



DRAFT REPORT

Rehoming of Companion Animals in NSW



*Prepared for
NSW Office of Local Government
September 2022*

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Executive summary

The NSW Office of Local Government (OLG) is undertaking a review of rehoming practices in NSW (Review). This involves an examination of current rehoming practices and factors driving euthanasia rates.

The overarching objectives in undertaking the above tasks are to **reduce unnecessary euthanasia of companion animals** and to **increase successful rehoming of companion animals**.¹ The Review has also considered ways to improve the efficiency of the system, which will enable these outcomes to be achieved at a lower cost.

This Draft Report sets out our understanding of the outcomes for companion animals, drivers of outcomes for companion animals and preliminary recommendations.

A large number of stakeholders have provided their input into this review through workshops and discussions, written submissions and provision of information (see Attachment C). This includes councils, animal welfare and animal rehoming organisations, regulatory bodies, veterinary practitioners, and many others. We thank everyone for their significant contributions. We would like to particularly acknowledge Dr Jacque Rand for her extensive input into the review.

In order to finalise the Review, we are seeking input on the findings and recommendations in the Draft Report.

- We are seeking feedback to ensure the recommendations we have made are workable for councils and possible unintended consequences.
- We are seeing feedback on whether there are other actions that could contribute to the objectives of the Review.

Written submissions will be accepted to Friday 21st October to ciesyd@thecie.com.au. We are conducting a series of stakeholder consultations in mid-October with councils, rehoming organisations and other organisations involved in rehoming of companion animals. If you would like to be involved please contact ciesyd@thecie.com.au.

Overall system for rehoming of companion animals

The overall system for rehoming of animals involves council pounds, animal welfare organisations and animal rehoming organisations. Animals can enter the system at any of these organisations, although in practice the majority enter through council pounds

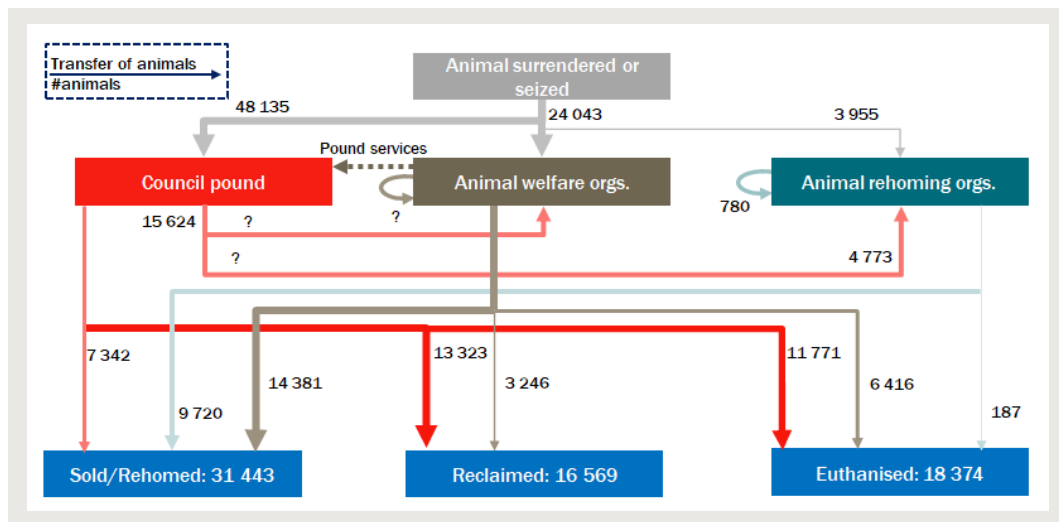
¹ We note that some stakeholders consider the term killed to be more appropriate than euthanised. We understand the rationale for this view and continue to use euthanised to be consistent with the broader literature on companion animal management.

and animal welfare organisations. An overall snapshot of the organisations involved and the movement of animals is shown in chart 1.

In 2019/20, 17 000 animals were euthanised in NSW through council pounds, animal welfare organisations and rehoming organisations. Approximately two third of animals euthanised are cats and one third are dogs.

The total cost of companion animal management in NSW for all LGAs is estimated to be approximately \$43m annually. This covers only the costs to councils and includes costs to pounds, animal management officers and programs. There are additional costs to rehoming organisations and animal welfare organisations.

1 Overall system for rehoming of companion animals (data for 2019/2020)



Note: † estimate based on data from RSPCA pounds.

Data source: CIE based on OLG data for council pounds, OLG data for animal rehoming organisations and annual report data for animal welfare organisations.

Patterns for cats and dogs into and out of pounds

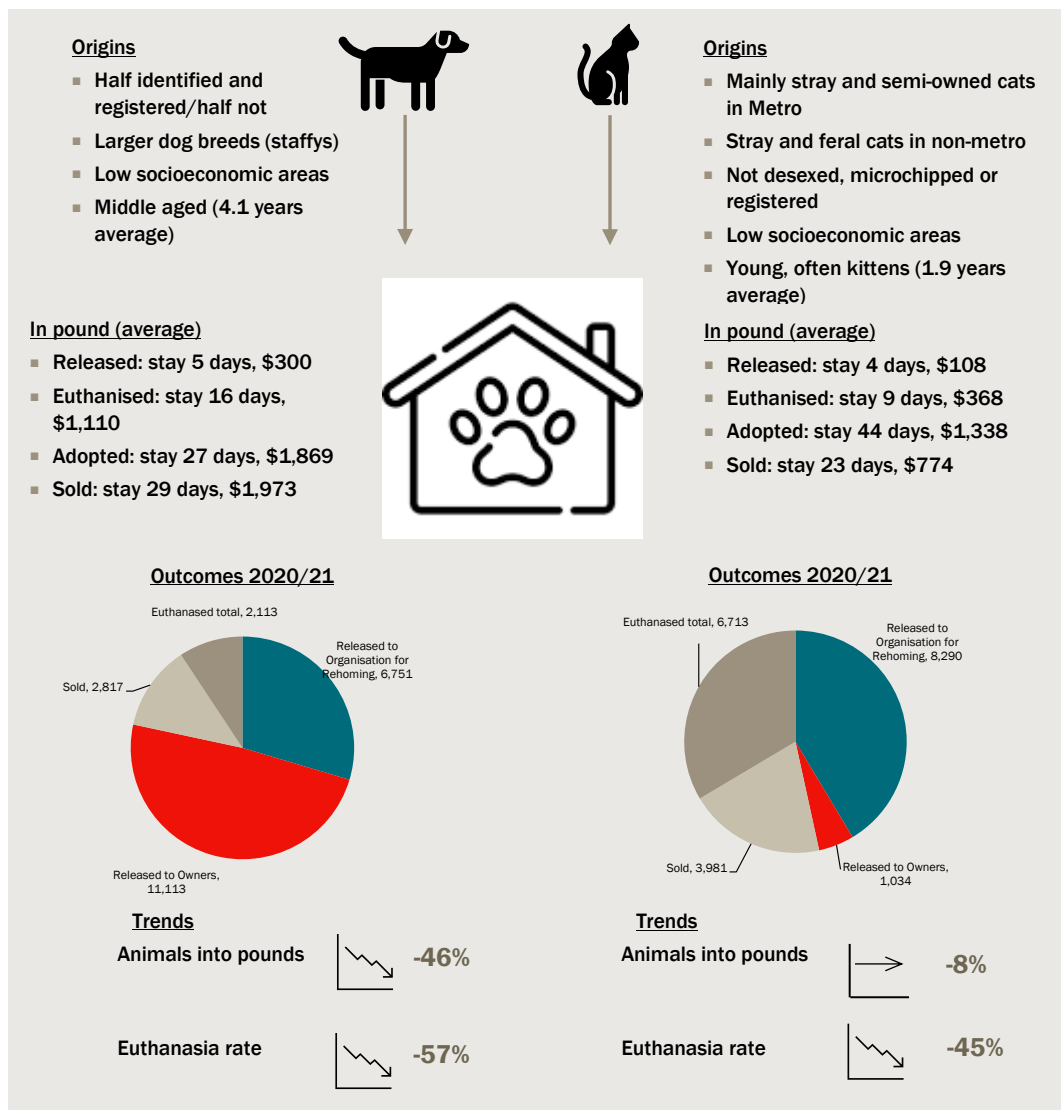
A summary of the sources, time in pound, outcomes and trends for cats and dogs is shown in chart 2. The patterns are very different for cats and dogs.

Dogs entering pounds are predominantly larger breed dogs of adult age (not puppies), particularly from low socioeconomic areas. Keeping dogs in pounds cost more than cats, for a given outcome. A high share of dogs are returned to owners (about half) and about 9 per cent of dogs entering pounds are euthanised. There has been a significant downward trend in the number of dogs euthanised in pounds over the past decade, reflecting both: reduced intake into pounds; and lower euthanasia rates.

Cats entering pounds are predominantly owned, semi-owned (also referred to as community cats) and unowned domestic cats (also referred to as stray cats) with no identification, as well as some feral cats. Cats are more likely to come from regional areas and from low socioeconomic areas and to be kittens. Very few cats are returned to owners, with most either being rehomed/sold or euthanised. Euthanasia rates for cats are

much higher than for dogs. Input of cats into pounds is stable across NSW, reflecting reduced intake in metropolitan areas and increased intake in regional areas. Euthanasia rates of cats are trending down, but overall euthanasia rates are substantially higher than for dogs.

2 Pattern of cats and dogs entering and leaving pounds



Note: Trends based on 2012/13/ to 2020/21.
Data source: As detailed in report.

Key factors associated with higher euthanasia rates for cats and dogs are identified in table 3.

3 Factors that increase the likelihood of being euthanised for a cat or dog entering a pound

| Cats | Dogs |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Very young (an infant) or older | Particular breeds (including: Staffordshire terriers, Mastiffs, Rottweilers, Shar pei) |
| Regional or rural area | Not desexed |
| Not desexed | Surrendered or transferred from another pound |
| Not microchipped | Older dogs (10+ years) |
| Drop off or surrendered | |

Source: CIE.

Successes and problems for animal rehoming in NSW

There have been substantial improvements in animal rehoming in NSW, particularly for dogs. These successes reflect changing community attitudes to animals, which have driven councils, rehoming organisations and others to invest considerable effort into improving outcomes for animals entering the pound and rehoming sector.

Councils and rehoming organisations have developed and implemented a range of successful strategies to achieve more successful companion animal management. Key to these strategies are that they are centred around community engagement and reframing the role of rangers from enforcement to support. Examples of successful strategies include:

- returning animals — rangers return animals before impounding when possible, complete a change of address form with the owner and issue a free pet tag
- social media — managing dedicated social media to de-stigmatise pounds and pound animals
- desexing — subsidised and targeted desexing programs
- microchipping — rangers attending owner's home for microchipping
- helping owners keep their animals — rangers helping owners with dogs that have come under notice for barking or escape issues. This includes training and advice on how to manage dogs with behavioural issues
- building relationships between councils and rehoming organisations.

However, despite successes, there remain a large number of companion animals that are being euthanised in NSW, particularly cats. Evidence on comparisons to other jurisdictions is scant, as other jurisdictions do not collect data to the same degree as NSW. The evidence that has been made available to the Review suggests NSW is not at the lower end of euthanasia rates. There are also very different outcomes for companion animals across parts of NSW.

The main reasons cited in collected data for euthanasia of cats is that they are feral/infant, while the main reason cited for dogs is behavioural. Few animals are identified as being euthanised because they were suitable for but unable to be rehomed (less than 1000 animals in 2020/21). It is evident that assessments of reasons for euthanasia of animals are subject to considerable differences across councils and over time. For councils where euthanasia rates have improved, part of this would be due to a reduction in euthanasia of cats previously classified as feral/infant and dogs classified as euthanised because of behaviour. This means that the overall euthanasia level of 17 000 animals (2019/20) is a better indicator of the scale of the problem than only including animals euthanised because they were unable to be rehomed.

Stakeholder consultations provided wide ranging views of the problems remaining with pounds and the rehoming sector. A number of people provided submissions indicating negative past experiences with individual pounds, related to animal welfare outcomes and euthanasia of animals. Given the significant improvement in outcomes over the past decade, it is difficult to know how broadly these issues remain prevalent.

Key problem areas noted by stakeholders included:

- councils and others are all interpreting the *Companion Animals (Rehoming Animals) Amendment Act 2022* (Rehoming Amendment Act) differently in terms of what this means for feral cats and dogs whose behaviour makes them unsuitable for rehoming
 - some organisations are euthanising ‘feral’ cats on the basis that keeping these for 7 days would be cruel. Others are keeping these animals for 7 days and following the protocols in the legislation. There are significantly different implicit definitions about feral and behaviour across stakeholders
 - some organisations are euthanising dogs that are considered dangerous, while others are seeking to declare dogs dangerous where incidents occur within a pound
 - many councils view that their actions are opening them up to risks as they are not clear if they are consistent with legislation
 - some councils have reduced their collection of animals (such as cat trapping) because of the requirement to keep animals for longer
- many stakeholders noted issues with the operation of the registration system and other fee arrangements, including the clarity of this and incentives created. This included:
 - confusion for animal owners about what identification and registration are
 - costs of registration leading people to (i) exit the official system through not registering their animal at all, and (ii) be unwilling to collect their animal from the pound
- many stakeholders noted different council interpretations of their roles and responsibilities in animals accepted into pounds, and councils noted that they did have substantial discretion to not accept animals
 - this is particularly the case with cats, where some councils are not accepting cats (as cats are allowed to roam, there is often no reason for the council to impound cats)
 - a number of other groups indicated that this had consequences for them, such as vets and rehoming organisations

- many stakeholders noted issues with the accountability across the rehoming system, including:
 - council accountability for welfare standards in pounds
 - rehoming organisation accountability for successful rehoming and animal welfare standards, particularly around their understanding of infectious disease
- many stakeholders noted a high administrative burden in relation to record keeping, and ambiguities around roles and responsibilities
- there were different views about who was best placed or what processes were required in order to be able to classify an animal as unsuitable for rehoming
- most stakeholders noted funding as a key issue, for councils, rehoming organisations and animal welfare organisations.

We also note that there are specific issues for rural and remote councils because of their lack of capacity in areas such as behaviour assessment and veterinary services and in their distance to people taking in rehomed animals.

Draft recommendations

The draft recommendations of the Review, based on the evidence presented in this report, are as follows.

- 1 The NSW Government to establish an ongoing funding arrangement for a community cat program which councils can apply to and could be run in partnership with the RSPCA or a similar experienced body. This would be targeted to councils with the highest cat intakes. Councils would need to show that they can target the areas with the highest problems and to report on outcomes. The expected cost of a program that would reduce cat euthanasia by one third is \$2 million per year on average, initially run over a five year period. Councils would benefit financially from this through reduced pound intakes. However, rather than seeking co-funding from councils, this cost saving would allow councils to redirect resources into increasing adoption rates for remaining animals.
- 2 The NSW Government provide a definition for types of cats, with a model definition below:
 - a) Domestic cats, which have some dependence (direct or indirect) on humans, categorised into:
 - i) Owned cats — identified with and cared for by a specific person and are directly dependent on humans. They are usually sociable, although sociability varies.
 - ii) Semi-owned cats — directly and intentionally fed or provided with some other care by people who do not consider they own them. These cats are of varying sociability, with many socialised to humans, and they may be associated with one or more households.
 - iii) Unowned cats — receive food from humans indirectly such as from food waste bins. They are indirectly dependent on humans, may have casual and

temporary interactions with humans, and are of varying sociability, including some who are unsocialised to humans.

- b) Feral cats, which can be distinguished from domestic cats because they are unowned, unsocialised, have no relationship with or dependence on humans, survive by hunting or scavenging, and live and reproduce in the wild. Feral cats do not receive food from humans directly or indirectly.
 - c) Infant cats, which is a cat in the first stage of existence and that is not able to feed and fend for itself or is of such age that keeping it within a pound facility would place the cat's welfare at risk
- 3 For annual information reporting to OLG, the NSW Government make the following revisions:
- a) the reason for euthanasia currently classified as 'feral/infant' be split into 'feral' and 'infant'
 - b) euthanised cats and dogs are entered into a future Companion Animal Register (CAR) if they are not already identified so that all animals are tracked within this system. These animals would have an identifier but would not actually be physically microchipped
 - c) approved rehoming organisations report separately for cats and for dogs
 - d) consideration be given to reporting of animal complaints
 - e) consideration be given to being able to prepare automatic reports to councils on rehoming outcomes from rehoming organisations through the redeveloped CAR
- 4 Administrative arrangements for rehoming organisations be adjusted to:
- a) allow approved rehoming organisations limited access to the CAR to minimise administrative requirements for rehoming organisations and councils
 - b) remove the requirement to provide information when an animal changes from one foster home to another. Animals would be linked to the rehoming organisation
- 5 Behaviour assessment arrangements be revised so that:
- a) councils are able to undertake assessments of whether an animal is suitable for rehoming before advertising to rehoming organisations
 - b) councils are able to euthanise animals where there are work health and safety concerns for keeping the animal
 - c) training programs for behaviour assessment for council staff are supported by NSW OLG, which could include financial support and coordination.
- 6 The identification and registration system be revised to:
- a) remove the annual permit fee for non-desexed cats
 - b) waive registration fees for cats through Community Cat programs similar to the waiving of registration fees for rehoming organisations
 - c) waive registration fees for animals that are returned to owners from pounds, where this is needed as an incentive for return to owner
 - d) make registration (i.e. payment) for an animal occur at the same time as identification. This would mean people selling or giving away animals would be

responsible for registration. Note that we would like stakeholder feedback on whether this would reduce animals being microchipped

- e) registration payments would be equal and include a voucher for desexing that goes with this fee, valid for a year. This allows for the desexing incentive to be retained, and identification and registration payment to be combined. The desexing would therefore not be as time limited as is currently the case
 - f) require any animal sold or given away to be registered
- 7 OLG should send messages to all dog and cat owners via text (or email) to remind them to update any relevant information on the CAR — this is already being advanced through the rebuild of the Companion Animal Registry
 - 8 Make it mandatory for animals rehomed or sold through council pounds or rehoming organisations to be desexed, unless there is a cruelty or health reason not to.

