



"Animal Welfare by the experts – those who keep, care for and breed animals."

www.animalcareaustralia.org.au

21st June 2021

Hon Mary-Anne Thomas
Minister for Regional Development
Minister for Agriculture

Dear Minister,

Re: Grants for rehoming of pets

Animal Care Australia (ACA) is a national incorporated association established to lobby for real animal welfare by those who keep, breed and care for animals. ACA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this review and we thank you for including us as a key stakeholder.

ACA would like to respond to your recent announcement of grants for the rehoming of pets. ACA disagrees with this strategy as this is creating a rehoming industry. rather than educating people so that animals do not require rehoming in the first place.

Although ACA supports rehoming of animals we do not think this is an appropriate way of dealing with the rehoming issue. Rather we must focus on REDUCTION in the number of animals requiring rehoming by educating people so that animals do not require rehoming in the first place.

People need to be educated to ensure they make informed decisions when taking on the responsibility of pet ownership, including the costs, time, personal commitment, etc.

Government should be actively working with animal keeping and breeding clubs to encourage broad understanding of responsible breeding and responsible buying. .

ACA has recently responded to the Taskforce for rehoming of pets and our submission is attached which outlines our position on this matter.

ACA recommends the focus of the Victorian Government should be funding strategies to reduce the number of animals requiring rehoming.

ACA looks welcomes the opportunity to provide further clarification on this submission should you require it.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Donnelly".

Michael Donnelly
President, Animal Care Australia.
0400 323 843

Taskforce on rehomming pets in Victoria

2021



Animal Care Australia



JUNE 21 2021

**ANIMAL CARE AUSTRALIA
STAKEHOLDER SUBMISSION**

Taskforce on rehoming pets in Victoria

Animal Care Australia Inc. (ACA) represents the interests of all hobbyist and pet animal keepers nationally. Our members are comprised of most major animal keeping representative bodies including those representing dogs, cats, birds, horses, small mammals, reptiles, and fish.

ACA has concerns with the use of surveys such as the one utilised for this Taskforce for a range of reasons. Primarily, the survey questions together with the themes the taskforce is considering all appear to point to encouraging and building a more significant rehoming industry. The majority of the survey appears to be aimed at data collection and very few questions seek out or request actual solutions to the issues of foster care, shelters, and rescue organisations.

Although ACA supports rehoming of animals we do not think this is an appropriate way of dealing with the rehoming issue. Focusing on and allocating large sums of funding on rehoming of pets is akin to trying to decide ‘what to do with the horse after it has already bolted’. The Victorian Government’s time and money would be far better utilised concentrating on the REDUCTION in the number of animals requiring rehoming in the first place.

The Taskforce should be concentrating on determining the source and reasons why animals are requiring to be rehomed and make the appropriate recommendations to the Victorian Government to alleviate the problem as well as to ensure the best welfare outcomes for those animals who do require rehoming can be met.

In light of the above statements ACA has the following responses to the Taskforce’s primary aims:

1. how to improve the welfare and survival rates of cats and dogs requiring rehoming while maintaining community safety
2. a regulatory framework for the rehoming of pets in Victoria
3. how to improve transparency in the movement of animals between shelters, pounds, Community Foster Care Networks and rescue groups

Animals that require rehoming generally come from **Irresponsible Breeders** and **Irresponsible Buyers**.

Maintaining the welfare of many dogs and cats that have been irresponsibly bred is a controversial issue and the constant rhetoric of animal rights ideologies that ALL animals MUST be saved places further burdens on those organisations already struggling to manage the welfare needs of their charges. Not every animal can be saved and it should be strongly noted that it can be in the best welfare interests of the animal to be euthanised. This decision should not be taken lightly however it equally should not be dismissed as Point 1 seems to imply is the intention.

Currently most rescue, foster and rehoming services are run by unqualified volunteers with no regulations that oversee or govern the organisations – outside of their requirement to meet the requirements of the Animal Welfare Act to provide food, water, shelter etc.

All organisations should be required to:

- Be a registered organisation.
- Staff and volunteers must be suitably trained in understanding animal behaviour and the appropriate mechanisms for potential rehabilitation/re-training where a suitable and desirable outcome can be achieved. (Currently not even the RSPCA has managed to achieve this adequately – with many Inspectorate unqualified and placing many animals into shelters or their own facilities with no logical reasons)
- Ensure the decision to rehome an animal is made following an appropriate assessment. This process should not be taken within the first few days of an animal's arrival as the behavioural instincts of the animal would not highlight the true nature of that animal.
- Animals should not be deemed dangerous simply because a government has determined there is a 'dangerous breed'. Breeds are not dangerous – those who have kept them and not catered for their needs have created an 'ill-equipped' animal. Poor training etc is the culprit and re-training can often turn an animal's behaviour around.
- Transparency of all organisations should be a requirement of being a registered shelter/rehoming service. Records should be made available for review by the government, along with the ability for an Independent review at any time if deemed necessary. The movement of animals between shelters and other services should be recorded via an online database that tracks the whereabouts of the animal while in that organisation's care.

Victoria has created its own problem with the influx of animals requiring to be rehomed.

