

**Submission
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INQUIRY INTO POUNDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: City of Coffs Harbour

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Inquiry into pounds in New South Wales

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(a) resourcing challenges affecting New South Wales pounds, including the adequacy of funding given towards the operation of pounds by local and state governments

One of the largest most recent impacts on service cost has been caused by the Governments legislative changes involving additional measure o be taken with the rehoming of animals. This change combined with unforeseen outcomes arising from covid and the financial crisis has impacted the ability of the existing network of rehoming organisations to meet the numbers of animals requiring rehoming. This change has resulted in a significant shift with Council's short term holding pounds becoming longer term shelters and resulting in additional resourcing costs - more animals being held for longer periods of time resulting in increased staffing costs, increased food and consumables, increased veterinary costs and significant strain on facilities that were not designed to meet animal shelter type needs.

Of particular concern from both a cost and service provision perspective is the difficulty in accessing and maintaining veterinary services. Whilst Coffs Harbour is a relatively large regional centre, local veterinary practices have cited extreme difficulty in sourcing and retaining qualified vets. The access to vets is a critical component of operating a facility and a significant driver of costs particularly in relation to the holding, management and rehoming of animals.

The City has been required to consider direct rehoming of animals from its facility resulting in significant additional veterinary fees to vaccinate and desex animals with the sale returns being far less than the costs incurred.

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

The City of Coffs Harbour has a modest new pound facility that was completed and commenced service provision in March 2022. Whist the facility was constructed to ensure compliance with the existing Code and impounding numbers to meet anticipated needs until at least 2035 it was not designed to cater for the legislated rehoming changes introduced a month prior to opening. The rehoming changes has resulted in animals being held for longer and the need to change the City's service provision to manage the impacts of the legislative changes and associated community expectations arising therefrom.

Whilst the City's facility complies with Code requirements to operate as a pound it is not designed to meet the animal welfare needs of animals being held in longer term care pending rehoming. It is anticipated that most Council's in NSW would have facilities suitable for short term care and not for operation as a longer term animal shelter.

(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

Pounds are by nature required to provide short term housing only. The Coffs Harbour pound was designed to meet and serve this purpose. The resulting impacts arising from the rehoming legislative

changes has resulted in a shift in the nature of pounds from a short term holding facility to a longer term shelter type service. The change in service is having flow on impacts that impact animal welfare. Holding animals for longer periods of time in an endeavour to rehome them in facilities designed as a pound is not ideal and causes detrimental impacts on the animals.

Whilst the legislation change may have been well intended, Council's are responsible for provision of pound facilities and in many cases are not established or resourced to operate animal shelters. An injection of significant funding will be required over the longer term to manage this change and fund the ongoing service implications unless significant other changes are made to reduce the burden on councils arising from managing and holding the current numbers of abandoned animals in the system.

(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

In simple terms there are more animals available than people to adopt them with animals being held for extended periods in Council pounds and Animal Rescue Organisations (ARO's). Solutions are needed to control this excess number in unwanted animals with the obvious being to introduce mandatory desexing and better manage authorised /non authorised animal breeders.

The existing Code of practice is suitable to meet the needs of a Council pound however if the intent is that Council's are to operate as animal shelters then a further review and associated funding is needed to manage and provide this service.

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

The unfettered breeding of animals, particularly cats, appears to exceed the number of people coming forward to adopt them. Animals appear to be abandoned/surrender in increasing numbers due to cost of living pressures, cost of having a pet (veterinary and care associated costs) and ability to accommodate them.

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

The increasing call for no kill Policies is an unachievable goal without significant other policy changes and measures to reduce unfettered breeding leading to ever increasing numbers of unwanted animals. Euthanasia is the only means to manage the increasing numbers. The call for the building of more kennels and shelters is not a sustainable solution.

The City is experiencing first hand, the impacts associated with an increasing number of unwanted animals and ARO's that do not have the capacity to provide longer term refuge. Despite longer holding times and active efforts to undertake direct rehoming from the City's pound facility, the sheer numbers and holding capacity limitations result in the need to euthanise unwanted animals.

Rehoming agencies do not have a mandatory requirement to accept animals and when at capacity simply stop their intake of further animals. This enables them to be supportive of a "No Kill" Policy. Council's by contrast have a legislative responsibility to continue accepting and managing

lost/stay animals and as a consequence will be overly represented in euthanasia statistics as opposed to many if not all rehoming agencies.

The behavioural assessment of animals is a necessary measure to minimise the risk of placement of potentially dangerous animals particular stray dogs being held at Council pounds with no knowledge of an animals previous history or behaviour. This however comes with the resourcing challenges of finding/training staff and investing the time required to undertake meaningful assessments. It is envisaged that Council's, in the main are not resourced to undertake behavioural assessments which are more aligned with the work undertaken by ARO's.

As advised above Council pounds are primarily designed and function to cater for short term holding of unclaimed animals and subsequent transfer to ARO's for longer term holding, observation and rehoming. The current constraints however are forcing Council's to hold animals for longer and requiring consideration to be given to behavioural aspects to manage risk exposure arising from subsequent involvement in direct rehoming from Council pounds. This is adding to the resourcing burden on Council's.

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

The unprecedented number and slow rate of animal placements is impacting the relationships between Council pounds and ARO's. It is considered the rehoming legislation has added to the tensions through increasing expectations that Council should introduce no kill policy's without clear means to reduce the numbers of unwanted animals or plans of how these animals can be cared for and managed. Building larger pounds and more animal shelters to care for an ever increasing number of unwanted animals is not a sustainable solution.

Current tensions can likely be attributed to the difference between the operating perspectives between a council pounds and an animal shelter – one has a statutory responsibility to provide short term care pending the return of a lost/stray animal to its owner whilst the other provides longer term care whilst trying to find a new home for an unwanted animal. There is an inherent conflict where the former may result in euthanasia whilst the latter will take all measures to prevent euthanasia.

The rehoming legislation has created expectations that Council's will do more to prevent euthanasia without supporting mechanisms and funding to assist.

(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 prolific breeding ability of cats is the single driver of numbers of unclaimed animals entering council pounds. Introduce measures that will reduce unplanned/managed cat breeding and the problem will reduce eg mandatory desexing of cats for sale/ provision of funding to support council's and volunteer organisations to conduct desexing programs.

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

The current Code for the design and operation of a Council pound is considered adequate to manage the intended short-term care of animals held in these facilities. The introduction of the rehoming legislation has had the unintended consequence of pounds effectively becoming longer term shelters pending the placement of unwanted animals. The difference in the purpose of each needs to be clearly understood and decisions taken on what role Council's are expected to undertake – if agreed

they are primarily required to provide a short term impounding service for lost and stray animals then euthanasia will continue to be an outcome of insufficient capacity in the systems to manage and care for unclaimed/unwanted animals.

(k) any other related matter

The large number of animals being held in Council pounds for longer periods is impacting on resourcing and the mental health of staff responsible for their longer-term care and subsequent euthanasia when required. Staff are also being exposed to increased negative community sentiment relating to care and euthanasia related issues.

The mental health pressures faced by animal care workers (similar to vets) is well documented with high rates of depression, anxiety and PTSD.