

29th January 2024

Portfolio Committee 8 – Customer Service

RE: Inquiry into pounds in New South Wales – Supplementary Submission

Animal Care Australia would like to thank the Portfolio Committee 8 for providing us with the opportunity to provide testimony at this Inquiry.

From other testimony throughout the Inquiry, it is clear that one of the biggest issues within the Pound system and is more prevalent within rescues is the lack of education and qualifications of staff and volunteers. Individuals with no qualifications are being relied upon to accurately understand animal behaviours and animal welfare needs and to correctly identify different breeds in order to correctly record the animals present at that facility.

Animal Care Australia researched recent vacant position criteria for NSW Council Pounds to find the following general commonalities in advertised positions:

DUTIES AND KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- Participate and contribute to an effective and productive team.
- Assist in Asset Management including daily cleaning and maintenance of Shelter office and animal facilities
- Animal Management including animal care, animal transport, euthanasia, and rehoming
- Provide a high level of customer service
- Cash handling and receipting of Shelter fees and charges
- Companion animal control including processing the impounding, and where necessary, the microchipping of animals.

THE APPLICANT

You will be confident and comfortable in handling a diverse range of domestic animals, demonstrating proficiency in their care, cleaning, feeding, and maintaining their hygiene upon their arrival at the animal shelter.

Additionally, you will have good computer literacy, administration skills and a demonstrated commitment to providing high levels of customer service. You will be a team player with excellent communication skills who continually looks for positive ways to contribute to team culture.

TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN THIS ROLE

- Previous work-related experience in animal handling
- Previous work-related experience in cleaning and maintenance of animal housing facilities
- Customer Service experience and high-level communication and conflict resolution skills
- Demonstrated experience following procedures and Work Health Safety requirements

It is clear to us from the above that the required skillset and the tasks that will be undertaken do not adequately align, and Animal Care Australia noted an overall absence of any ‘required qualifications’ and only requested ‘previous experience.’ While previous experience is great, there is currently a huge staffing shortage, and this opens the door for persons with extremely limited experience to be hired by very desperate Councils. More disturbingly there is an obvious lack of experience in or an understanding of animal behaviour, and yet these facilities are tasked with assessing animals for rehoming and/or euthanasia based on their behaviour!

Animal Care Australia acknowledges some Councils are seeking people who have completed some appropriate accredited courses, however, that does not appear to be a requirement of Councils to do so.

Animal Care Australia noted that most rescues did not even require previous experience, just a willingness to work with the animals.

Therefore, Animal Care Australia requests this Committee includes a recommendation that those working within Pounds, Shelters, and Rescues MUST hold a level of qualifications in addition to experience. The attached appendix shows accredited courses currently available. Additionally, government could develop specific accredited courses for the different facilities.

Animal Care Australia currently has a registered training organisation (RTO) as a member, and we would welcome the opportunity to partner with the NSW Government to develop appropriate accredited courses.

Animal Care Australia would also like to draw your attention to one of our submission recommendations:

- The NSW Impounding Act (1993) Section 11 (1) be amended to remove the requirement of immediate impounding of an animal.

Animal Care Australia now notes the Impounding Act (1993) has been replaced by the Public Spaces (Unattended Property) Act 2021. Section 21:

21 Authorised officers to ensure animals taken to place of care

(1) If an authorised officer takes possession of an animal the officer must ensure the animal is—

(a) taken to a place of care, or

(b) returned to the responsible person for the animal.

(2) To avoid doubt, an animal taken to a place of care continues to be the possession of the authority that appointed the authorised officer while the animal is at the place of care.

(3) An authority may nominate a place of care as the place of care to which an authorised officer appointed by the authority may take an animal the officer takes possession of.

Animal Care Australia has concerns that most Councils have not adopted the requirements of Section 21 (1) (b) – to return the animal to its owner instead rather they are still taking the animal directly to the pound/shelters (place of care). Perhaps that is because there is a level of ambiguity in Section 21 (1).

It is our recommendation that this be reviewed and re-phrased in a manner that requires the authorised officer (and Council) to make attempts to return the animal to its home (responsible owner) BEFORE taking it to the pound/shelter (place of care). Microchip readers provided to all authorised officers would provide for immediate identification of the animal and owner.

A lack of microchip would then permit the authorised officer to take that animal into the shelter, where further attempts to locate the owner can be made.

This submission can be publicly listed.

We look forward to the opportunity of providing further information to this Committee should you require it.

On behalf of the Animal Care Australia Committee,



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President, Animal Care Australia.
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Appendix: Education opportunities Shelter and Pound

The following are accredited courses and as highlighted there is also an option for the government to create their own if necessary.

ACM20121 Certificate II in Animal Care: An entry level course perfect for those undertaking lower-level jobs such as kennel attendant also may be an option for foster carers.

ACM30122 Certificate III in Animal care Services: Includes behaviour units so good for those working with difficult behaviours and those wanting to understand the basics of modification.

ACM40322 Certificate IV in Animal Behaviour and Training: Includes complex units in behaviour and behaviour modification for those wanting to rehabilitate complex behaviours and understand why we see the behaviours we do in animals.

ACM40222 Certificate IV in Facility Management: A must for those managing shelters and pounds and any animal facility, it both upskills in the management of animals but also people management including compassion fatigue which is a huge industry issue.

Skill Sets

ACMSS00030 Animal Shelter Worker Skill Set

This skill set provides individuals with the skills and knowledge required to work in animal shelters or holding facilities.

ACMBEH301 Identify behaviours and interact safely with animals

ACMGEN305 Provide advice on companion animal selection and general care

ACMGEN311 Maintain and monitor animal health and wellbeing

ACMGEN303 Assess the welfare status of an animal

ACMINF301 Comply with infection control policies and procedures in animal care work

ACMBEH302 Provide enrichment for animals

ACMSS00023 Animal Welfare Management Skill Set

This skill set is designed to provide individuals with skills and knowledge for higher level responsibilities in managing animal welfare. It involves assessing and managing the welfare of animals within a workplace and promoting animal welfare principles, policies, and procedures to staff.

AHCLSK404 Implement and monitor animal welfare programs

ACMGEN303 Assess the welfare status of an animal