We seek feedback from stakeholders to further develop these recommendations, including potential problems and unintended consequences.

Other findings

We consider that revised standards for pound facilities to ensure animal welfare standards should be developed. This is not a formal recommendation as it is not within our terms of reference. However, it has been raised by numerous stakeholders.

Activities that we are not currently recommending but could be considered further in the future include:

- increased regulation of rehoming organisations alongside government funding for these organisations, or a grant program if euthanasia rates for animals remain steady or increase
- government support in terms of loan guarantees or loans for major new pound facilities
- increasing the rights of tenants to have pets, similar to changes made in Victoria and Queensland
- introducing a rewards system for people who register their pet in partnership with pet stores.

We seek feedback from stakeholders on whether there are practical ways to implement actions in these areas that could contribute to the objectives of the review, and their benefits and costs.

Activities not recommended in relation to the Review's objectives

Activities that **we do not recommend** in relation to the objectives of this review:

- mandatory no kill policies for councils and other shelters
- cat containment policies
- more stringent requirements for breeders of animals for sale

- continuation of amendments that place onus for rehoming on rehoming organisations rather than councils
- TNR and culling programs for unowned and semi-owned cats, and
- development of standardised behaviour assessment tools.

These activities may meet other objectives. However, they are not recommended in relation to the objectives of this review.

We seek feedback from stakeholders on our conclusions that these activities will not materially achieve the objectives of the review or have sufficiently negative other consequences that they are not supported.

1 Introduction

The NSW Office of Local Government (OLG) is undertaking a review of rehoming practices in NSW (Review). This involves an examination of current rehoming practices and factors driving euthanasia rates. The Review will be undertaken in consultation with metropolitan, regional, and rural councils as well as NSW rehoming organisations, to collect and analyse information and data to better understand euthanasia rates and trends. It will examine breeding, desexing and rehoming practices and their impacts on euthanasia rates. The CIE is assisting OLG in this review.

The objectives of the Review are to:

- provide the NSW Government with an overview of the current legislative and policy framework supporting the rehoming of companion animals in NSW and how the NSW framework and outcomes compare to other Australian jurisdictions
- provide an overview of existing practices and euthanasia rates in NSW council pounds and provide detail of sector challenges and best practice
- provide recommended strategies to further reduce euthanasia rates, encompassing:
 - possible legislative reform
 - improvements to impounding processes
 - education and capacity building, and
 - better data collection and reporting.

The overarching objectives in undertaking the above tasks are to **reduce unnecessary euthanasia of companion animals** and to **increase successful rehoming of companion animals**. The Review will also consider ways to improve the efficiency of the system, which will enable these outcomes to be achieved at a lower cost.

We note that some people prefer the term killed to euthanised. While we understand this, we continue to use the term euthanasia as this is the common term used in the literature in relation to companion animals, regardless of the reasons for an animal being put to death.

Previous Reviews

In the last decade there have been two major reviews into Companion Animals, upon which this Review builds.

- In 2012, the NSW Companion Animals Taskforce² provided 22 recommendations aimed at:

² <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/Companion-Animals-Taskforce-report-to-Ministers.pdf>

- reducing the number of cats and dogs that are impounded and euthanised
 - improving the regulatory framework around the breeding, sale and management of cats and dogs, and
 - promoting socially responsible pet ownership to the whole community
- In 2015, the Parliament of New South Wales conducted an Inquiry into Companion Animal Breeding Practices in New South Wales³, and provided 34 recommendations to improve breeding practices, as well as touching on many other areas of regulation of companion animals.

This Review will particularly address Recommendation 5 of the Parliamentary Inquiry:

The Committee recommends that the NSW Government undertakes a comprehensive study of euthanasia rates to determine: the breed and source of animals entering pounds and those being euthanised; whether current litter restrictions impact on abandonment and euthanasia rates; what information should be recorded to allow euthanasia rates and trends to be better understood; and the impact of rehoming and low kill policies on euthanasia rates.

Process of review

The Review has and will continue to take a consultative approach consistent with the NSW Guide to Better Regulation. The Guide sets out a best practice approach to policy development and evaluation. Although this project is not a Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) or a Better Regulation Statement (BRS), we propose to apply this approach to the review.

This approach is simply a formal framework to help policy-makers think through the impacts of policy proposals in a disciplined and comprehensive way. This helps to ensure that policy decisions are based on best practice regulatory principles (see box 1.1) and the best available evidence, resulting in better policy outcomes for the community.

1.1 Better Regulation Principles⁴

Principle 1: The need for government action should be established. Government action should only occur where it is in the public interest, that is, where the benefits outweigh the costs.

Principle 2: The objective of government action should be clear.

Principle 3: The impact of government action should be properly understood by considering the costs and benefits (using all available data) of a range of options, including non-regulatory options.

Principle 4: Government action should be effective and proportional.

Principle 5: Consultation with business and the community should inform regulatory development.

³ <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/listofcommittees/Pages/committee-details.aspx?pk=161>

⁴ NSW Government, *NSW Guide to Better Regulation*, October 2016, p. 6.

Principle 6: The simplification, repeal, reform or consolidation of existing regulation should be considered.

Principle 7: Regulation should be periodically reviewed, and if necessary reformed to ensure its continued efficiency and effectiveness.

The steps involved in the review are:

- release of an Issues Paper to stakeholders, available at <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/councils/responsible-pet-ownership/rehoming-practices-review/>
- release of a Draft Report to stakeholders in September (this report), and
- release of a Final Report to the NSW Government following feedback from stakeholders.

Contribution of stakeholders

A large number of stakeholders have provided their input into this review through time for workshops and discussions, written submissions and provision of information. This includes councils, animal welfare and animal rehoming organisations, regulatory bodies and many others. We thank everyone for their contribution. Particular thanks go to Dr Jacquie Rand for her extensive input into the review.

Structure of this report

This report continues as follows:

- Chapter 2 sets out a summary of rehoming arrangements for Companion Animals in NSW, covering:
 - the regulatory framework and key organisations involved
 - arrangements in other jurisdictions
 - costs and funding
 - a summary of outcomes

It is clear that cats and dogs have very different issues from a rehoming perspective. Given this, the report separately sets out for cats and dogs:

- problems with the current system (chapter 3 and 6)
- the range of options to achieve the objectives of the Review (chapter 4 and 7)
- an assessment of options (chapter 5 and 8).

Following this, the report considers specific issues for rural and regional councils, as well as issues raised in relation to recent amendments made to the Companion Animals Act.

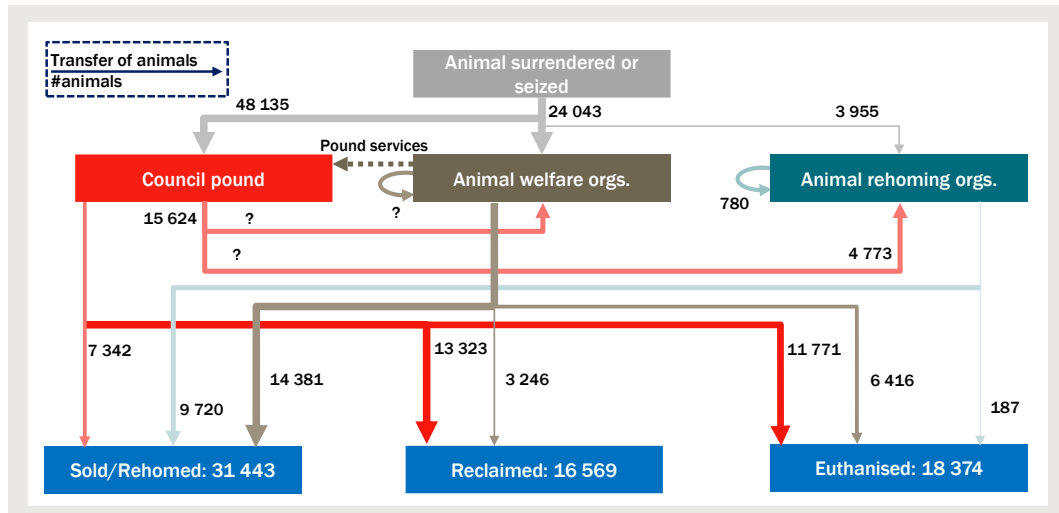
Chapter 11 summarises the recommendations of the Review for cats and dogs.

2 Rehoming arrangements for companion animals

Rehoming of animals in NSW

The overall system for rehoming of animals involves council pounds, animal welfare organisations and animal rehoming organisations (these organisations are explained further below). Animals can enter the system at any of these organisations, although in practice the majority enter through council pounds and animal welfare organisations. An overall snapshot of the organisations involved and the movement of animals is shown in chart 2.1.

2.1 Transfer of animals between pounds and rehoming organisations in 2019/2020



Note: [£] estimate based on data from RSPCA pounds.

Data source: CIE based on OLG data for council pounds, OLG data for animal rehoming organisations and annual report data for animal welfare organisations.

Companion Animals Amendment (Rehoming Animals) Bill

On 23 February 2022, a Private Members Bill, the Companion Animals Amendment (Rehoming Animals) Bill passed Parliament and was assented to on 4 March 2022. The Amendment Act seek to improve rehoming outcomes for pet cats and dogs in the care of NSW council pounds and shelters.

Key changes include:

- The need for councils to give written notice to at least 2 rehoming organisations that the animal is available for rehoming and will remain available for at least 7 days from the date the notice is given.

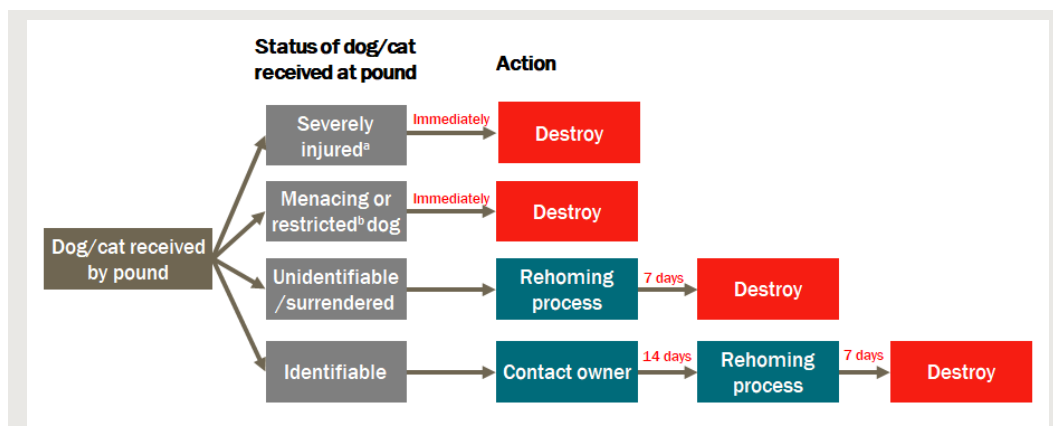
- The need to take reasonable steps to advertise on a webpage or through a social media platform that the animal is available for rehoming.
- New record-keeping requirements in relation to:
 - the identification of animals either rehomed or destroyed, and
 - in the case of animals that are destroyed, the actions a council took to rehome that animal.

The changes standardise the rehoming process and create a consistent approach to rehoming across all NSW councils. It also aims to foster the development of closer partnerships with local rehoming organisations that will enable the development of a system that works best for both parties, including shared, cost-effective arrangements for the collection of animals from pounds.

Process for pounds to destroy an animal

Since the implementation of the Amendment Act, the process councils must follow before they destroy an animal has been prescribed. Chart 2.2 illustrates this process for the various statuses of animals the pound would receive. There are provisions in the *Companion Animals Act 1998* retained to deal with severely injured⁵ cats and dogs and dangerous / menacing / restricted dogs whereby they can be destroyed immediately.

2.2 Pathway for NSW pounds to destroy an animal



Note: a: Opinion needs to be provided by a veterinary practitioner, b: if a proposed declaration the owner has 7 days to object, holding days are statutory minimum and may be longer at council discretion

Data source: CIE based on NSW Companion Animals Act.

Pound system

Under the Impounding Act, a local council may establish a public or private pound for the holding of companion animals surrendered to the council, or seized by an authorised officer of the council.

⁵ In the opinion of a veterinary practitioner, is so severely injured, so diseased or in such a physical condition that it is cruel to keep the animal alive (section 64B(8)).

Councils are required to impound and care for companion animals in a way consistent with animal welfare laws when they choose to seize them and when a member of the public surrenders them. These responsibilities create the positive obligation on councils to maintain pound facilities.

Councils may establish and run their own pounds or enter into arrangements with other organisations to do so on their behalf, such as the RSPCA, another animal shelter or rehoming organisation. Regardless, the relevant council retains responsibility for all companion animals impounded by, or on behalf of, that council.

Importantly, councils will still be able to establish pounds when the *Impounding Act 1993* is repealed following commencement of the new *Public Spaces (Unattended Property) Act 2021*, potentially later in 2022. This is because the definition of pound under section 5 of the Companion Animals Act enables councils to establish a pound at “*any [sic] place approved by a council for the purposes of the holding of animals for the purposes of this Act*”.

Animal welfare organisations

Animal welfare organisations are registered charities which, among other things, assist council pounds in the management of companion animals. They have been designated powers under the Companion Animals Act to receive dangerous, menacing or restricted dogs.

There are 3 registered animal welfare organisations in NSW:

- Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals NSW
- Animal Welfare League NSW
- Cat Protection Society of NSW Limited.

In addition, the RSPCA and Animal Welfare League NSW are able to investigate cases of animal cruelty under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act.

Rehoming organisations

Section 88B of the Act authorises the Office of Local Government (OLG) to designate an organisation as a rehoming organisation. The designation confers on the organisation certain privileges in relation to companion animals that it has in its custody for rehoming purposes. These privileges provide financial relief to those organisations to assist them in their endeavours to find new homes for unwanted or abandoned companion animals and to encourage members of the public to acquire such animals from those organisations rather than from other sources.

To encourage members of the public to adopt desexed companion animals from rehoming organisations, no registration fee is payable for the registration of the animal. This places rehoming organisations on the same footing as is the case where such animals are acquired from council pounds.

Rehoming organisations must report to the OLG annually information relating to animals received and transferred out, with particular detail for any animal euthanised under its care.

There are currently 87 rehoming organisations registered with the OLG⁶.

Other relevant arrangements

In addition to the Companion Animals Act, animal welfare is also protected through the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979* (POCTAA) and the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Regulation 2012*.

The protections under POCTAA extend to vertebrates, including any amphibian, bird, fish, non-human mammal, reptile, and to crustaceans at places where food is prepared/offered for retail consumption. A distinction is drawn between stock animals, being cattle, horse, sheep, goat, swine, poultry, and domestic animals, being wholly or partly tame animals or animals being tamed to serve a purpose for humans. Stock animals are generally afforded less protection due to a number of exemptions in POCTAA.

Identification and registration arrangements for companion animals

In NSW, microchipping and registration are a separate process.⁷

- All cats and dogs (other than exempt cats and dogs) must be microchipped by 12 weeks of age or before being sold or given away (whichever happens first).
- All cats and dogs (other than exempt cats and dogs) must be registered by 6 months of age.

Exemptions from microchipping and lifetime registration requirements include:⁸

- cats born before 1 July 1999 and ownership has not changed;
- a working dog used for tending stock on a rural property; or
- a greyhound currently registered under the Greyhound Racing Act 2017.

Microchipping arrangements

A microchip is implanted beneath an animal's skin by an Authorised Identifier (vet or qualified implanter). The main purpose of microchipping is for identification of the animal and owner.

⁶ <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Rehoming-Organisations-07042022.pdf>

⁷ OLG website, <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/public/dogs-cats/nsw-pet-registry/microchipping-and-registration/>, accessed 9 September 2022.

⁸ OLG website, <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/public/dogs-cats/nsw-pet-registry/microchipping-and-registration/>, accessed 9 September 2022.

After an animal has been microchipped, a Permanent Identification Form (P1A form) is completed. The information is entered onto the Companion Animal Register (either by the Authorised Identifier or the local council) and a Certificate of Identification is issued to the owner. The information recorded on the Companion Animal Register includes:

- the microchip number
- the Authorised Identifier's details
- the animal details (including: species, gender, name, breed, date of birth, colour, identifying marks, address where usually kept, and a secondary address)
- the owner's details, including:
 - name of organisation (where relevant)
 - owner's name
 - contact details (including: phone numbers, email address, home and postal addresses).

The owner is required to notify any local council within a specified period, of a change in circumstances to update the Companion Animal Register (see table 2.3).

2.3 Changes of circumstances

| Change of circumstance | Notification period |
|--|---|
| Change of ownership (either sold or given away) | Within 14 days |
| Change of address | Within 14 days |
| Change of any other animal details (e.g. the animal is desexed) | Within 14 days |
| A court declaration that a dog is menacing or dangerous is made or revoked | Within 14 days |
| The animal dies | Within 28 days |
| The animal is missing for more than 72 hours | Within 96 hours after the animal went missing |

Source: NSW Companion Animals Register Permanent Identification Form, <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Permanent-identification-P1A-Form.pdf>, accessed 9 September 2022.

There is no regulated charge for microchipping. However, the Authorised Identifier would charge a commercial fee for the service.

A failure to have an animal microchipped can attract a fine.⁹

- In most circumstances, a fine can be applied through either:
 - a fixed penalty notice (\$180); or
 - a court can award a maximum penalty of \$880.
- For restricted dogs or dogs that have been declared dangerous:
 - a fine of \$1320 can be imposed via a fixed penalty notice; or
 - a court may award a maximum penalty of \$5500.

