

**Submission
No 139**

INQUIRY INTO POUNDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Danielle Haase

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Danielle Haase
Founding Owner
Diesel and Blue Doggie Daycare & Grooming

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The Chair
Portfolio Committee No. 8
Hon. E Hurst MLC
Parliament of New South Wales
6 Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Re: Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry (PC8) on Pounds in NSW

Dear Ms Hurst,

I am writing to submit my thoughts and recommendations regarding the management of NSW pounds as part of the ongoing parliamentary inquiry. As a concerned citizen and advocate for animal welfare, I believe that there are significant opportunities to improve the current system to better serve both the animals in our care and our community. I first contacted your office in Oct 2023 but unfortunately have only now been contacted and feel it may be too late for my submission to be included.

I have significant experience with this issue through my work in the Petcare Industry in Regional NSW as well as my membership of the Orange City Council Companion Animals Committee. I am also a board member of the local business chamber, Business Orange and an owner of numerous domestic pets. My extensive experience relates mainly to dogs and have limited my thoughts to this only.

By this stage of your inquiry, I see you have already been exposed to numerous failures and issues within this industry. The problem is overwhelming and therefore I will aim to provide a succinct list of issues for your attention, and you are welcome to seek clarification if it has not yet been brought to your attention.

- 1) Despite legislation to the contrary, a significant quantity of puppies are *not* microchipped and registered by owners. There is a plethora of causes some of which are economic limitations, unaware of the law and actively choosing not to.
- 2) During Covid19, dog ownership grew by 400% and few thought about the consequences after lockdown ended. Many of those new puppies and owners did not attend puppy class which has exacerbated the poor behaviour of that demographic of now 1–3–year–old dogs. An interesting observation now on social media is that supply has saturated demand and what were once designer dogs for six-thousand dollars are now being offered at bargain-basement prices, but the breeders keep breeding!

- 3) Consistently closed pounds across the Central West due to overcapacity, as growing numbers of dogs are voluntarily given up for rehoming (either simply let out of the home gate and not claimed or dropped off to the pound cages in the middle of the night). Some causes of this influx have been surrendering due to unmanageable behaviour as mentioned above; economic downturn has resulted in owners unable to feed and care for dogs; the rental crisis forcing dog owners to take homes that won't allow dogs; Domestic Violence issues where dogs cannot be a priority and un-desexed dogs getting pregnant to ill-informed owners who can't or won't find homes for subsequent puppies.
- 4) Unregulated rehoming organisations on all levels run by well-meaning volunteers with various outcomes of success. These NFP organisations are splitting the available pool of charitable donations and government grants with little oversight of KPI's and improvement in the issues despite their efforts.
- 5) Higher than ever euthanasia rates across all pounds due to the recent growth in ownership and subsequent over capacity as mentioned above.
- 6) Although our new purpose-built Orange City Council pound appears to be a standout benchmark in a sea of substandard council run pounds, we could still be twice the size if funding and staffing would allow. I'm aware of many others in the region that lack funding, appropriate facilities, staffing and many other challenges leading to less-than-ideal management of surrendered dogs.
- 7) A Companion Animal Register that appears to be outdated, poorly maintained and more of a hinderance than an asset.
- 8) Low desexing rates of dogs who then go on to breed and produce more unwanted back yard puppies.

Above are the current issues I believe are a priority as a business owner and member of the community. I expect There are many more you would be aware of that I've not mentioned.

As a solution focussed operator, I have identified two key areas where I feel action can be taken to bring about positive change, without having to make major changes to organisations and legislation.

1. **Mandatory Microchipping Permission for Vets:** One crucial step towards improving the environment of pounds and stray animals is to ensure that all veterinarians have the legal authority *and* obligation to microchip pets during routine procedures. Microchipping is already legislated but not being enforced or policed. By microchipping all animals we significantly increase the chances of lost or abandoned animals being reunited with their owners or at the very least having a recorded history (name, origin, breed). This simple yet effective measure would enhance accountability and streamline the process of identifying and returning pets to their homes. Currently these important stakeholders in the Petcare community are not able to enforce this legislation, and if an owner declines the offer of microchipping the Veterinarian cannot insist.

- 2. Community Education Campaign on Dog Ownership Laws:** Many pet owners are unaware of their responsibilities and obligations under the law, particularly regarding microchipping and registering their pets with the local council. Therefore, implementing a comprehensive community education campaign through all mediums concurrently including free to air TV, social media, and print media is essential. This simple campaign should focus on raising awareness about the importance of microchipping, registering pets, desexing and adhering to relevant regulations. By empowering residents with knowledge and understanding, we can foster a culture of responsible pet ownership and reduce the number of animals entering council pounds due to negligence or ignorance. As an experienced communications manager I see this approach as step one in a multi-staged campaign to raise awareness of every demographic.

I believe these two initiatives represent low-hanging fruit that can be implemented relatively quickly with minimal resources. By addressing these fundamental issues centrally, we can lay the groundwork for a more humane and efficient system for managing pounds in NSW. Education and microchipping will in combination with other more detailed solutions begin to decrease administrative heavy tasks from NSW pounds and ensure a state-wide expectation benchmark.

In addition to these recommendations, I would like to express my interest in facilitating a visit to the Orange City Council pound for the PC 8 committee members. As a Petcare business owner with a unique viewpoint, I believe that firsthand experience of the environment will provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities for improvement. Furthermore, (if not too late) I welcome the opportunity to be called on to give evidence to the committee based on my firsthand experience, offering a perspective that is not solely that of a council or rehoming organization, but rather a pragmatic assessment of the broader picture.

In conclusion, I urge the parliamentary inquiry committee to prioritise these recommendations and consider them in their deliberations. By working together to enact meaningful reforms, we can create a safer, more compassionate environment for animals and communities across NSW.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Danielle Haase