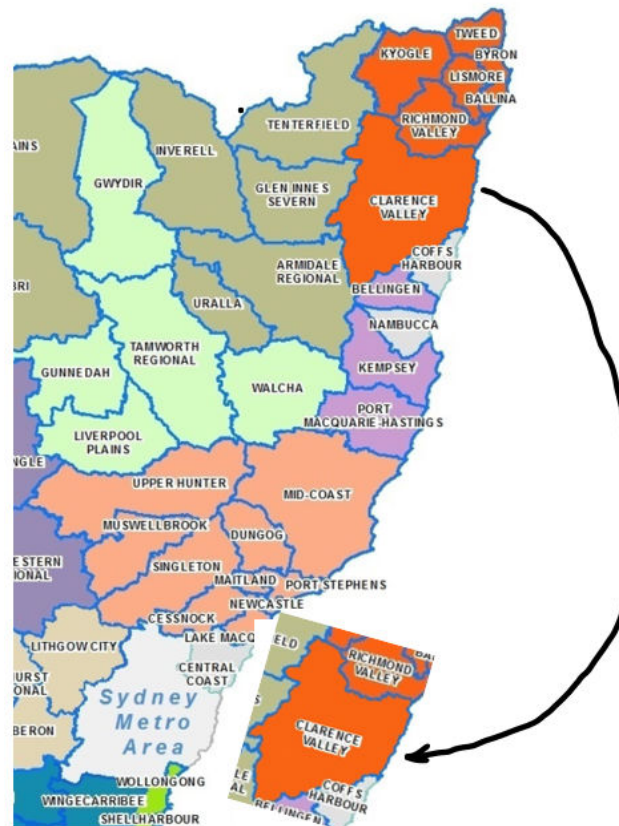


Figure 1 – A comparison of the Clarence Valley LGA in both location and size relative to Sydney.

Council's animal control staff enjoy positive and productive working relationships with rehoming organisations which is critical given the limited number of these organisations that operate regionally. The Committee is requested to consider how the demands on regional local Council pound facilities to maintain high rehoming levels/lower euthanasia rates, in much the same way as larger, metropolitan pound facilities, brings added per capita cost burdens to the regional organisations.

We would be pleased to offer further insight or input to the Inquiry at the Committee's request. I can be contacted on phone _____ or email _____ should any clarification be required.

Kind regards

Scott Lenton

Manager Environment and Regulatory Services

Appendices follow

Appendix 1 – Clarence Valley Council Pounds dog and cat records for 2020/21 – 2022/23

CLARENCE VALLEY POUND DATA (2020/21 TO 2022-23) - INCOMING COMPANION ANIMALS AND EUTHANASIA RATES															
MONTH	DOGS	CATS	CAT EUTHANASIA	DOG EUTHANASIA	MONTH	DOGS	CATS	CAT EUTHANASIA	DOG EUTHANASIA	MONTH	DOGS	CATS	CAT EUTHANASIA	DOG EUTHANASIA	
Jul-20	16	12	5	1	Jul-21	19	18	8	4	Jul-22	32	10	5	6	
Aug-20	15	13	5	0	Aug-21	23	12	9	3	Aug-22	44	8	2	3	
Sep-20	6	19	3	2	Sep-21	19	7	1	5	Sep-22	45	14	4	3	
Oct-20	32	21	2	1	Oct-21	21	7	1	1	Oct-22	30	16	10	1	
Nov-20	25	24	8	8	Nov-21	24	32	8	0	Nov-22	38	31	3	5	
Dec-20	20	24	5	4	Dec-21	24	11	4	1	Dec-22	31	26	0	8	
Jan-21	11	26	2	4	Jan-22	26	13	0	2	Jan-23	32	31	1	1	
Feb-21	33	11	3	2	Feb-22	11	5	0	1	Feb-23	30	16	1	1	
Mar-21	19	30	3	5	Mar-22	30	12	1	3	Mar-23	41	8	1	3	
Apr-21	8	25	2	3	Apr-22	25	17	0	2	Apr-23	19	21	2	3	
May-21	12	29	2	3	May-22	29	19	3	2	May-23	42	19	1	2	
Jun-21	7	29	2	3	Jun-22	29	10	2	4	Jun-23	38	16	1	3	
TOTALS	204	263	42	36		280	163	37	28		422	216	31	39	
TOTAL DOGS/CATS EUTHANASIA %		467	16.0	78			443	22.7	65			638	14.4	70	
TOTAL EUTHANASIA %				16.7					14.7					11.0	

Appendix 2 – Brochures used for educating Clarence Valley cat owners



WHY KEEP YOUR CAT AT HOME?