⁹ OLG website, <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/public/dogs-cats/nsw-pet-registry/microchipping-and-registration/>, accessed 9 September 2022.

Registration arrangements

The main purpose of the registration requirements are to:

- provide councils with a source of revenue to fund companion animal management activities
- provide an incentive for owners to have their animals desexed by the relevant date (owners pay more for animals that are not desexed).

Companion animals can be registered in the following ways:

- online via the NSW Pet Registry
- over the counter at the local council

The animal must first be microchipped. The Lifetime Registration Form (R2) includes the following information:

- microchip number
- species
- desexed status
- type of registration
- dangerous dog (yes/no)
- currently lost animal (yes/no)
- the owner's name.

Lifetime registration fees are shown in table 2.4.

- Dogs that are not desexed by 6 months of age pay an additional fee of around \$165 (or \$205 for dogs owned by eligible pensioners), unless written notification from a vet that it should not be desexed is provided.
- Cats that are not desexed pay the same lifetime registration as desexed cats, but must also obtain an annual permit, which attracts an annual fee of \$85 (see table 2.5 below).

2.4 Lifetime registration fees

| Registration Type | Fee for animal desexed by the relevant age ^a | Fee for animal not desexed by the relevant age |
|--|---|--|
| Registration fees for dogs | | |
| Dog | \$69 | \$234 |
| Dog (eligible pensioner rate) | \$29 | \$234 |
| Dog – Desexed (sold by pound/shelter) | \$0 | n.a. |
| Dog – Not Desexed (recognised breeder) | n.a. | \$69 |
| Special cases | \$0 | \$0 |
| Registration fees for cats | | |
| Cat | \$59 | \$59 |

| Registration Type | Fee for animal desexed by the relevant age ^a | Fee for animal not desexed by the relevant age |
|--|---|--|
| Cat (eligible pensioner rate) | \$29 | \$29 |
| Cat – Desexed (sold by pound/shelter) | \$0 | n.a. |
| Cat – Not Desexed (recognised breeder) | n.a. | \$59 |
| Other fees | | |
| Registration late fee | \$19 | |

^a Includes where there is a written notification from a vet that the animal should not be desexed.

Note:

Source: OLG website, <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/public/dogs-cats/nsw-pet-registry/microchipping-and-registration/>, accessed 9 September 2022.

In addition to the lifetime registration fee, annual permits are required for some animals, including:

- cats that have not been desexed by 4 months of age
- dangerous dogs
- restricted dogs.

The annual permit fees are shown in table 2.5.

2.5 Annual permit fees

| Permit type | Current permit fee |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Cat not desexed by 4 months of age | \$85 |
| Dangerous dog | \$206 |
| Restricted dog | \$206 |
| Permit late fee ^a | \$19 |

^a Payable if the permit fee has not been paid 28 days after the date on which a permit was required to own the companion animal.

Note:

Source: OLG website, <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/public/dogs-cats/nsw-pet-registry/microchipping-and-registration/>, accessed 9 September 2022.

A failure to register an animal can also attract a fine as follows:¹⁰

- a fine issued with a fixed penalty notice is \$330; or
- a court can award a maximum penalty of \$5500 or up to \$6500 if a dog is a restricted dog or a declared dangerous or menacing dog.

Arrangements in other jurisdictions

Across Australia, all states and territories except for the Northern Territory, have a legislative approach to animal welfare and management. However, there is significant

¹⁰ OLG website, <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/public/dogs-cats/nsw-pet-registry/microchipping-and-registration/>, accessed 9 September 2022.

variation across policies for each jurisdiction. See below for a summary of key similarities and differences:

- All jurisdictions have conducted a review and amended state animal welfare and management legislation in the past 5 years.
- The statutory holding period for an animal seized or accepted by the pound is relatively similar across jurisdictions, with NSW having the longest period. NSW is the only jurisdiction to have obligations to try to rehome an animal
- Across jurisdictions, euthanasia is permissible when an animal is trespassing on protected land (farm or nature) and when a dog is aggressive. Some jurisdictions allow for immediate destruction of feral and infant cats. Queensland stands alone in requiring the destruction of a regulated dog as soon as practicable after surrender. Reporting of euthanasia is only required in NSW and Western Australia, with Victoria considering a review into this topic
- There is considerable variation in the desexing policies across jurisdictions, for both species and age of animal. Each jurisdiction has incentives for desexed animals, such as cheaper registration. Most jurisdictions enforce a limit on litters per bitch and queen, however Victoria is the only jurisdiction to limit the number of fertile females for a breeder
- Victoria and Western Australia enforce a rule on pet shops that they can only sell dogs and cats that are being rehomed. NSW and QLD encourage pet shops to form relationships with rehoming organisations
- All jurisdictions require registration for dogs whereas for cats there are considerable differences. Some jurisdictions delegate this decision to local government. NSW is the only state to mandate a one-time only registration, where other jurisdictions require either annual confirmation of details or a recurring payment. Some councils in Western Australia may offer between 1 year and lifetime registration

Costs and funding arrangements

Overall costs and funding

The total cost of companion animal management in NSW for all LGAs is estimated to be approximately \$43m annually¹¹. This covers only the costs to councils and includes costs to pounds, animal management officers and programs. There are additional costs to rehoming organisations and animal welfare organisations. Each local government is responsible for companion animal management within their jurisdiction. Their responsibilities relating to companion animals include seizing, holding, euthanising, selling or otherwise transferring ownership¹² of the animals under care. Councils can elect to run their own pound, engage a contractor to run their pound operations or enlist the companion animal management services of another LGA.

¹¹ See appendix B for detailed calculations

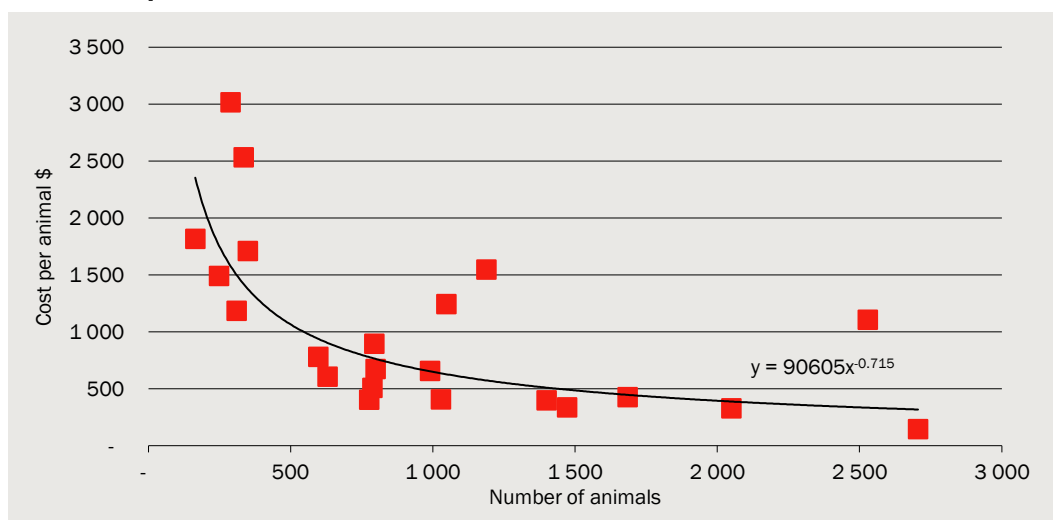
¹² According to section 64B of the Companion Animals Act, councils must contact 2 rehoming organisations to rehome a suitable animal before euthanasia of the animal.

Across the sample of council impounding data, we observe lower costs per animal for pound services as the number of animals per pound increases (see chart 2.6). Total costs for companion animal management comprise of fixed and variable costs.

Key drivers of fixed costs are the animal holding facility and staff costs. Construction of an animal holding facility can be highly capital intensive, for example see the new animal holding facility for Blacktown City Council, which is estimated to cost \$30m with space for 135 dogs and 230 cats¹³. Staff costs are also a significant contributor to fixed costs, for example Liverpool City Council¹⁴ incurs \$850 000 annually on 6 full time equivalent employees and Wagga Wagga Council¹⁵ incurs \$313 000 on total staff costs annually.

Variable costs are driven by the number of days an animal stays within care as well as any medical treatments the animal requires. Animals require food and supervision as well as in some cases medication and behavioural training to increase their prospects for rehoming.

2.6 Cost per animal and number of animals



Note: Estimation based on a sample of pound data for 22 councils

Data source: CIE, Council annual reports

Rehoming organisations alleviate the cost burden to councils through accepting animals from them or through the public directly. In the financial year ended 2020, 10 329 animals were received across 58 accredited rehoming organisations¹⁶. On average, animals were in care for 63 days. Of these animals, 9 720 were rehomed, 12 escaped, 187 were euthanised and 363 were transferred to another rehoming organisation or died in

¹³ Blacktown City Council, accessed 12/09/2022 <https://www.blacktown.nsw.gov.au/About-Council/What-we-do/Transformational-Projects/Blacktown-Animal-Rehoming-Centre>

¹⁴ Liverpool City Council Annual Report (2021) page 62, https://www.liverpool.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/208187/Annual-Report-2021.PDF

¹⁵ Wagga City Council Annual Report (2021) page 27, <https://wagga.nsw.gov.au/the-council/planning-and-reporting/community-reporting/annual-reports>

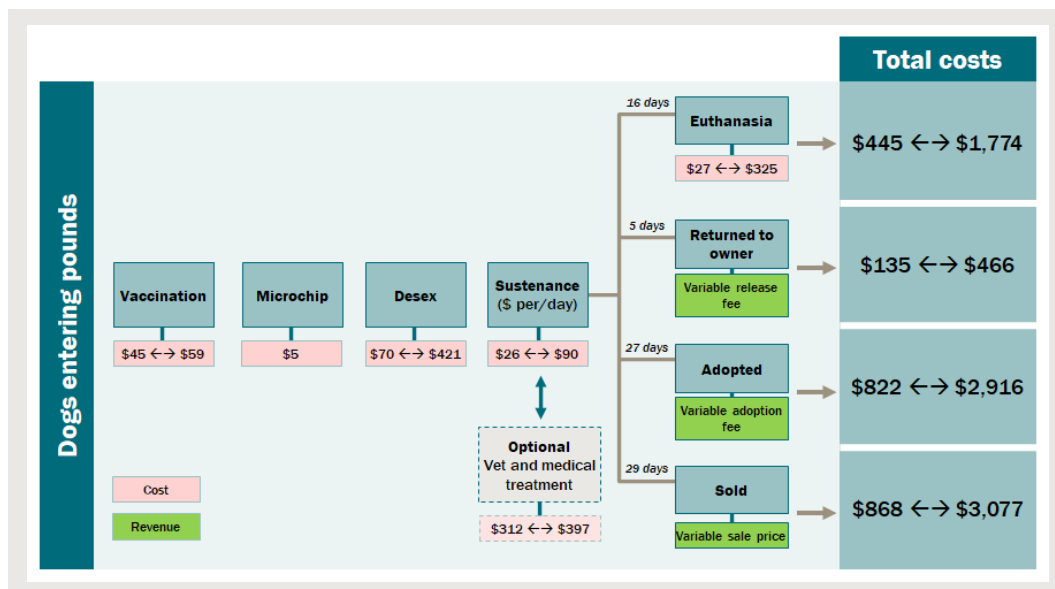
¹⁶ Accredited rehoming organisations annual reporting to OLG

care. If we assume the holding costs are the same as for the Animal Welfare League, which averages \$11 per day for an animal¹⁷, the total costs of holding these animals is \$7.2 million. This estimation is not reflective of the full cost, due to operations of the rehoming organisations being supported by volunteers and donations.

Cost drivers

When animals enter the pound system, they incur various costs during their time under care and additionally in preparation for adoption or sale. Animals held under care of the pound require at a minimum a shelter space as well as food and water. In some cases the animal will require medical treatments or assessments to prevent the spread of disease. Animals that will be adopted or sold are required to be microchipped and, in most cases, will be vaccinated and desexed by the pound. If the animal is declared as menacing or dangerous or is severely injured, it will be euthanised either at the pound or a vet. Chart 2.7 and 2.8 shows the range of costs that could be incurred based on the outcome for each cat and dog entering the pound. The least financial cost is typically where an animal can be returned to its owner. Costs for euthanising an animal are higher than this and depend on how long an animal is held. Costs for adoption and sale of an animal are substantially higher because of a longer period held in a pound and other activities such as desexing and microchipping.

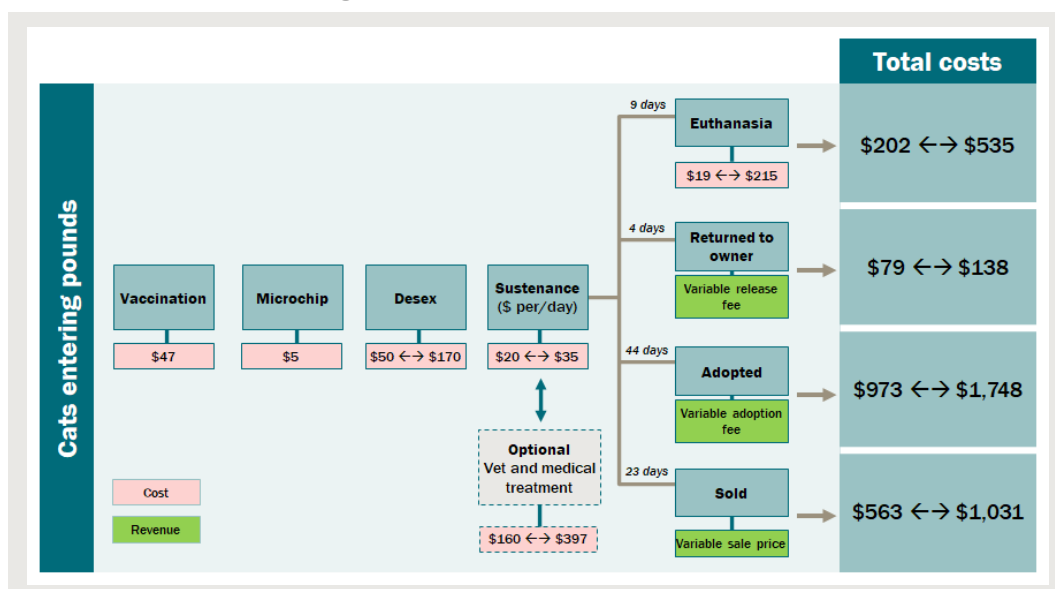
2.7 Costs of dogs entering pounds



Data source: CIE, stakeholder consultations feedback, council pound reports provided for selected councils to CIE.

¹⁷ ABC 2022, accessed 14 September 2022, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-09-08/sydney-dogs-and-cats-home-animal-shelter-pet-surrenders/101414942>

2.8 Costs of cats entering pounds



Data source: CIE, stakeholder consultations feedback, council pound reports provided for selected councils to CIE.

Holding costs

The biggest cost driver in the pound and rehoming system is the cost for holding an animal in an animal care facility. Councils charge a daily fee that ranges between \$26 and \$90 for a dog and \$20 and \$35 for a cat. This fee is intended to cover direct costs such as food and medical treatments, as well as indirect overheads such as supervision, administration and holding pen costs. It was consistently reported in consultation that the fee does not cover the actual costs of holding an animal, therefore we expect the cost could be greater than the fee charged. As the number of days an animal is kept at a holding facility can range between 4 and 44 (see table 2.9), the holding cost can quickly escalate to be the major cost of animals in the pound system.

2.9 Average days kept within a holding facility by outcome

| Outcome | Average days kept |
|-------------|-------------------|
| | Days |
| Adopted | 43.6 |
| Transferred | 24.6 |
| Sold | 23.1 |
| Euthanised | 9.1 |
| Released | 3.9 |

Note: A transferred animal can be moved to a rehoming organisation or another pound

Source: CIE, stakeholder consultations feedback, council pound reports provided for selected councils to CIE.

Table 2.10 shows the total cost and sustenance cost based on outcomes. The sustenance cost is the major cost for all outcomes.

2.10 Share of total care costs attributable to holding costs

| Outcome | Average total cost | Average sustenance cost |
|-------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| | \$ | \$ |
| Adopted | 1361 | 1 200 |
| Euthanised | 368 | 252 |
| Released | 108 | 108 |
| Sold | 797 | 636 |
| Transferred | 837 | 675 |

Source: CIE, stakeholder consultations feedback, council pound reports provided for selected councils to CIE.

Councils can transfer an animal to a rehoming organisation, who will hold the animal at their own facility or place it in a foster care home. The holding costs for the animal will significantly decrease, as these organisations have reduced overheads and operating costs. Estimates provided by Animal Welfare League¹⁸ report that their shelters cost approximately \$14 per day for a dog and \$8 per day for a cat. (This is well below estimates from pounds.) These organisations will rehabilitate, when required, an animal so it is able to be rehomed. The length of this process is highly dependent on the health and behaviour of the animal, some stakeholders reported for some animals this can take years.

Alternatively, a rehoming organisation can place an animal in foster care. Some animal rehoming organisations have a network of homes who are able to care for an animal while it is waiting to be adopted. The Animal Welfare League advised that a typical stay in a foster home costs 7 times less than an animal shelter.

When an animal is adopted, the rehoming organisation can recover an adoption fee, and are exempt from registration fees. The rehoming organisation is only exempt from registration for 12 months, while a person adopting a desexed animal pays no registration fee. It was noted during consultation that the adoption fee is not sufficient to cover the costs of holding the animals. Organisations rely on donor contributions to maintain operations. When the animal requires medical treatment, the rehoming organisation is liable for the costs of the procedure.

