

**Submission  
No 3**

**INQUIRY INTO 2025 INQUIRY INTO THE OPERATION OF  
THE APPROVED CHARITABLE ORGANISATIONS UNDER  
THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS ACT 1979**

**Name:** Ms Louise Webb  
**Date Received:** 12 September 2025

---

# **2025 Inquiry into the operation of the approved charitable organisations under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979**

## **Submission**

Thank you for the opportunity of providing comment to this inquiry.

RSPCA NSW appears to me to be an organisation headed in completely the wrong direction. I feel it has lost its way, and as such has let down the community and the animals which should be at the core of its activity.

It gives me no pleasure to make these comments, but I feel they must be said, in the hope that a much-respected Australian institution can get back on track.

I base my views on personal experience. I was a volunteer with a regional branch of RSPCA NSW between 2013 and 2022. I served as branch president for six years, and also as canine coordinator for four of those years. We rehomed over 900 animals during that time, mostly cats and dogs, but also pocket pets and even a horse. The work was hard and emotionally draining but also hugely rewarding. Our team built up a strong support network within the region, and was aided by generous donors impressed by the dedication of our volunteers and the animal outcomes achieved by them.

As far as our team was concerned, the downward slide began with the closure of Nowra Shelter in 2018. From that point, branches faced increased centralisation from the Sydney HQ, with growing requirements for burdensome reporting and administrative tasks, including the preparation of “business plans” for the branch. I should add that our branch was described by a senior officer at RSPCA NSW as a “star” and a “model”, so this intrusive pressure was not designed to fix problems we were facing. We were successfully rehoming animals in short timeframes, had a healthy and improving financial position, and were complying with mandated policies and procedures.

We took many animals from the local council pound until, without warning or consultation, this was no longer permitted. In 2021, RSPCA NSW advised all councils that they must use a central portal for requesting the organisation to accept impounded animals. This portal was unwieldy and not at all user-friendly, but feedback about it from our branch was not responded to.

Beyond that, we were also required to film standardised behaviour tests for all dogs, and submit them to the Sydney head office for approval before the animal could be advertised for adoption. The process involved securing two qualified volunteers and two additional dogs to be used in the test, often travelling a long distance for a suitable venue, then uploading the video to a central drive, and writing up a report. Despite the

logistical problems, we managed to comply with this requirement and were still rehoming large numbers of animals, but it was becoming clear that the focus of the organisation seemed to be on raising money (this was a constant theme) and protecting against any legal action. One particular case sticks in my mind: a dog surrendered for what the owner called “aggressive” behaviour, despite the animal not having attacked or bitten any person or other animal. Even though this dog sailed through her behaviour assessment, we were forced to have her euthanased. This struck me as a focus on protecting against possible future legal action rather than on the best interests of the dog.

Branches were also being asked to contribute money to head office for various projects, even though the money had been raised locally. Many of our donors had specified that they wished their contributions to be used in the local area.

As the bureaucratic style increased, policies would be devised without consultation, and handed down to branches for implementation. On several occasions, our branch attempted to provide feedback and constructive suggestions for improving such policies, but these ideas appeared to be dismissed without consideration. It was frustrating for me to see the views of people with extensive career and life experience ignored, when they in fact had much to offer the organisation.

As president, I invited the NSW President and/or other Board members to visit us, and see first-hand both the challenges facing a regional branch as well as our achievements. I never received any response.

By 2022, I felt sufficiently uncomfortable with the direction of the organisation that I left. I handed over with good wishes to the new regime an efficient, well-financed and functioning branch. Within eighteen months, the branch had ceased to exist, having become a “Supporter Group”, unable to rehome animals and struggling to find volunteers.

A similar story took place in Cooma, where a branch of over 40 years’ standing, and responsible for finding new homes for thousands of animals, has morphed into a Supporter Group which does not rehome animals.

I look at all this with a sense not of grievance, but bewilderment.

I find this change of direction by RSPCA NSW inexplicable. By stopping branches rehoming animals, the organisation has cut off a key, low-cost means of bringing much-needed help to both people and animals in many regional areas. Moreover, branches with foster carers were able to take in animals seized locally by inspectors; what is

happening now? For example, what does an inspector do in Bega with a mother dog and eight puppies seized for their safety? There is a shelter in Illawarra, but that is four and a half hours' drive away, and, moreover, it is likely that there will not be room at that shelter. All the while, the inspector is not available to attend to other, possibly urgent, cruelty cases.

Branches which rehomed animals also funded desexing programs, ran community outreach events, and supported their own work with locally raised monies. To close off this beneficial arm of the organisation seems to me a seriously backward step, and a significant contributing factor to the declining number of animals taken in by the organisation, as shown in the statistics below.

I made a comparison of the annual reports of RSPCA NSW 2017-18 and the one before the committee now, 2023-24, and found what appears to me to be an organisation retreating from its core business. For example:

2018's report stated that the organisation had:

- 9 shelters
- 4 vet hospitals
- 2 care centres
- 24 volunteer branches
- 3 support groups
- 1 rehabilitation facility
- 30 Petbarn adoption centres

By 2024, the comparative list reads:

- 5 shelters
- 3 vet hospitals
- 2 behaviour and rehabilitation centres
- 1 education centre
- 46 Petbarn locations

So – four shelters closed, one vet hospital closed, and no information that I could find about how many branches or support groups are now in place.

(I should add that the use of Petbarn to rehome cats and kittens is in my view a positive innovation, and I am pleased to see the number has grown in recent years, given the challenge of the huge numbers of cats and kittens needing rehoming.)

Other comparisons that I made are:

- 2018 – 30,411 animals taken in; 2024 – this number has shrunk by more than half to 13,082.
- 2018 – donations represented 21% of revenue, down to 18% in 2024.
- 2018 – live outcomes for animals were 74%; in 2024 this had fallen to 62%.

These statistics should alarm the committee about the direction in which RSPCA NSW is headed.

I cannot understand why the organisation has decided to step back so far from what I and, I think, the broad community, see as its basic responsibilities to animals. My impression, as stated, is that the focus has been principally on fundraising and legal protection. However, this has had a serious impact on the ability of the organisation to help animals, and has resulted in a fall in the percentage of donations received. I note also that actual donations fell from \$8,705,000 in 2023 to \$8,125,000 in 2024, in spite of the seemingly ceaseless advertising for donations that now characterises RSPCA NSW.

It may be that stopping branches from rehoming was due to concern regarding legal risk, although with the checks and balances in place, it seems to me that the risk was much the same as rehoming from shelters. Moreover, I note that the Animal Welfare League NSW maintains an active network of branches that successfully rehome felines and canines (without the heavy-handed central control that was utilised by RSPCA) so I am at a loss to understand the reason for RSPCA's actions.

Another issue I noted via comparison of this year's annual report with previous years is that, in 2018, it was reported that 31 inspectors investigated 15,451 cruelty complaints, an average of 498 per inspector. The 2024 report shows that 17,093 complaints were investigated by 53 inspectors, an average of 323 complaints per inspector. I know that these inspectors work very hard at an extremely demanding job, but I suggest the committee may wish to look further into this issue.

I should say at this point that my view has always been, and remains, that RSPCA and any other organisation that undertakes work that otherwise would fall to the government, such as policing the provisions of the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act*, should be fully recompensed for the entire cost of the task. They should not have to rely on one-off grants, but be assured of appropriate recurrent funding as long as they are contracted to do the work.

I conclude by saying that I am disappointed and saddened by the changes made in recent years by RSPCA, and hope that the board and CEO will reconsider some decisions, in the interests of animals, and that of the organisation's own reputation.