- They will **live longer**
- Avoid being injured or killed by a car
- Decreased risk of **tick paralysis and parasites**
- Prevent the spread of **TOXOPLASMOSIS** (can cause abortions in humans)
- Prevent the spread of **FIV (Feline Immunodeficiency Virus)**
- **Prevent impoundment - and associated costs**
- **Reduced risk of poisoning or disease**
- **No infections from cat fights - or resulting vet bills**
- **No damage from predators or dog attacks**
- **You can control food intake**
- **No risk of cruelty from others**
- **Always will know where your cat is**
- **Better able to monitor health**
- **Makes you a more considerate neighbour and community member**
- **Reduced vet fees and associated medications**

References: RSPCA NSW (2023), Zoos Victoria Safe Cat (2018), Safe Wildlife "Cat Hacks", RSPCA Australia Guide 'Keeping Your Cat Safe and Happy at Home', Safecat.org.au, Cat Protection Society



**Lions Club of Clarence
- Environmental**
Advocating

PROTECTION and PRESERVATION

All domesticated animals to be kept on their owner's property



CARE FOR YOUR CAT - KEEP IT SAFE *at home*

By keeping your cat at home you are ensuring its welfare and wellbeing. Cats at home live on average **10 years** longer than those who roam. (RSPCA 2023)

RSPCA NSW strongly advocates keeping cats as indoor pets.

Caring for cats: means being kept safe, always at home under your guidance and care.

a WIN / WIN
CARING FOR YOUR CAT and CARING FOR NATURE

By keeping your cat contained or on a lead you will also:

HELP SAVE AND PROTECT OUR WILDLIFE
for now, and for your childrens' children



Some facts:

- 3.9 million cats provide love and companionship (when they feel inclined)
- 9 in 10 cats who go missing are never reunited with their owners
- 46% of Australia's threatened wildlife can be found in cities
- Two in three cat owners have lost a cat in a roaming-related accident
- Pet cats only take home 1 in 5 of the animals they kill on average
- More Councils are looking at reducing the impact of pet cats on wildlife

Ref: Zoos Vic 2018 and ABC News 2023



In Australia, every day cats kill:

- Mammals - 3.2 million
- Birds - 1.2 million
- Reptiles - 1.9 million
- Frogs - 0.25 million
- Invertebrates - 3 million

Many of these are endangered native species

(Ref: Zoos Victoria 2018)



Pamphlet #1 / Produced by Lions Club of Clarence - Environmental

Join us on Facebook: Lions Club of Clarence - Environmental








CVC is a supporter of the positive environmental efforts of Lions Club of Clarence – Environmental and commends this initiative to promote improved cat management in the Clarence Valley.



Clarence Valley Council supports responsible cat ownership

Look after your pet cat/s by following the tips below:

-  **Keep your cat at home** – a contained cat is a safe cat. Cats that roam outside at any time of the day or night are likely to predate on a wide variety of native wildlife. Wildlife or other feral animals (such as foxes, wild dogs or even other cats) can also harm or kill your cat. In addition, most vehicle accidents involving cats occur at night which doesn't help the cat, owners or motorists.
-  **A microchipped and registered cat is a safer cat** – If you like your cat get it microchipped and registered! Microchips contain data about your cat, your contact details and the address of your cat. Cats that are microchipped and present to Council's Animal Shelter, Rangers or Animal Control team can be scanned, identified and safely returned to their owner. In NSW, the Companion Animals Act 1998 requires that cats are registered within 6 months of age.
-  **A desexed cat is the best kind of cat** – Desexing your cat reduces potential unplanned breeding, reduces numbers of feral or wild cats in the environment and the impacts they have on local native wildlife as well as nuisance they cause. A desexed cat does not require an annual permit to retain and this reduces costs of owning a cat.

Did you know?

When you purchase a companion animal (cat or dog) from Council's Animal Shelter they are microchipped, desexed, vaccinated and registered prior to sale.



Council's website has more information to guide cat owners in how they can contain their cat at home as well as details about microchipping and pet registration, including opportunities for rebates or discounts.



END