Desexing costs

The second highest cost driver is the cost of castrating or spaying an animal. There is a considerable difference in cost based on the size and type of animal. A small dog can cost between \$70 and \$90 whereas a large dog greater than 50kg can cost up to \$380. Cats are substantially cheaper to desex, ranging between \$50 and \$110 with no difference based on size. Desexing an animal is an important procedure which can help suppress the supply of unwanted animals, as well as decrease aggressive tendencies in animals which can make them more attractive as a pet.

¹⁸ ABC (2022), Future unclear for Sydney Dogs and Cats Home shelter after government funding request denied, accessed 9 September 2022, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-09-08/sydney-dogs-and-cats-home-animal-shelter-pet-surrenders/101414942>

Euthanasia costs

Euthanasia can incur significant costs when it is undertaken by a vet compared with a registered euthanasia officer at the pound. Vet costs for euthanasia of a dog range between \$130-\$325 whereas if the procedure is performed in house it can cost between \$20-\$50 plus a body disposal fee of \$7-\$48. Vet costs for euthanasia of a cat range between \$40-\$215 while in house costs range between \$12-\$26 plus disposal. Euthanasia is a necessary procedure when it is inhumane to keep an animal alive due to pain and suffering associated with its condition, or the prospect of no rehoming suitability based on its behaviour or past violent behaviour.

Health assessments

When an animal is received at a pound, a health assessment is undertaken. This health assessment can include vaccinations, flea and worm treatments as well as treatments for canine and feline transmissible diseases. This assessment can cost up to \$397 for a dog and \$320 for a cat, however they are not required to be undertaken for each animal that enters the pound. If an injured or stray animal is taken directly to a vet, the vet may be required to undertake these assessments and treatments and be required to bear the full cost. Performing health assessments can detect transmissible diseases and help prevent outbreaks within a holding facility. In addition, increasing the health of an animal can increase its rehoming prospects.

Microchipping

In NSW, all cats and dogs, other than exempt cats and dogs, must be microchipped by 12 weeks of age or before being sold or given away. If a pound accepts an un-microchipped animal, it will microchip the animal before allowing it to be released. Microchipping is a relatively low cost procedure which costs councils approximately \$5 to undertake themselves. Cats and dogs that are microchipped are more likely to be released to their owners than those without. It is important to note that identifying the owner of a microchipped animal is only possible when the owner's details are up to date in the Companion Animal Register.

Incidence of costs

When an animal is delivered to a pound, the council is responsible for all costs relating to releasing the animal, selling the animal or euthanising the animal. The council recovers costs for this process through charging fees for releasing an animal and selling the animal. Release fees are set to be cost recoverable, however are only recoverable if the owner agrees to collect the animal. Sale fees are generally set to the price for a certain animal based on gender, breed and age. Therefore, the sale price is not reflective of the costs in preparing the animal for sale, e.g. desexing, deworming and microchipping and the days held at the pound.

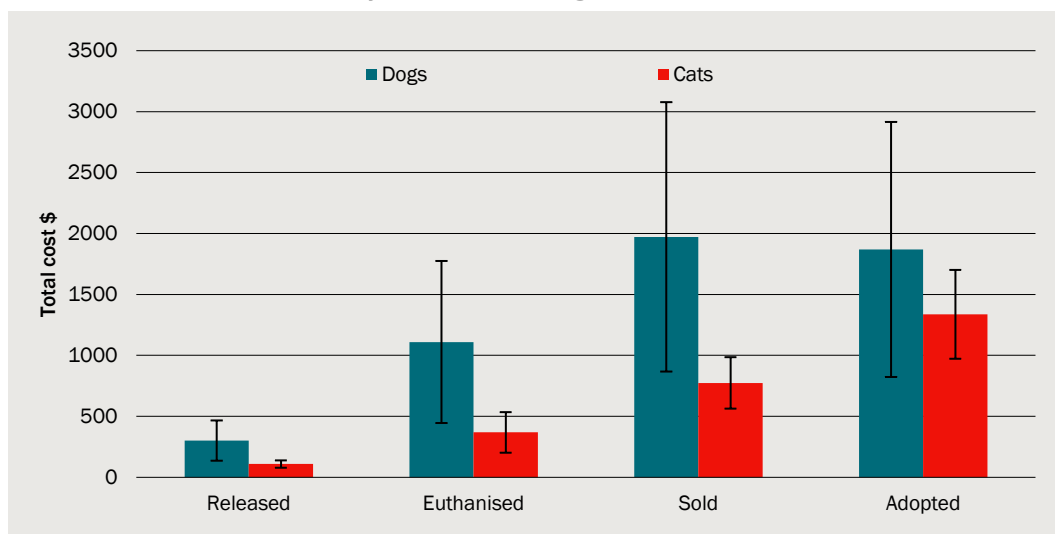
As the council incurs the costs of the pound system, this means ratepayers are ultimately bearing the cost. In order to release, sell or rehome an animal, certain costs must be incurred e.g. desexing, deworming and microchipping. However, holding the animal

while it is on the market is a cost that increases each day the animal is under care. This brings into question what is a reasonable cost for the ratepayer to bear, as animals can remain on the market for any period from months to years.

Costs by outcome sought

Releasing an animal to its owner is the lowest cost outcome for both dogs and cats, see chart 2.11. Animals that are released to owners have the lowest average days spent in care of the pound and do not require microchipping, desexing and vaccination. Animals that are euthanised incur additional costs as they are held longer in the pound on average than those released to owners and incur a cost for euthanasia. This cost varies substantially depending on whether the euthanasia is performed at the pound or a veterinary practice. Animals that are sold or adopted incur the highest costs as they remain under the pounds care for longest period on average and will in most cases require desexing, microchipping and vaccination. An adoption or sale fee may be receivable, however stakeholder consultation advised that this is not sufficient to cover all costs.

2.11 Estimated total costs by outcome for dogs and cats



Note: Error bar shows lower and upper range estimates

Data source: CIE, stakeholder consultations feedback, council pound reports provided for selected councils to CIE.

Overview of outcomes for companion animals in NSW

Animals entering NSW local council pounds

In 2020/21, based on data reported by local councils to Office of Local Government (OLG), there were 44 000 cats and dogs that entered NSW council pounds, comprising 23 000 dogs and 21 000 cats. Of these, the majority are reunited with their owners, rehomed or sold. In 2020/21, 9 per cent of dogs were euthanised and 32 per cent of cats were euthanised.

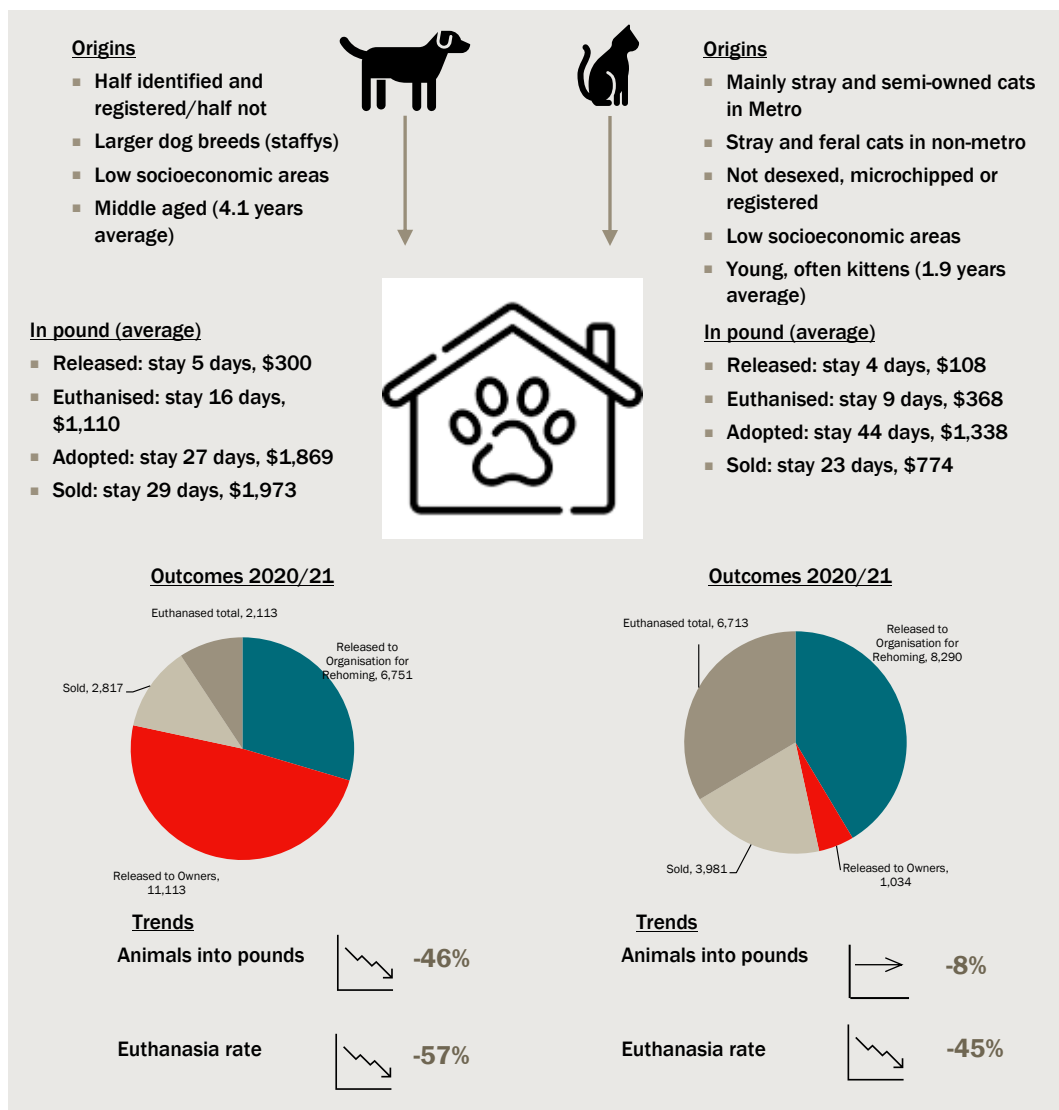
The local council data is available since 2012/13 and indicates strong trends over this time, shown in more detail in chapter 3 and chapter 7.

- There has been a large reduction in dogs entering council pounds, while cats have been fairly stable.
- There has been a 77 per cent reduction in the number of dogs euthanised and a 50 per cent reduction in the number of cats euthanised, from 2012/13 to 2020/21.
- The number of animals euthanised because they were unable to be rehomed has fallen sharply, by 93 per cent for dogs and 76 per cent for cats, from 2012/13 to 2020/21.

The sources and outcomes for cats and dogs are very different.

A summary of the sources, time in pound, outcomes and trends for cats and dogs is shown in chart 2.12.

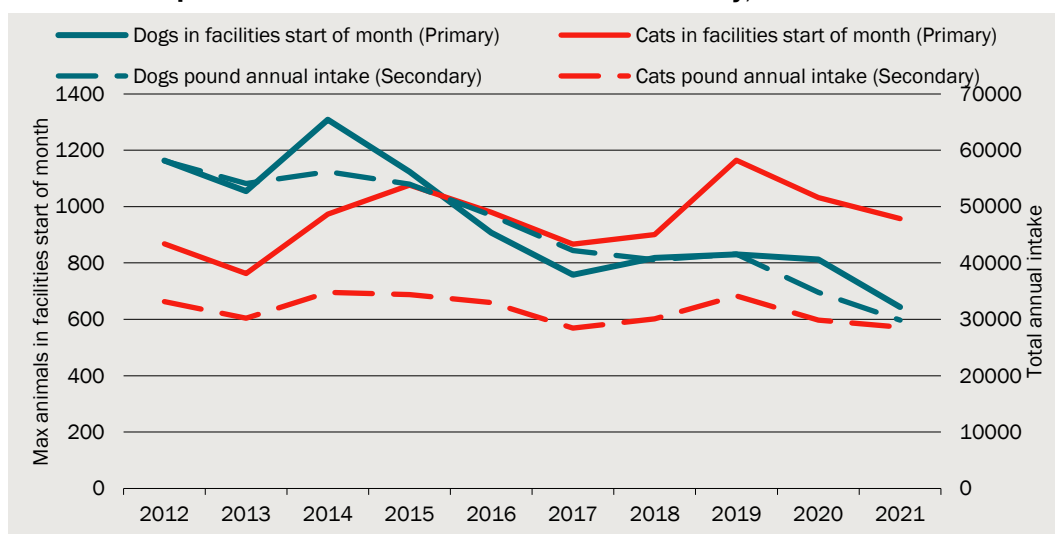
2.12 Pattern of cats and dogs entering and leaving pounds



Data source: As detailed in report.

The length of stay in pounds for cats and dogs can be inferred by the number of animals in a facility at a particular point in time compared to the intake of animals. If animals are staying for a longer period, then the former will be higher, for a given intake. Cats are typically in pounds for longer than dogs, with the ratio of maximum number in a pound compared to intake higher. From 2012 to 2021, the maximum number of cats in pounds in NSW has increased, meaning a need for more capacity, despite intake being relatively stable (chart 2.13). For dogs, the number of dogs entering pounds has decreased as well as the maximum number of dogs in all facilities at a point in time.

2.13 Annual pound intake and number of animals in facility, 2012-2021



Data source: CIE, OLG

Outcomes from rehoming and animal welfare organisations

More than 15 000 animals are released to other organisations for rehoming from NSW local councils. This includes to:

- approved animal welfare organisation, which are the RSPCA NSW, Animal Welfare League NSW, The Cat Protection Society of NSW, and
- approved rehoming organisations, of which there are 87¹⁹, and
- other rehoming organisations.

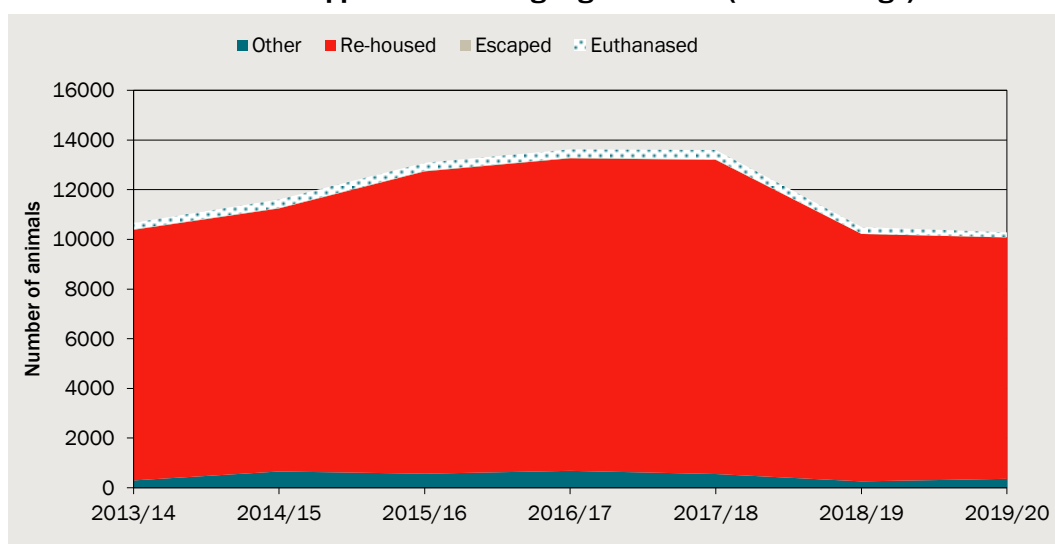
There are also animals that go directly to approved animal welfare organisations and rehoming organisations, such as through being surrendered by owners, rather than to council pounds.

NSW OLG collects data on animals entering and exiting approved rehoming organisations. In addition, approved animal welfare organisations have annual reports that detail their outcomes.

¹⁹ NSW OLG website, accessed 17 May 2022, <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/public/dogs-cats/information-for-professionals/information-for-animal-rescue-organisations/>.

- Approved rehoming organisations have received over 10 000 animals per year since 2013/14. A very small share of animals (~2 per cent) are euthanised, the majority of which are euthanised for medical reasons (chart 2.14). About half of the animals that go into approved rehoming organisations are from council pounds. This data is not split into cats and dogs.
- RSPCA data suggests similar trends to council pounds, of reducing number of animals entering facilities and reducing euthanasia, particularly for dogs (chart 6.10 and chart 3.14). Note that this data overlaps with council pound data as RSPCA manages some local council pounds, as well as receiving animals through other sources such as animal welfare enforcement activities.
- The Cat Protection Society and Animal Welfare League both indicate that any animals euthanised are for medical reasons (Cat Protection Society) or medical and behavioural reasons (Animal Welfare League).²⁰

2.14 Destinations from approved rehoming organisations (cats and dogs)



Data source: CIE analysis based on Annual Report data collated by NSW OLG.

Outcomes for rehomed Companion Animals

There is no real tracing of what happens to companion animals once they have been rehomed. For example, satisfaction of people taking on rehomed animals, whether they are subsequently returned and whether they are involved in incidents.

Scott et al 2018 found very high levels of satisfaction for people receiving dogs and cats from a shelter in South Australia, even though there was a substantial share of animals

²⁰ Animal Welfare League NSW Annual Report 2020/21, https://www.awlnsw.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/AWL21_NSW_AnnualReport_18.2.22_MR.pdf and Cat Protection Society website, accessed 18 May 2020, <https://catprotection.org.au/our-philosophy/>.

whose owners noted behavioural issues.²¹ AMA 2019 also found very high levels of satisfaction from pet owners in general and high scores for pet owners to recommend having a pet to others.²²

In the sections below, we detail outcomes, problems and options in more detail for cats and dogs.

²¹ Scott, S., Jong, E., McArthur, M., & Hazel, S. J. (2018). Follow-up surveys of people who have adopted dogs and cats from an Australian shelter. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 201, 40–45. doi:10.1016.

²² Animal Medicines Australia 2019, *Pets in Australia: a national survey of pets and people*, https://animalmedicinesaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/ANIM001-Pet-Survey-Report19_v1.7_WEB_high-res.pdf.