The introductory of poorly thought through breeding regulations, restrictions on the numbers of dogs and cats that can be kept (without excess animal permits) and the introduction of number restrictions within the Planning Laws that have been capitalised by Local Councils have all resulted in a sharp decrease in:

- * Registered (responsible) breeders
- * healthy puppies and kittens
- * breeding females available to other breeders for genetic diversity (leading to the decline in healthier genetics)

With the restriction of only 10 females per property many shelters & rescues have been unable to take on additional animals — resulting in some needing to be euthanased to maintain numbers as per permits. Despite assurances that services & organisations would be exempt - changes to local council codes have seen many 'boarding & rescue' facilities close or run on limited numbers.

The introduced legislation in Victoria has seen a drastic increase in:

- X — unhealthy puppies & kittens at veterinary surgeries & shelters*
- X — complaints relating to scammers and non-supply of animals where deposits were paid
- X — unregistered breeders (essentially 'puppy farms' — by the very definition)

X — prices skyrocketing for all breeds of puppies and kittens (pre-covid19) with exorbitant prices during Covid19.

(* Source: <https://www.smh.com.au/business/consumer-affairs/penned-in-victorians-pining-for-a-pet-drive-cruel-smuggling-trade-20200731-p55h6n.html>)

Another major contributor are **Irresponsible Buyers** who are predominantly uneducated about the needs of the desired pet and their responsibilities to meet all the ongoing added requirements set down by Local Councils and governments such as annual registration fees, mandatory microchipping fees and so on all lead to animals going from desirable to unwanted.

⇒ **ACA encourages government to provide initiatives to the public that ensure people of lower income communities can maintain their animals' welfare needs — such as concessions for veterinary treatment, de-sexing costs, food and housing.**

Initiatives and incentives are vital in changing societal behaviour. 'Reward the good — punish the bad'. Too much focus is on punishing the bad and very little reward is available for those people doing the right thing.

Local Councils should be providing concessions for veterinary treatment, de-sexing costs, food and housing.

People who register their pets should not be charged a fee for the 'privilege' instead when a pet is registered the owner should be rewarded, with a voucher discounting the cost of their next vaccination or microchipping the pet.

⇒ **ACA implores government to provide more adequate funding for educating the public on their responsibilities as pet owners including supporting & promoting animal keeper associations & clubs.**

Educating the public is a key step into changing behaviour. Education needs to be themed with the aim of making pet owners more aware of their responsibilities. In general, most people are unaware that there are Codes of Practice that must be followed. They know that animal cruelty laws exist, but do they know what is written in those laws?

Education needs to start in our schools (primary-school). Our children are usually the one's seeking to own a pet and they are also the keepers and breeders for the decades that follow. Introducing basic pet care and the responsibility of pet ownership skills to children will enhance the understanding of pet ownership within the community and more specifically will help overcome many barriers within multi-cultural communities, where often pet welfare and ownership has been inherited from different societies with a vastly different understanding of how animals should be kept.

Teaching children throughout their primary and higher education levels about responsible buying and the need to ensure you buy from a reputable breeder is crucial in this era of technology where not-so-credible sellers are attracting the new generations that live in the technological space .

4. how to improve information and advice for scientific organisations and Animal Ethics Committees to support the successful rehoming of dogs and cats used in research and teaching
5. how to further develop and implement the successful rehoming of dogs and cats used in research and teaching.

The inclusion of Scientific Research Animals in this Taskforce is totally unnecessary. Welfare and animal management of these animals already protected by sufficient regulations and codes of practice – there should not be any further requirement on these institutions.

Rehoming of scientific animals where viable is supported by ACA and should be the direct responsibility of the research institution. This is to be a requirement addressed in the research application together with training and other procedures specified to enable effective rehoming. If rehoming is not viable then the research institution must justify why this is the case. ACA does not oppose humane euthanasia when the merits of the research are deemed ethical.

Conclusion:

- ❖ ACA welcomes the need to regulate the shelter and rehoming organisations that currently exist in Victoria and this must include the RSPCA Vic.
- ❖ ACA has major concerns with the approach and perceived direction this Taskforce is taking. We do not support the further development or expansion of a shelter/foster/rehoming industry.
- ❖ The Animal Rights ideology of ‘adopt – don’t shop’ is incredibly short-sighted. Shelters are predominantly full of irresponsibly bred and owned animals and this mantra only supports that industry further.
- ❖ If people stop buying animals from responsible and reputable breeders that leads to a decrease in available animals which creates a stronger market which in turn raises the dollar value of each animal. Simple economics – less animals – higher demand – higher prices. These higher prices create a greed among those who see an opportunity to ‘make a quick buck’ and these breeders do not register, do not follow stronger welfare practices and don’t care whether there is a code of practice – reducing the health and welfare of the animals.
- ❖ The animals are not raised with the necessary temperament or care needed to find their new forever homes. They quickly end up being too much to handle and are abandoned or handed in for rehoming.
- ❖ Unregulated shelters & rescues that rely on volunteers are not required to be trained in animal behaviour and may incorrectly assess animals for rehoming (often unrealistically avoiding the use of euthanasia as a necessary solution) and equally incorrectly assess the new owners capabilities and needs – all resulting in the animals returning to a shelter industry within a short period of time.

-
- ❖ This cycle needs to be broken by providing adequate funding for educating the public on **responsible breeding** and **responsible buying**.

ACA looks forward to further consultation and welcomes the opportunity to provide further clarification on this submission should you require it.

Kind regards,



Michael Donnelly
President, Animal Care Australia.
0400 323 843