PART I

Cats



3 *Problems with the current system: cats*

Demand for cats and rehomed cats

Animal Medicines Australia estimates that there are 4.9 million pet cats in Australia in 2021.²³ If NSW had its share of cats relate to its population, this means there are 1.5 million pet cats in NSW.

The statistics on cat identification average ~70 000 cats per year for the past three years and 650 000 in total for the 11 years from 2010/11 to 2020/21.²⁴ Of these 650 000 identified cats, 290 000 are registered. Together with AMA figures, and given domestic cats live on average 13-14 years, this suggests:

- about half of pet cats are identified, and
- about one quarter of pet cats are registered.

This is below estimates provided in surveys of pet owners. For example, Australia-wide, a survey by the AMA in 2019 found that 77 per cent of cats were identified.²⁵ (This would imply about 40 per cent are registered.) In any case, registration of cats is quite low.

The 2021 AMA survey found that the most common methods of obtaining cats are through animal shelters (27 per cent) or friends/family/neighbours family (25 per cent). These were followed by breeders (14 per cent), adopting strays (12 per cent), pet shops (9 per cent), vets (6 per cent), inherited (1 per cent), and miscellaneous other means (5 per cent). This indicates that rehoming and adopting strays are a very substantial part of the market for cats. Furthermore, 40 per cent of people cited 'rescue animal/to give them a home' as a reason for deciding to get a cat.

The 2021 AMA survey found that almost half (48 per cent) of cats were given freely. A further third (34 per cent) were obtained for \$200 or less. The pet cats that had cost anything at all averaged \$372 at the time of acquisition for the 2021 survey, and only slightly higher for those obtained since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The survey findings suggest there are around 100 000 to 150 000 new pet cats per year in NSW, of which about a quarter come from animal shelters. This is a bit higher than council and rehoming data, which has just over 30 000 dogs and cats together being

²³ Animal Medicines Australia 2021, *Pets and the Pandemic*, https://animalmedicinesaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/AMAU005-PATP-Report21_v1.4_WEB.pdf.

²⁴ NSW OLG data provided on animals added to the Companion Animal Registry.

²⁵ Animal Medicines Australia 2019, *Pets in Australia: a national survey of pets and people*, https://animalmedicinesaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/ANIM001-Pet-Survey-Report19_v1.7_WEB_high-res.pdf.

rehomed each year, of which more than half is expected to be cats. (Rehoming data isn't split into dogs and cats.)

Surveys of potential pet owners indicate that there is a pool of future demand for additional animals including cats. Among pet free households, AMA 2021 found that across Australia 20 per cent of households that do not have a pet would like a cat, and 8 per cent were seriously considering getting a cat in the next 12 months. The main reasons for pet-free households not getting a pet are:

- Home/lifestyle not suitable
- Landlord / body corporate / strata doesn't allow pets
- Responsibility
- Cost.

These issues are also prevalent in terms of turning intentions into pet ownership. Among non-owners, those who are actively considering getting a pet in the next 12 months said that their biggest considerations in deciding to obtain a pet would be the ongoing cost (53 per cent), responsibility (45 per cent), the upfront price (42 per cent) and the space required (37 per cent).²⁶

A number of projects have found that semi-owners of cats are a source of demand for cats, through turning semi-owners into owners and targeted desexing and registration programs.²⁷ This source of demand is particularly relevant for rehoming.

- **Cats from shelters are a large part of the market for pet cats**
- **Cats are mainly obtained at no or minimal cost, which places limits on amounts that could be charged by shelters and rehoming organisations**
- **The main barriers to increasing demand for cats relate to price and ongoing cost and being allowed to have a pet in the housing that a person lives in**
- **Cat semi-owners can be a source of demand**

Supply of cats into animal shelters

In 2020/21 there were over 30 000 cats that came into animal shelters, including:

- 21 000 into council pounds
- 9 000 cats into RSPCA shelters, not associated with council contracts
- some share of the 4600 animals (dogs and cats) surrendered to approved rehoming organisations, and
- animals surrendered to other rehoming organisations

²⁶ Animal Medicines Australia 2019, *Pets in Australia: a national survey of pets and people*, https://animalmedicinesaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/ANIM001-Pet-Survey-Report19_v1.7_WEB_high-res.pdf.

²⁷ Rand, J. Engaging with semi-owners, RSPCA Australia Feline Futures Animal Welfare Seminar Feb 2021, <https://hub.rspca.org.au/attachments/16>.

There is no systematic data on the sources and characteristics of cats entering pounds and other animal shelters. Based on data we have collated from a selection of councils and shelter operators and other published studies, cats coming into pounds and shelters are:

- not registered or desexed
- likely to be semi-owned or unowned domestic cats and potentially feral cats in some rural areas
- often kittens, and
- more likely to be from regional and rural areas.

Pound data reporting the incoming microchip and desex status of incoming cats into their care is shown in table 3.1. Cats were more likely to be desexed than microchipped, with the lowest share for both categories being cats seized or stray. Surrendered cats had the highest likelihood of being microchipped and desexed.

3.1 Share of cats microchipped and desexed by incoming source

| Incoming source | Share microchipped | Share desexed |
|-----------------|--------------------|---------------|
| | Per cent | Per cent |
| Drop off | 7.3 | 15.4 |
| Seized/stray | 5.6 | 13.7 |
| Surrendered | 19.8 | 40.9 |
| Transferred | 6.9 | 21.8 |

Source: CIE, stakeholder consultations feedback, council pound reports provided for selected councils to CIE.

Other evidence provided to the review aligns to this. The Australian Pet Welfare Foundation indicated that most cats and kittens entering council pounds and animal welfare shelters are strays, most of these strays are semi-owned cats and most are less than 6 months of age.²⁸ Kerr et al 2018 found that about half of the cat intake into RSPCA shelters in QLD were kittens (<17 weeks), most cats were not desexed (partly reflecting their age).²⁹

In terms of reasons for surrender of owned cats, Zito et al 2016 found that the main reasons were accommodation-related reasons (47 per cent of people), other personal reasons (28 per cent), financial reasons (24 per cent) and unwanted kittens (19 per cent). The main reasons for surrender of unowned cats were not my cat (85 per cent), concerned for cat (72 per cent), thought cat would be better off in shelter (59 per cent), did not want cat around (45 per cent) and unwanted kittens (29 per cent).³⁰

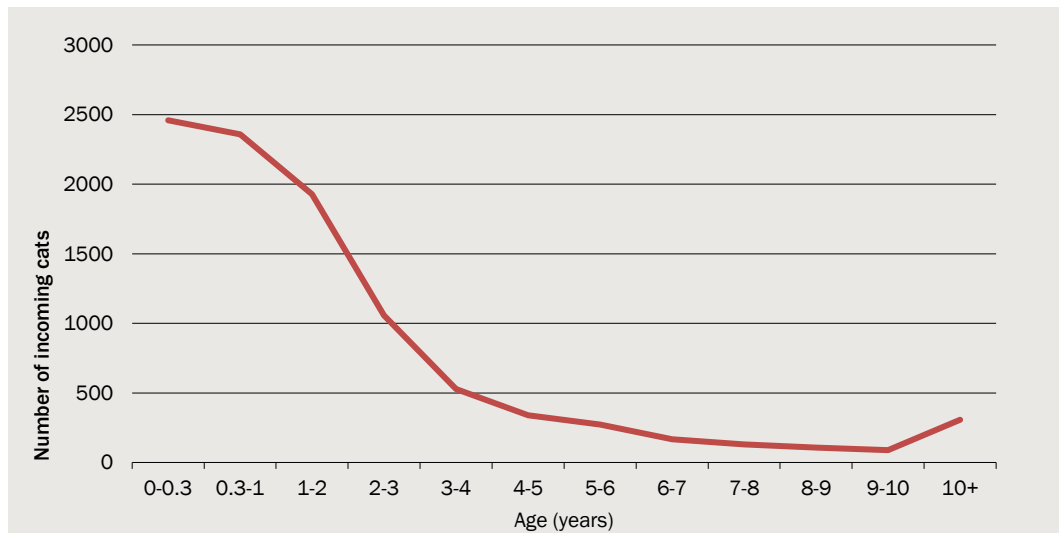
²⁸ Australian Pet Welfare Foundation 2022, Submission to Rehoming Practices Review NSW.

²⁹ Kerr CA, Rand J, Morton JM, Reid R, Paterson M. Changes Associated with Improved Outcomes for Cats Entering RSPCA Queensland Shelters from 2011 to 2016. *Animals (Basel)*. 2018 Jun 12;8(6):95. doi: 10.3390/ani8060095. PMID: 29895814; PMCID: PMC6025144

³⁰ Sarah Zito, John Morton, Dianne Vankan, Mandy Paterson, Pauleen C. Bennett, Jacquie Rand & Clive J. C. Phillips (2016): Reasons People Surrender Unowned and Owned Cats to Australian Animal Shelters and Barriers to Assuming Ownership of Unowned Cats, *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science*, DOI: 10.1080/10888705.2016.1141682.

The supply of cats into shelters is strongly driven by semi-owned and stray cats, and the kittens that come from this. Chart 3.2 shows the age of cats as they enter the pound system, based on a selection of data collated for this review. Cats aged up to 1 year old make up 49 per cent of cats entering pounds.

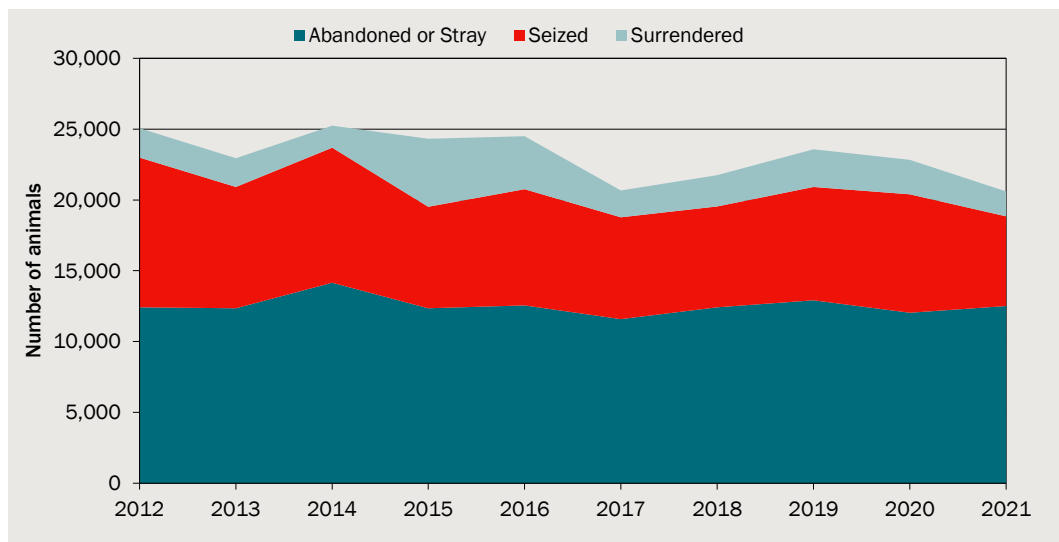
3.2 Age of cats incoming into pounds



Data source: CIE, stakeholder consultations feedback, council pound reports provided for selected councils to CIE.

The source of cats is primarily 'abandoned or stray', with smaller shares from seized cats and surrendered cats (chart 3.3). The shares have remained fairly constant over the last decade.

3.3 Cat intake by source



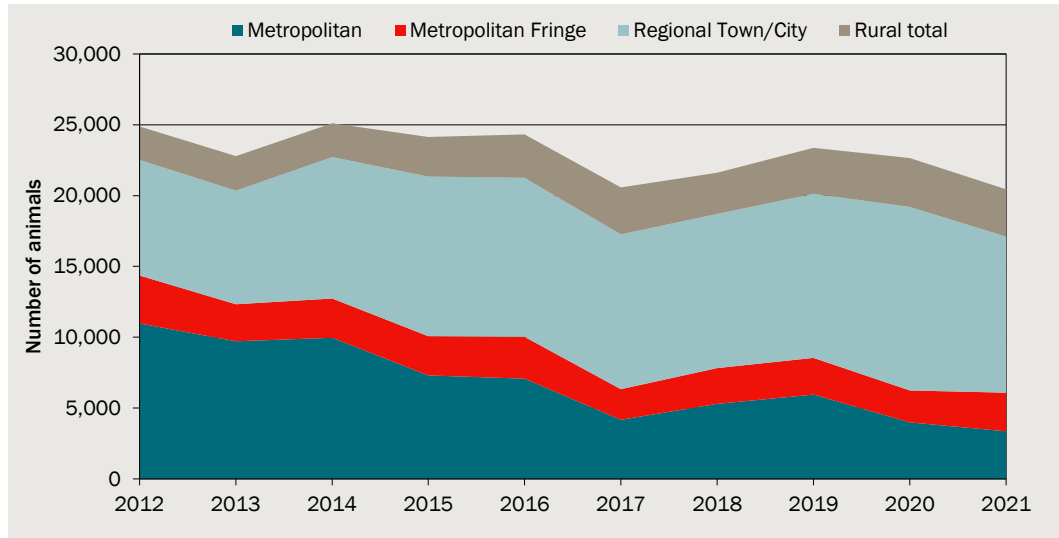
Note: A small share of animals are returned to owners prior to impounding, so the number of animals entering pounds is slightly lower than in the totals here.

Data source: CIE analysis based on data provided by Geoff Robertson, collated from council returns to OLG.

Across regions, supply of cats into pounds is now predominantly from regional towns/cities (chart 3.4). There have been large reductions in cat intake into pounds in

metropolitan areas, moderate reductions in metropolitan fringe areas but substantial increases in regional towns and cities and in rural areas over the past decade.

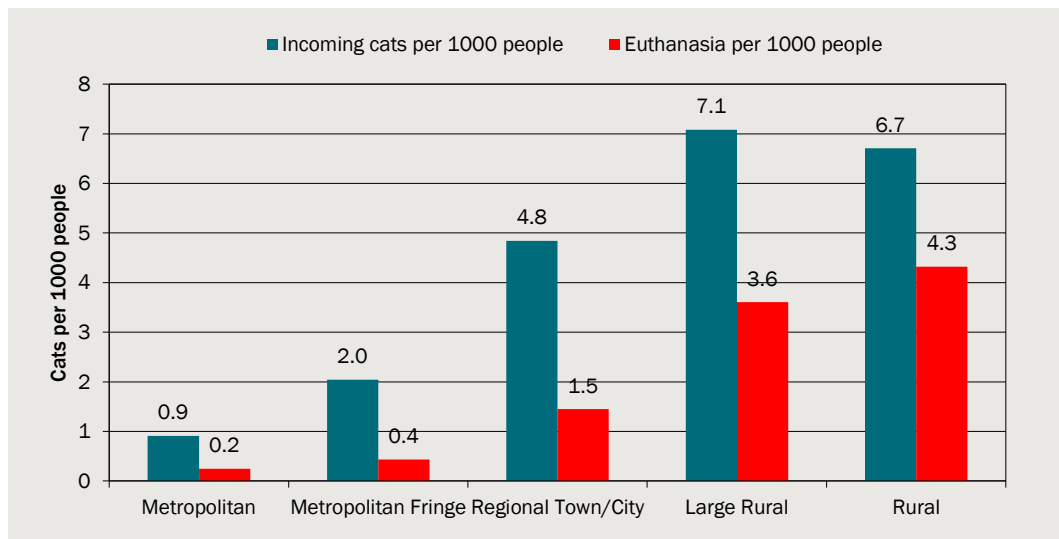
3.4 Cat intake by region



Data source: CIE analysis based on data provided by Geoff Robertson, collated from council returns to OLG.

Relative to population, cat intake is dramatically higher in regional and rural areas. For example, LGAs such as Dubbo, Maitland and Wollongong all have more than 800 cats received into their pounds each year. There is very low intake in metropolitan areas (0.9 per 1000 people), rising in metropolitan fringe areas to 2.0 and then to 4.8 and above in regional areas (chart 3.5). Euthanasia rates follow a similar pattern.

3.5 Cat intake and euthanasia per 1000 people 2020/21



Data source: CIE, based on data from NSW OLG.

The supply of cats into shelters is heavily dependent on council policies around whether they accept cats for surrender, seize cats and/or collect abandoned and stray cats. For example, Liverpool Council reported 2 cats as coming into council facilities in 2020/21,

compared to similar areas of Blacktown (1599 cats) and Campbelltown (1135 cats). Stakeholders noted that Liverpool does not accept cats, on the basis that cats are allowed to roam. Council policies not to accept cats will clearly reduce intake (and euthanasia) of cats. However, this does not appear consistent with council obligations for animal management in general and results in other issues such as larger stray cat populations.³¹

- **A large share of cats into shelters are strays of various categorisations**
- **Compared to the broader cat population, cats into shelters are much less likely to be microchipped, registered and desexed**
- **Approximately half of cats entering pounds are aged 1 year or younger**
- **Across NSW, the largest share of cats come into shelters in LGAs classified as regional towns/cities and the rate of intake relative to population is much higher in regional and rural areas**
- **There have been large reductions in cat intake in metropolitan areas offset by increases in regional towns and cities and in rural areas**
- **Council cat intake is heavily influenced by policies related to animal management. Policies to not accept cats will reduce intake and euthanasia of cats but are not consistent with animal management responsibilities**

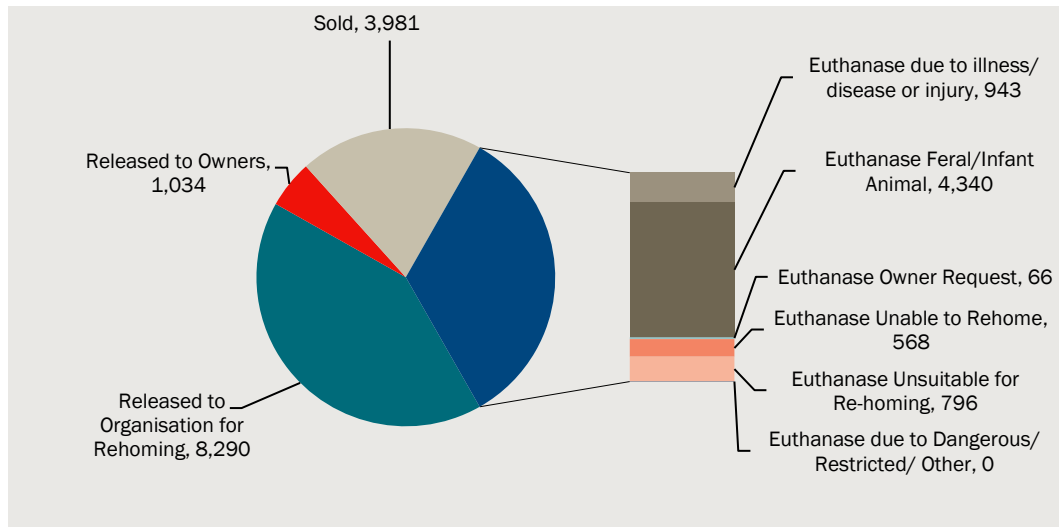
Outcomes for cats

Outcomes for cats entering pounds

In 2020/21, about two thirds of cats entering pounds found a new home and a small share returned to their owner (chart 3.6). The remaining 32 per cent were euthanised. The main reasons cited for euthanasia of cats was that they are feral/infant, due to illness/disease or injury or were unsuitable for rehoming. In 2020/21, 568 cats were considered suitable for rehoming but still unable to be rehomed.

³¹ NSW OLG 2021, Circular 21-05: Cat management requirements for councils,, <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/council-circulars/21-05-cat-management-requirements-for-councils/>.

3.6 Outcomes for cats entering NSW local council pounds 2020/21

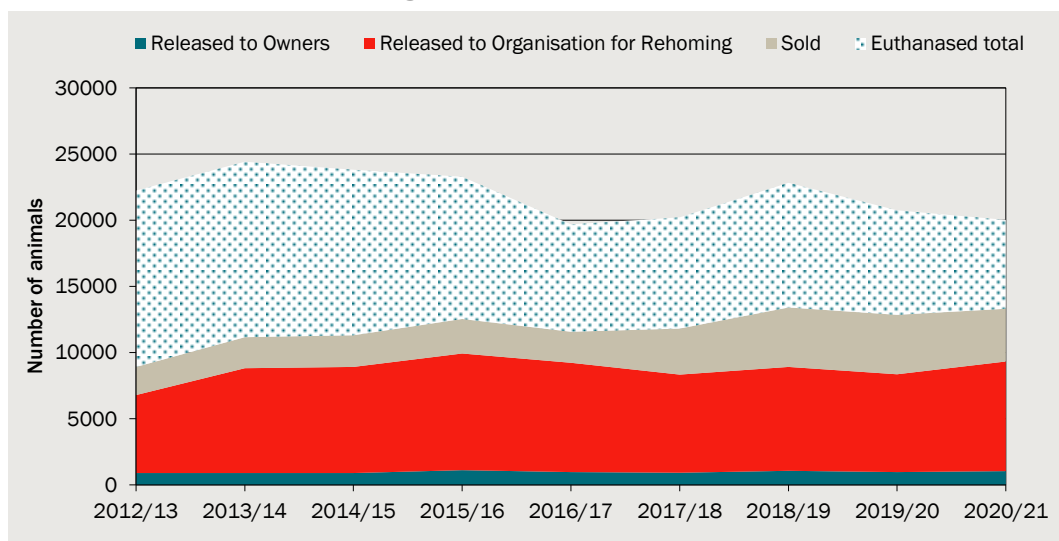


Data source: CIE analysis based on data from NSW OLG at <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/public/dogs-cats/responsible-pet-ownership/pound-and-dog-attack-statistics/>.

The euthanasia rate for cats across NSW is substantially higher than dogs. The state-wide euthanasia rate for cats has trended down over time, although the level of improvement is much less than for dogs (chart 3.7). As noted above, the composition of where cats are from across NSW has changed substantially over the past decade, with fewer cats from metropolitan areas and more from regional and rural areas. Regional and rural areas have higher average euthanasia rates for cats, and this compositional shift has led to upwards pressure on state-wide euthanasia rates.

The decline in the euthanasia rate for cats has been driven by more cats being sold and rehomed, rather than a change in cats released to owners.

3.7 Outcomes for cats entering pounds – 2012/13 to 2020/21

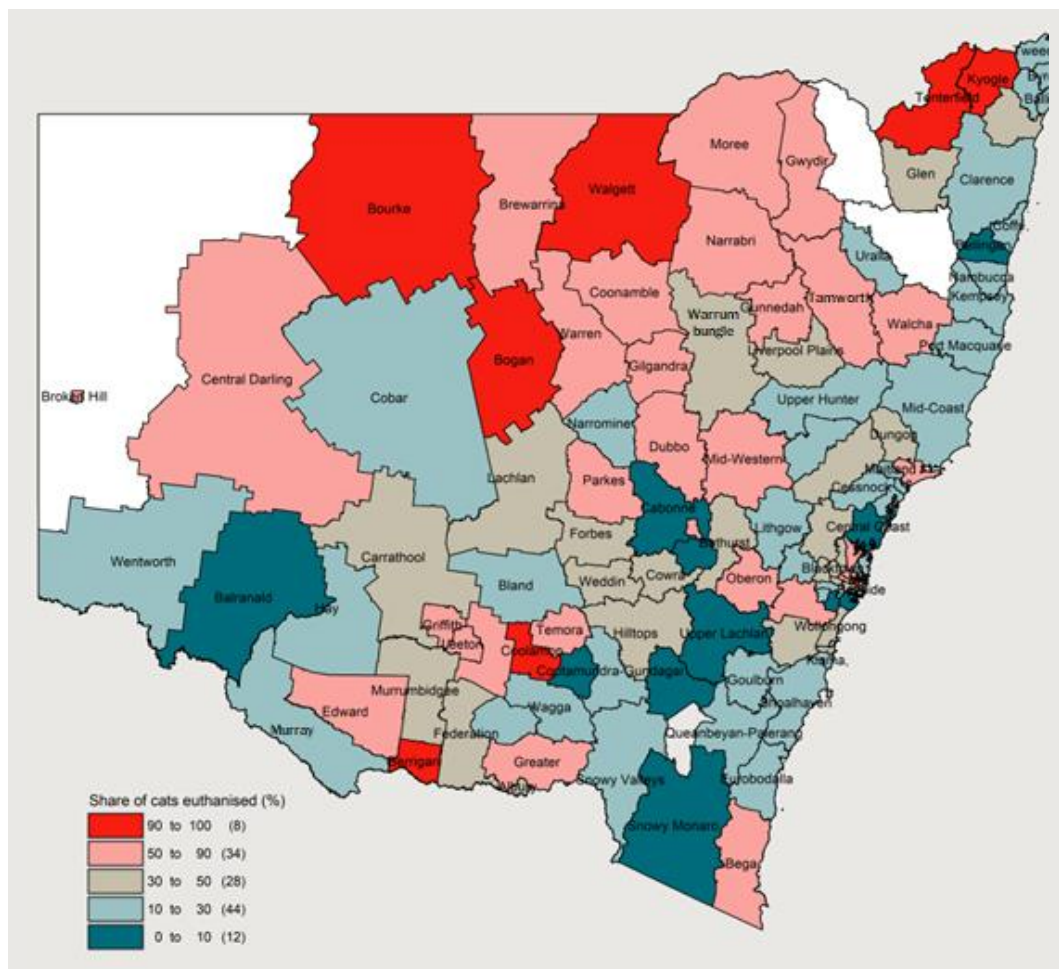


Data source: CIE analysis based on data from NSW OLG at <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/public/dogs-cats/responsible-pet-ownership/pound-and-dog-attack-statistics/> and previous years data provided by NSW OLG.

During stakeholder consultations, a number of groups indicated that the improvement in outcomes in 2020/21 was at least partly due to COVID-19 and they were experiencing increase supply of animals and reduced demand currently. This suggests that some of the improvement in intake and euthanasia in the most recent data will not be sustained.

Across geographic areas there are noticeable differences in outcomes for cats. Charts 3.8 and 3.9 show the average euthanasia rate for cats entering pounds from 2018 to 2021 in NSW local government areas. Most notably, there are very large differences across councils that would face similar types of cat populations. This indicates that councils can do things differently to achieve lower euthanasia rates.

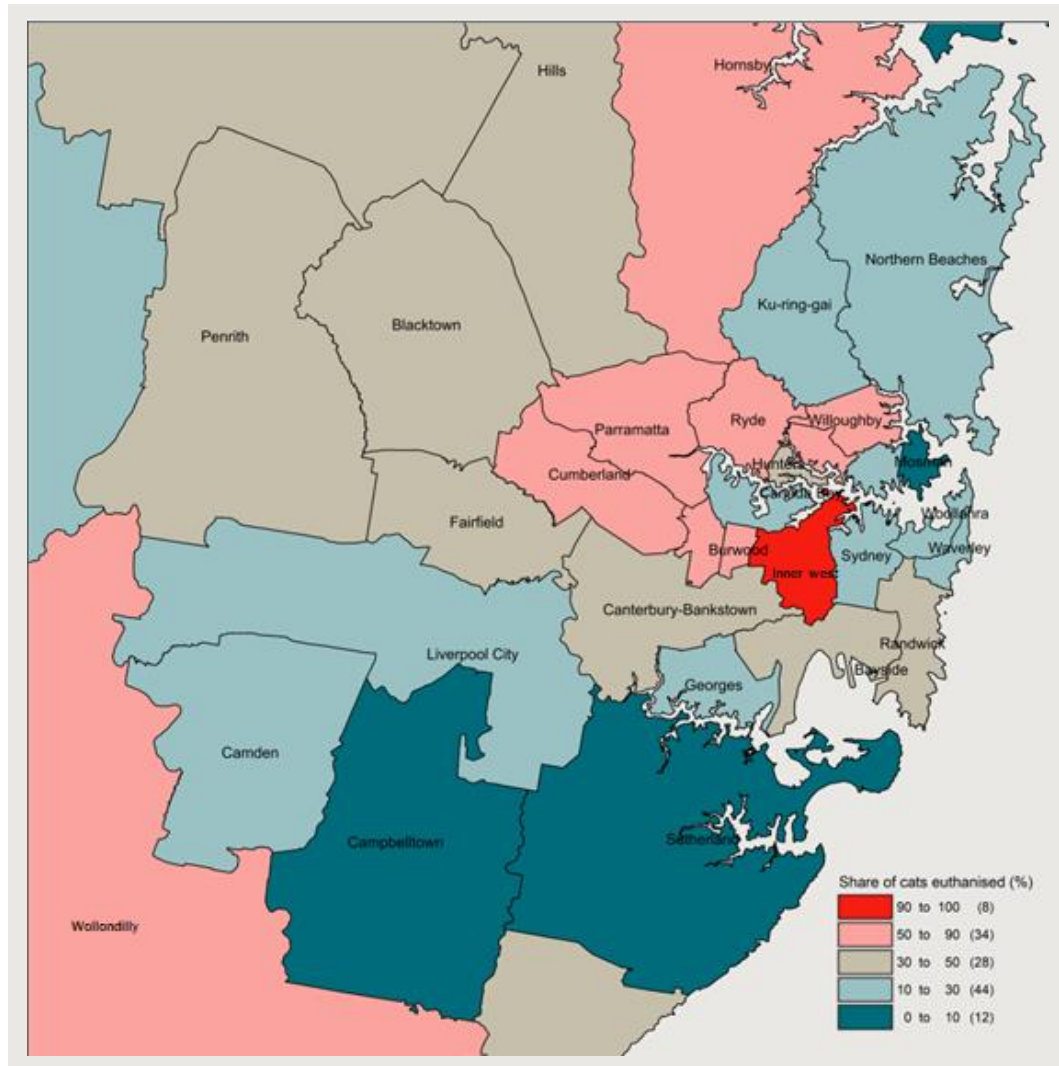
3.8 Share of cats euthanised by local government area



Note: Based on the euthanasia rate for 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21.

Data source: CIE analysis based on data from NSW OLG at <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/public/dogs-cats/responsible-pet-ownership/pound-and-dog-attack-statistics/>.

3.9 Share of cats euthanised by local government area NSW (Sydney snapshot)



Note: Based on the euthanasia rate for 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21.

Data source: CIE analysis based on data from NSW OLG at <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/public/dogs-cats/responsible-pet-ownership/pound-and-dog-attack-statistics/>.

For a selection of councils, we have obtained data that provides more specifics about how the characteristics of a cat links to outcomes. A summary of key factors driving the likelihood of euthanasia are shown in table 3.10.

3.10 Factors that increase and decrease the likelihood of being euthanised for a cat entering a pound

| Increase likelihood of euthanasia | Decrease likelihood of euthanasia |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Very young (an infant) or older | 2 months to 1 year old |
| Regional or rural area | Metropolitan area |
| Not desexed | Desexed |
| Not microchipped | Microchipped |

| Increase likelihood of euthanasia | Decrease likelihood of euthanasia |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Drop off or surrendered | Seized/stray or transferred |

Source: CIE.

Cats that are microchipped when they enter a pound are more likely to be released to their owners and less likely to be euthanised. Cats that are desexed are more likely to be both released to owners and adopted, as well as less likely to be euthanised (table 3.11).

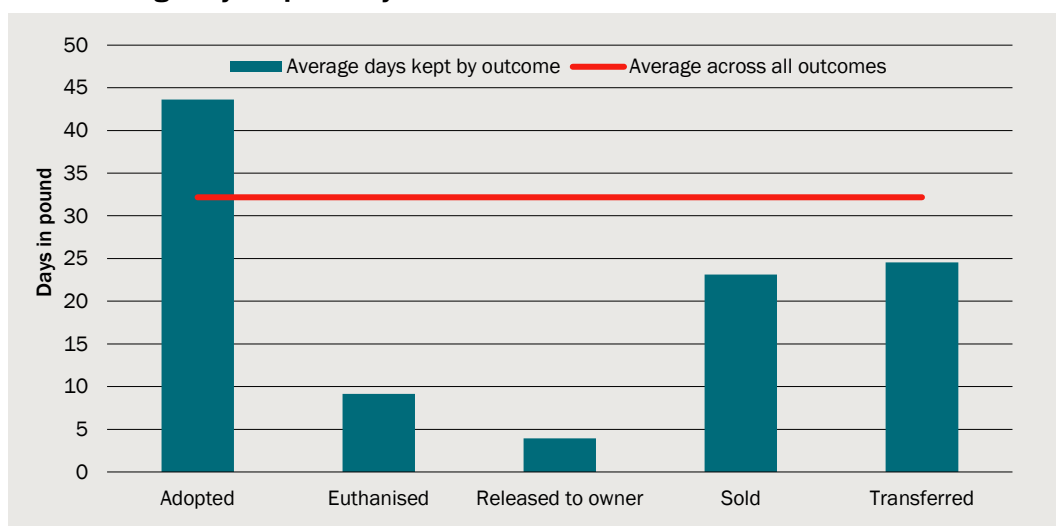
3.11 Outcome of cats and dogs by incoming microchipped and desexing status

| Outcome | Not microchipped | Microchipped | Not desexed | Desexed |
|-------------|------------------|--------------|-------------|----------|
| | Per cent | Per cent | Per cent | Per cent |
| Adopted | 64.1% | 51.7% | 60.5% | 72.6% |
| Euthanised | 30.5% | 23.0% | 33.9% | 13.7% |
| Released | 2.6% | 23.7% | 2.5% | 12.8% |
| Transferred | 2.8% | 1.7% | 3.1% | 0.8% |

Source: CIE, stakeholder consultations feedback, council pound reports provided for selected councils to CIE.

From a sample of councils, we have also obtained information on time in pounds under different outcomes. Cats adopted from councils take on average 44 days. Where cats are released back to owners, this happens very quickly, within an average of four days. Where cats are euthanised, this also happens within a short period of time, with an average of nine days. Where cats are transferred, the average days held is 25. The average across all categories is 32 days.

3.12 Average days in pound by outcome



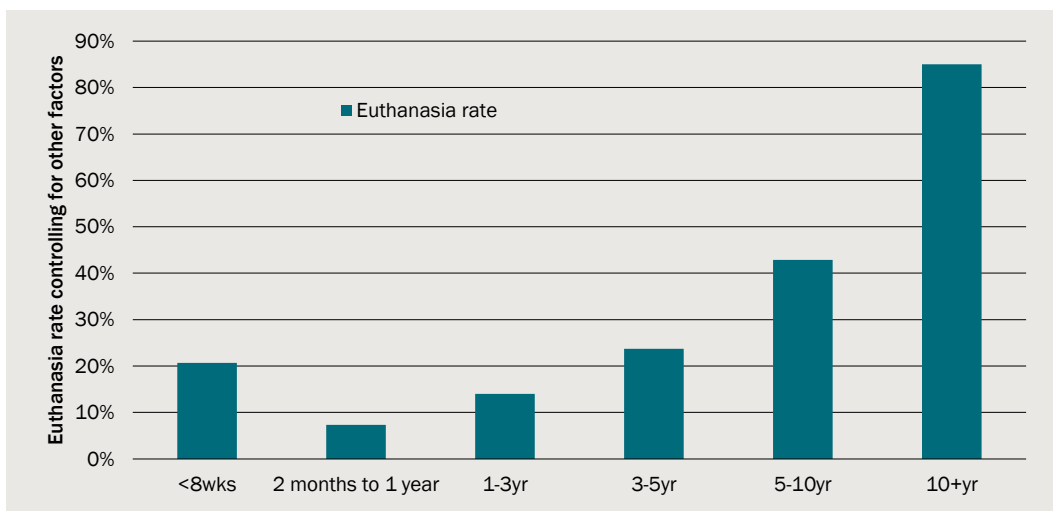
Data source: CIE, stakeholder consultations feedback, council pound reports provided for selected councils to CIE.

Cats tend to be kept longer in metropolitan pounds than in regional pounds, for the pounds for which we have data. The exception is for cats being transferred, which takes longer from regional pounds.

The age of cats is an important driver of entering a pound and the outcome (chart 3.13). A large number of cats are infants, which increases the likelihood of euthanasia. Cats

aged between 2 months and 1 year are the least likely to be euthanised. Likelihood of euthanasia increases substantially for cats older than this. Nearly all cats over 10 years were euthanised within the sample of pounds for this review.

3.13 Average age of cats and likelihood of euthanasia

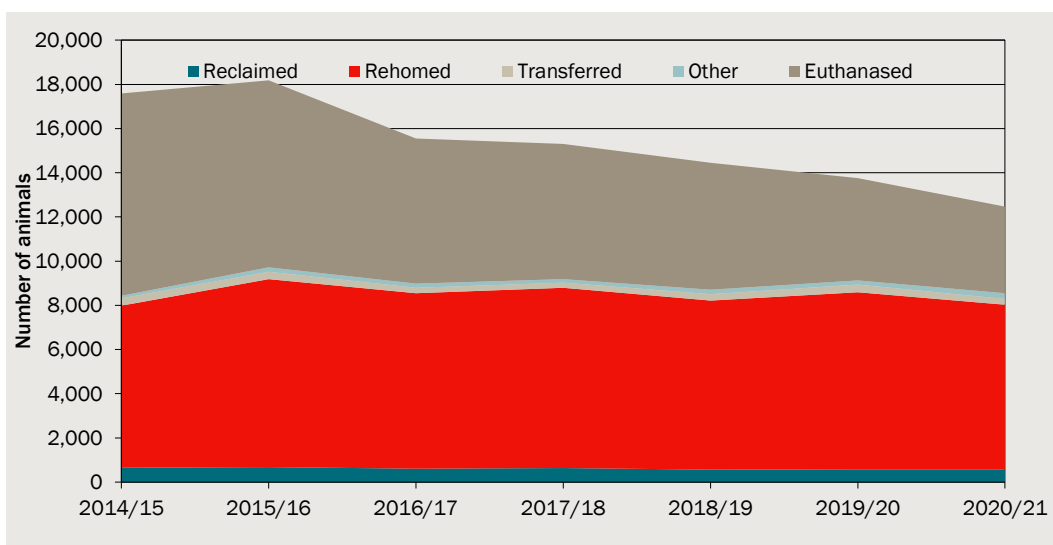


Note: This controls for other factors such as microchipping and desexing status and how cat arrived at pound.
Data source: CIE, stakeholder consultations feedback, council pound reports provided for selected councils to CIE.

Rehoming organisations

The RSPCA receives cats through council contracts, from councils and through other sources such as animal enforcement (chart 3.14). Similar to councils, RSPCA euthanasia rates for cats have been falling over the past decade, largely because the number of cats rehomed has remained similar while the number of cats taken in has fallen. Note that this data overlaps with council data for the pounds managed by RSPCA.

3.14 RSPCA outcomes in NSW for cats



Note: RSPCA data includes data for council pounds managed by the RSPCA.
Data source: RSPCA annual statistics, <https://www.rspca.org.au/what-we-do/our-role-caring-animals/annual-statistics>.

Data from approved rehoming organisations is not split into cats and dogs. It is evident that very few animals are euthanised that go to rehoming organisations. Animals from rehoming organisations had an average time in care of 63 days. This does not include the time spent at council pounds for those animals that came from pounds.

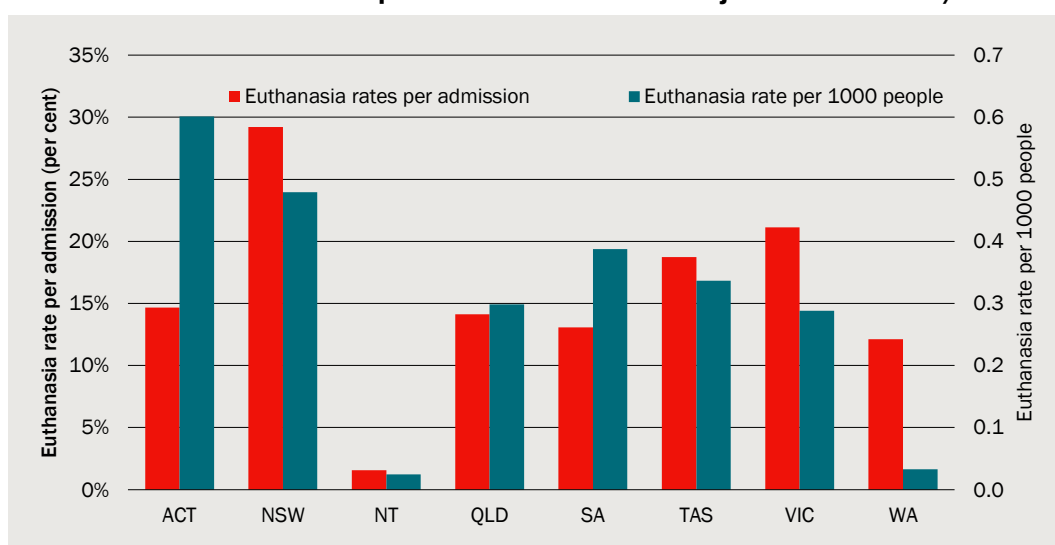
Comparison with other jurisdictions

Comparison of euthanasia rates across jurisdictions is not straight forward. NSW has the most comprehensive data reporting of Australian states and territories for outcomes from pounds. For other states and territories there is no standard systematic public reporting of outcomes.

We have been provided with academic work in progress on a confidential basis that seeks to compare euthanasia rates for cats across jurisdictions. While this is not complete, the initial indications are that NSW is at the upper end of jurisdictions in terms of euthanasia of cats as a share of cats entering pounds, animal welfare and rehoming organisations. Note that this is based on 2018/19 and there have been large changes in outcomes for cats in NSW even over the subsequent years. The data is more preliminary in terms of cat euthanasia per person. Initial indications are that NSW has a lower rate than some states, but is not the lowest.

The RSPCA also reports about the euthanasia rates of animals that it admits across states. However, the role of the RSPCA can differ across states (and over time), which makes comparisons more difficult. In 2020/21, NSW had the highest euthanasia rate of cats as a share of animals admitted to the RSPCA (chart 3.15). It had the second highest rate for cats euthanised per 1000 people. The second statistic in particular will reflect the coverage of the RSCPA across jurisdictions.

3.15 RSPCA euthanasia rate per admitted animal across jurisdictions 2020/2021

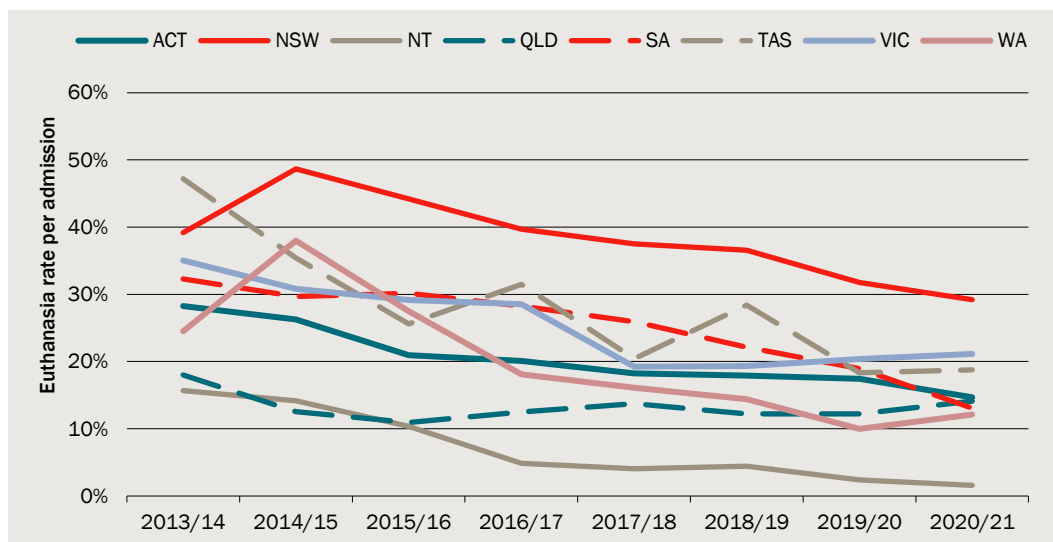


Note: RSPCA data for NSW includes data for council pounds managed by the RSPCA.

Data source: RSPCA annual statistics, <https://www.rspca.org.au/what-we-do/our-role-caring-animals/annual-statistics>.

RSPCA data across jurisdictions also indicates a falling euthanasia rate per admitted animal for cats in NSW and in most other jurisdictions. Despite falling, the euthanasia rate per admitted animal is higher in NSW than all other jurisdictions for cats (chart 3.16). Whether this reflects the type of RSPCA operations, or a real difference is not clear.

3.16 RSPCA euthanasia rate per admission across jurisdictions – cats



Note: RSPCA data for NSW includes data for council pounds managed by the RSPCA.

Data source: RSPCA annual statistics, <https://www.rspca.org.au/what-we-do/our-role-caring-animals/annual-statistics>.

Stakeholder views on problems for cat rehoming

The CIE conducted a large number of consultations with stakeholders following the release of an Issues Paper in May 2022. The type of problems with the existing system for cats raised in these consultations is summarised below.

- Councils and operators of pounds indicated that recent amendments to the Companions Animals Act to require councils to make any cat available for rehoming do not provide councils with sufficient discretion for animals that should not be rehomed. In particular, councils and others are all interpreting the recent amendments differently in terms of what this means for feral cats or other cats whose behaviour makes them unsuitable for rehoming
 - some organisations are euthanising ‘feral’ or un-rehomeable cats on the basis that keeping these for 7 days would be cruel. Others are keeping these animals for 7 days and following the protocols in the legislation. There are significantly different implicit definitions about feral cats across stakeholders
 - some councils have reduced their collection of animals (such as cat trapping) because of the requirement to keep animals for longer
 - councils and pound operators indicated that holding feral cats for longer was both cruel and a risk to staff (disease and WHS) and other animals (disease)

- A number of rehoming organisations considered that the recent amendments shifted the obligation for rehoming from councils to them, leading to guilt if they were unable to accept animals to rehome
- Many stakeholders noted issues with the operation of the registration system and other fee arrangements, including the clarity of this and incentives created. This included:
 - confusion for animal owners about what identification and registration are
 - costs of registration leading people to (i) exit the official system through not registering their animal at all, and (ii) be unwilling to collect their animal from the pound because of registration costs
- Many stakeholders noted different council interpretations of their roles and responsibilities and councils noted that they had substantial discretion to not accept animals
 - some councils are not accepting cats (as cats are allowed to roam, there is often no reason for the council to impound cats)
 - a number of other groups indicated that this had consequences for them, such as vets and rehoming organisations
- Many stakeholders noted issues with accountability across the rehoming system, including:
 - council accountability for welfare standards in pounds, in the absence of any defined standards
 - rehoming organisation accountability for successful rehoming and animal welfare standards, particularly around the understanding of rehoming organisations in relation to infectious disease for cats
- Many stakeholders noted a high administrative burden in relation to record keeping. Practical improvements noted were providing some limited access to the Companion Animal Register for rehoming organisations
- There were different views about who was best placed or what processes were required in order to be able to classify an animal as suitable or unsuitable for rehoming
 - a number of councils considered it very obvious when a cat was feral or was rehomingable. However, it was clear to CIE that the definitions councils used were very different
 - a number of other stakeholders considered that there were rehomingable cats being euthanised by councils, because councils were classifying these as un-rehomingable
- Most stakeholders noted funding as a key issue.
 - With RSPCA moving out of operating pounds, Blacktown Council building a new facility and Sydney Cats and Dogs in the process of seeking to build a new facility, there is significant transitional risks related to pound capacity
 - Rehoming organisations noted that they were taking on council responsibilities for rehoming but without any funding.
 - It was evident that financial circumstances for animal welfare organisations were also very challenging.

During consultations with councils, we also discussed the extent to which compliance and enforcement could address issues related to animals that enter pounds, such as through ensuring higher levels of identification and registration. Councils had at times tried enforcement focused approaches, such as finding unidentified and unregistered animals and issuing fines. They noted that efforts had been very resource intensive and had had little success in the lower socioeconomic areas where most animals were coming from into pounds. Our understanding is that initial efforts by councils in relation to annual cat permits have also had limited success. Organisations outside of councils noted that engagement was much more effective than enforcement in relation to the types of animals that entered pounds.

Through reviewing and using information in relation to companion animals, there are also a number of problems and improvements that emerge.

- The Companion Animal Register does not have individual records of cats that are not microchipped and are then euthanised. (This is reported in aggregate cat statistics provided to OLG.) Given this is the group of cats that are the target of the review, this is a significant gap.
- Annual reporting from councils to OLG on outcomes from pounds is much more systematic than in other states and territories and the transparency of this is also much higher. There are some problems in relation to:
 - definitions of reasons for euthanasia — feral/infant being combined into a single category is problematic, and that there is no definition of feral being used consistently across councils
 - withholding of information – data being collected by pounds is not being made public. This could be addressed as follows:
 - ... councils provide additional information to NSW OLG in relation to the source of animals, which could be included in public reporting
 - ... reporting on average days in facilities could be a useful leading indicator of emerging capacity problems. This is reported by approved rehoming organisations but not by pounds
- Reporting from rehoming organisations could also be improved through separate reporting for cats and dogs.

Notwithstanding the problems noted above, it was evident that there was an awareness that euthanasia rates for cats had been able to be substantially reduced where there was a focus on this. Improvements were generally viewed as coming from either public/media pressure or from the efforts of particular individuals within the system, rather than from system changes. Key drivers of increased success in rehoming and reduced euthanasia included:

- community engagement through foster systems and education
- building strong networks and relationships between council pounds and rehoming organisations
- transparency and social media to de-stigmatise pounds and pound animals and present animals in a positive light
- reducing the number of cats requiring rehoming through:

- targeted microchipping and desexing programs (subsidised lower socioeconomic focus)
- flexibility in levying of fines, registration and pound fees.

Summary of problems for cats

The primary problem for cats is that **euthanasia rates for cats entering pounds and other facilities in NSW remain high**, despite some declines over the past decade.

The reasons for high euthanasia of cats include that:

- few cats are returned to owners — this is because they don't have owners or because their owners can't be identified because very few of the cats entering pounds are microchipped and registered
 - there are many issues with existing identification and registration arrangements that push people out of the formal system, so that fewer cats are microchipped and/or registered
 - specific issues include:
 - ... the two step process of identification and registration, which confuses people and leads to some cats being identified but not registered
 - ... the cost associated with registration, particularly for undesexed cats, including the new annual permit requirements. A particular criticism was that the undesexed cat fee would apply for a year for a cat desexed after 4 months
 - ... the lack of effective means of compliance and enforcement to get people to identify and register their cats
 - ... cats being semi-owned, so that the person feeding the cat does not consider they have full ownership
- there are large numbers of urban stray cats entering council pounds, many of which are rehomeable and some of which are not (or they require substantial resources to rehome)
- there are at least some true feral cats being trapped in rural areas, which are not rehomable. However, because of varying definitions used for feral cats and infant and feral being combined in the data, the true number of feral cats being impounded and euthanised is not clear. We expect it is much lower than captured in the data, given that there are many examples of reductions in euthanasia of 'feral' cats from councils and others
- there are different council approaches to cat management:
 - some councils do not impound cats, on the basis that cats are allowed to roam, and also do not accept cats that people have themselves trapped or wish to surrender. This has the effect of reducing cat euthanasia in the short term but leads to larger stray cat populations and issues in the longer term

- note that this is not consistent with NSW OLG guidance to councils about what their responsibilities are to manage cats in their LGA³² but is something that is done by many councils
- councils and rehoming organisations have various levels of training and skills to make assessments about whether cats can be rehomed and this task is complicated by cat behaviour in pounds:
 - the term feral is used for cats ranging from semi-owned to community to urban stray to feral, depending on the council. RSPCA defines feral cats as “Cats who are unowned, unsocialised, have no relationship with or dependence on humans and reproduce in the wild”.³³ However, councils often referred to cats as feral that were collected from people’s homes and in urban areas.
 - cat behavioural assessment is difficult because of the response of cats to new environments. Many cats are likely being considered as un-rehomeable and even feral where this is not actually the case. It is clear that councils have been able to substantially reduce their cat euthanasia and increase rehoming even where cats were mainly being classified as being euthanised because they were feral
- there are some aspects of the data collection process that could provide greater transparency about the reasons for euthanasia and overall operation of the system
- administrative complexities around accessing CAR and processes between rehoming organisations and councils, which reduce time available for other activities
- risks around capacity of pounds created by the exit of the RSPCA from undertaking pound services and transitional issues for Sydney Dogs and Cats Home as they seek to build their new facility at Kurnell.

While not strictly the subject of this review, the lack of standards for pounds is also a problem from an animal welfare perspective and a risk for councils making major investments without knowing if these would meet any prospective standards.

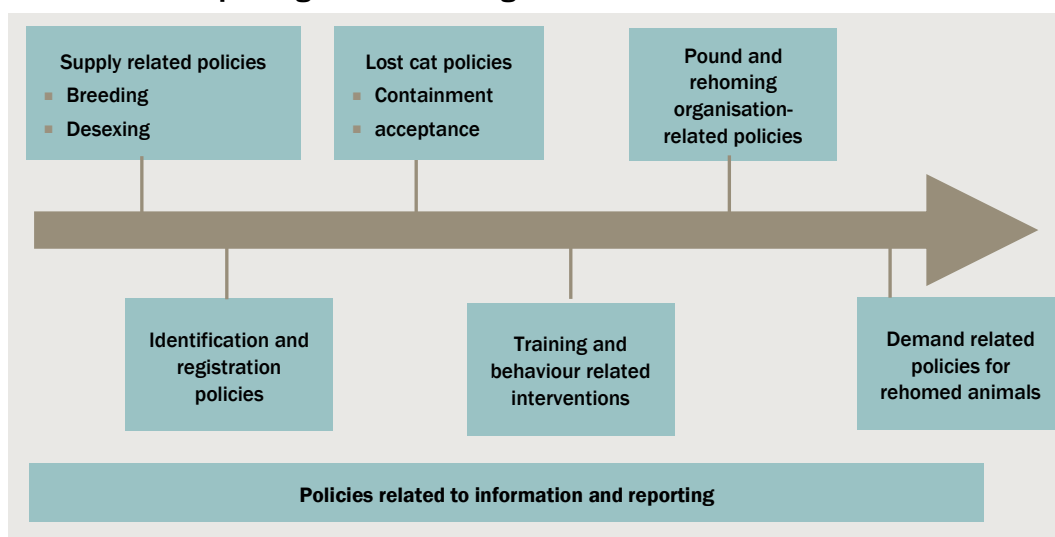
³² NSW OLG 2021, Circular 21-05: Cat management requirements for councils,, <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/council-circulars/21-05-cat-management-requirements-for-councils/>.

³³ RSPCA definition.

4 Options to achieve the Review's objectives for cats

The focus of this review is on **reducing unnecessary euthanasia** and **increasing successful rehoming** of companion animals. Different outcomes for cats can be driven by policies across different stages of an animal's life and across different organisations, from breeding to training to impounding to demand for impounded animals (chart 4.1).

4.1 Policies impacting at different stages of an animal's life



Data source: CIE.

The policy option that is by far the most prominent and which has proven success is **targeted desexing of owned, semi-owned and community cats**. There are a range of other less prominent options, some of which we do not consider will be successful in meeting objectives as set out in later chapters. A list of options is set out in table 4.2. Note that some policies will be successful in meeting the specific objectives of this review, such as not accepting cats, but will have broader negative consequences for people and for animal welfare.

4.2 Potential policy directions to improve euthanasia and rehoming practices

| Policy area | Impact |
|---|---|
| Supply-related policies – stray cats | |
| 1a. Trap neuter release | This policy would aim to stop the breeding cycle of colony/feral cats. For councils to be able to implement this policy, it will require a change to POCTA which does not allow animals to be released into the public, in this case after being neutered. Benefits would be reducing the growth rate of colony/feral cats as well as improving the welfare of workers in pounds due to less euthanasia of colony/feral cats. |

| Policy area | Impact |
|---|---|
| 1b. Culling | This policy would aim to eradicate colony/feral cats. Clearing an environment of cats can create a 'vacuum effect' whereby cats in adjoining environments will move into the vacant space and take advantage of the resources that sustained the initial population. |
| 1c. Council to not accept stray cats | Councils could refuse to accept stray cats into their pounds. This is currently being undertaken by some councils in NSW. |
| 1d. Targeted desexing programs | To reduce semi-owned and community cat litters, which are a main form of animals coming into pounds. |
| 1e. Reduce council cat trapping programs | Councils will often lend traps to people with nuisance cats or undertake their own trapping programs. This could be reduced to reduce intake into pounds and euthanasia |
| Supply related policies – other | |
| 2a. Requirements for people who breed cats | Regulations that limit people who are allowed to breed and sell/give away cats |
| 2b. Subsidised general desexing programs | Many councils operate desexing days and provide subsidised (non-targeted) desexing and this could be expanded |
| 2c. Containment policies | The right to roam provides cats the ability to live and reproduce in public. Cat containment policies would reduce roaming of owned cats and may make it simpler for councils to pick up other cats. |
| 2d. Council to not accept surrenders or abandoned cats | Councils could refuse to accept surrenders or abandoned cats into their pounds. This is currently being undertaken by some councils in NSW. |
| 2e. Increased compliance activity on registration and desexing permits | Increase compliance activity and fines for people with non-registered or non-desexed cats without permits |
| 2f. Financial incentives for desexing through registration system | This would continue/adapt existing policies of providing reduced registration fees for desexed cats via not being subject to an annual permit fee. |
| 2g. Abolish registration step in process | Details of the owner would be recorded when the animal is microchipped and will be updated when the animal is transferred between owners. There are significant compliance issues with registration as people are often confused by the difference between microchipping and registering. If the core purpose is to raise revenue, it is not achieving its objective while shifting the burden to the limited people who follow the system. The impact would be a simplification of monitoring the owners of animals. |
| 2h. Accuracy of owner details | Link registration to Service NSW – integrating systems will make it easier for pet owners to update details while managing other government services (e.g. car registration) Automatic registration reminders, such as being built into the new Companion Animal Register |
| Impounding | |
| 3a. Digital impounding for councils with animal held at rehoming organisations | Rehoming orgs could hold animals surrendered/seized by pounds while the statutory process is ongoing. This would increase capacity of pounds as lower risk cats can be held externally and the activities in the rehoming process such as rehabilitation and training can be underway immediately. |
| 3b. Define feral cats in companion animals act and have different requirements for these cats | Allows a consistent approach for defining the feral status of a cat, which is substantially tighter than the definition currently used across councils. For cats determined as feral, they can be euthanised more quickly, which is less cruel than keeping these animals longer. |
| 3c. Increase pound capacity through funding | Would allow animals to be kept for longer, potentially increasing the likelihood of rehoming. |
| 3d. Standards for pound facilities | A set of standards in relation to the facilities provided by a pound to support animal welfare in pounds. |

| Policy area | Impact |
|---|---|
| Euthanasia process | |
| <p>4a. Clear guidance on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Behaviour assessment processes for suitability for rehoming ▪ Circumstances when animals can be euthanised ▪ Who can make the assessment ▪ Who can euthanise the animal ▪ Acceptable euthanasia methods ▪ Reporting/accountability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Would increase consistency and accountability of processes used for euthanasia of animals, to reduce euthanasia rates ▪ Ensure that sick and suffering animals are euthanised without prolonging suffering ▪ Improved welfare outcomes for euthanised animals, as euthanised humanely ▪ Note that this may require legislative change, as the current Act is very prescriptive, as well as guidance |
| 4b. Mandated no kill requirements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Require councils to have no kill policies except in particular circumstances |
| Rehoming organisations | |
| 5a. Allow rehoming organisations limited access to pet registry | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rehoming orgs will be able to check if an animal is stolen or reported missing before accepting it as well as verifying the details of person surrendering. ▪ Rehoming orgs will be able to process administration themselves and not rely on councils to update details, which can cause significant delays in the process. Increasing the speed of the process will allow more throughput of animals through rehoming organisations. |
| <p>5b. Tighter regulation and accountability for rehoming organisations to ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The welfare of animals in the care of the rehoming organisation ▪ Appropriate rehoming of animals. | <p>Policy options could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A Code of Practice relating to welfare standards ▪ Rehoming orgs could be required to undertake checks of prospective adopters. This may increase successful rehoming through reducing the number of animals returning in the system. ▪ Higher standards to achieve accreditation <p>Potential to improve animal welfare outcomes while under the care of rehoming organisation and avoid unsuccessful rehoming.</p> |
| 5c. Mandatory desexing for rehomed cats from councils and other rehoming organisations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Would ensure that rehomed animals are not contributing to future supply of cats, but would also increase the cost of rehoming. Most councils would not release an animal that is not desexed currently |
| Demand for rehomed animals | |
| 6a. Increase ranging of housing that accepts pets, particularly rental housing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Revise rental laws so that there is a right for people to have pets in rental accommodation, similar to the change made for owners in strata accommodation |
| 6b. Centralised animal marketing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Central point for animals to be found by prospective buyers |
| 6c. Semi-owner programs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Utilise semi-owners as prospective demand for cats |
| 6d. Provide funding or coordination for foster care networks across rehoming organisations and councils | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Foster care networks would allow reduced cost of rehoming and increase rehoming |

| Policy area | Impact |
|---|--|
| 6e. Provide funding to rehoming organisations to allow for lower charges for people for rehomed cats. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Funding would allow for rehoming organisations to be able to better provide services and rehome more cats |
| Information collection | |
| 7a. Entering euthanised cats in CAR, including those not chipped with pseudo chip numbers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provides clearer tracking of euthanised cats |
| 7b. Separating feral and infant categories in reasons for euthanasia | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provides clearer data on cats being euthanised |
| 7c. Providing standard definitions for types of cats | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provides consistent position across councils about types of cats, which would link to what councils are expected to do |
| 7d. Reporting to councils on outcomes for their rehomed animals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Would provide greater clarity to councils about the success of rehoming of their animals |

Source: CIE.

5 *Assessment of options for cats*

There are clear options that can achieve the objectives of the review for cats. In particular, community cat programs, which are focused on targeted free desexing (and identification and registration) of owned, semi-owned and community cats, have been shown to be effective and to have minimal other negative consequences.

This chapter:

- sets out examples of programs and councils where outcomes have changed dramatically
- undertakes a qualitative assessment of the options presented in the previous chapter. The aim of this is to show which options may work and which will not, and
- undertakes quantitative assessment of a small selection of options to understand how much they would cost and what benefits they are anticipated to deliver.

Evidence from councils that have dramatically improved outcomes

Many councils and other organisations have shown dramatic improvements in the outcomes for cats that come into their shelters. These changes show that the level of euthanasia of cats does not reflect the type of animals and the region, or even the overarching regulatory framework, but reflects the decisions that pounds and other organisations make about how they manage cats.

QLD RSPCA shelters

Kerr et al (2018) investigated dramatic reductions in euthanasia of cats from RSPCA shelters in Queensland.³⁴ Euthanasia rates fell from 58 per cent in 2011 to 15 per cent in 2016 across RSPCA's Queensland shelters. The study found that:

- the reduced euthanasia rate was because of increased rehoming, including:
 - a doubling of the number of cats temporarily in foster care
 - an 85 per cent reduction in the number of cats euthanised for behavioural reasons,
 - a reduction in the number of cats classified as feral and euthanized from 1178 to 132, reflecting increased time for assessment of behaviour and increased use of behaviour modification programs and foster care. Note that in 2016, one third of the cats classified as feral were rehomed within 90 days

³⁴ Kerr CA, Rand J, Morton JM, Reid R, Paterson M. Changes Associated with Improved Outcomes for Cats Entering RSPCA Queensland Shelters from 2011 to 2016. *Animals (Basel)*. 2018 Jun 12;8(6):95. doi: 10.3390/ani8060095. PMID: 29895814; PMCID: PMC6025144

- a large reduction in euthanasia of young kittens
- there was a marked increase in the number of commercial pet supply shops operating as cat adoption centres from two stores in 2011 to 39 stores in 2016
- there were also one-day adoption events held in 2016
- euthanasia rates were not reduced through reduced intake of cats or through increasing cats reclaimed by their owner

The study shows that efforts to try to increase rehoming of companion animals can be highly effective. Furthermore, classifications of animals in terms of behaviour and whether animals are rehomingable are subject to large changes.

Community cat programs

There have been a range of community cat programs that focus on targeted desexing of semi-owned and owned cats in specific areas where problems such as complaints and surrenders are occurring. The Australian Pet Welfare Foundation has been involved in many of these and has guidelines for these programs.³⁵ Examples of specific programs are set out below.

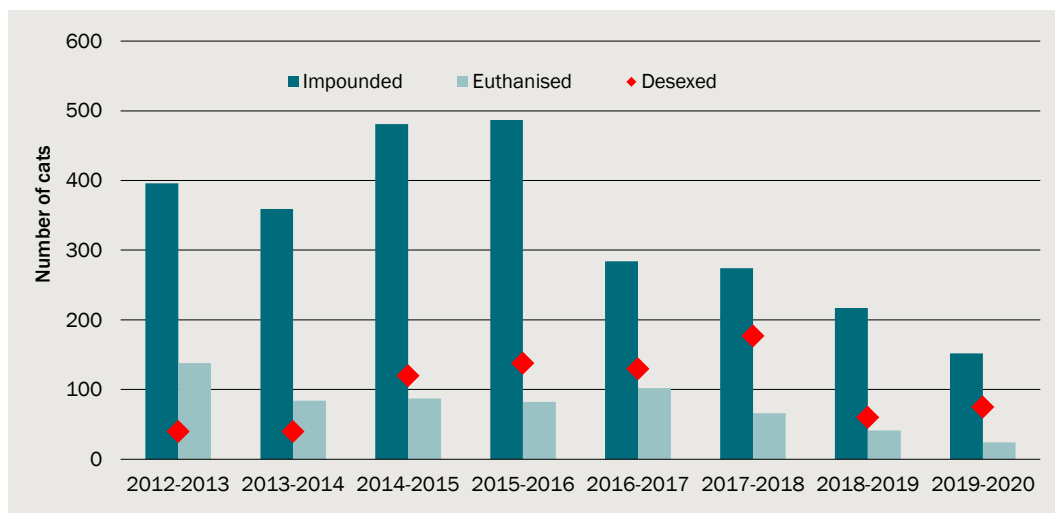
Banyule City Council Victoria

In 2012/13 Banyule began a program of targeted desexing of cats. This followed impounding of over 1000 cats in 2010/11 and euthanising 578 of these. The program was initially targeted in its first year, but then broadened. In 2016/17 the program went back to being very targeted at problem areas. By 2019/20, the number of impounded and euthanised cats in Banyule was 24.

The total cost (since the program commenced in 2013) for the cat desexing program is \$60 000.

³⁵ <https://petwelfare.org.au/community-cat-program-faq/#:~:text=A%20Community%20Cat%20Program%20is,microchip%20and%20vaccinate%20stray%20cats>

5.1 Banyule Community Cat program



Data source: Banyule City Council, Submission to The House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy into the "Inquiry into the problem of feral and domestic cats in Australia", <https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=29ab9b81-391c-459c-8eed-ff6253b0293d&subId=691320>.

APWF Community Cat Programs

The Australian Pet Welfare Foundation (APWF) has programs running across Australia under its Community Cat Program. Its end of year 2021 report sets out the impacts of programs in QLD and others' programs in NSW (Canterbury-Bankstown through RSPCA), Victoria (Banyule).³⁶

- In Queensland, over 1000 cats have been desexed.
 - In Ipswich, targeted suburbs had intake to shelters reduce to zero, while remaining unchanged in comparison suburbs
- In NSW, there has been a reduction in intake of one third to one half, for Canterbury-Bankstown through desexing of 163 cats through the RSPCA Keeping Cats Safe at Home program.³⁷

Other NSW councils

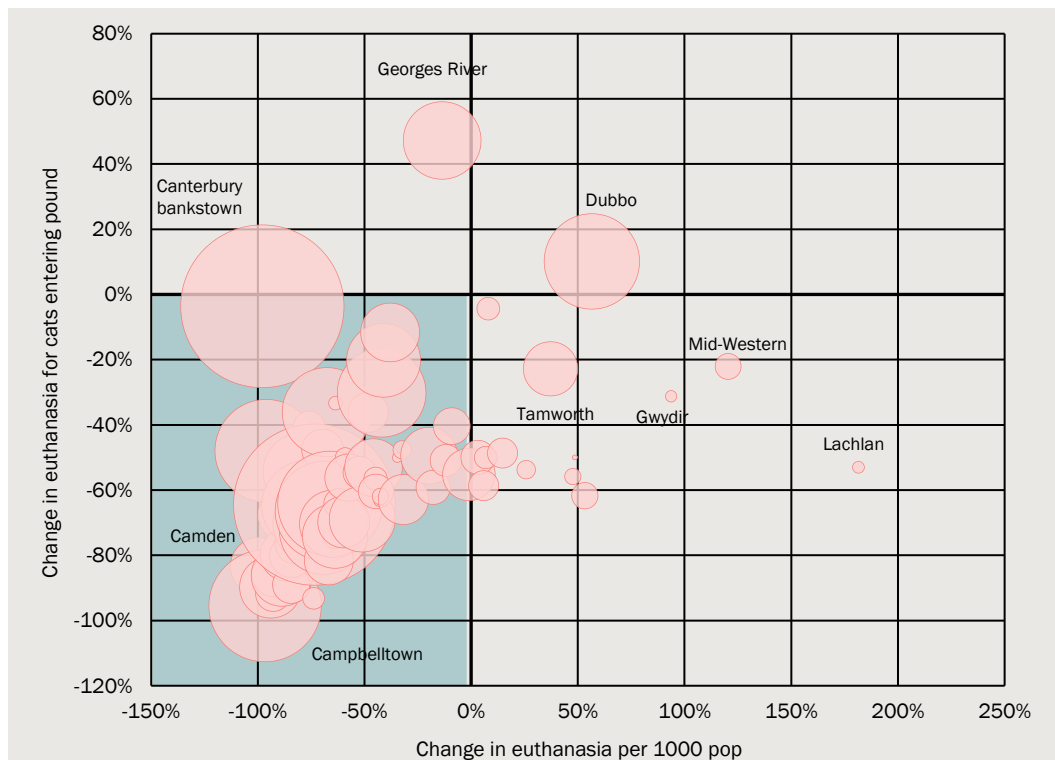
Over the past decade some councils in NSW have achieved better outcomes for euthanasia. Outcomes can be assessed as the rate of euthanasia per person, as well as the rate of euthanasia for cats entering pounds. Chart 5.2 shows the performance of a selection of councils with high cat intake over the period measured against both outcomes. The size of the bubble represents the number of cats entering each pound in 2014. Councils in the bottom left quadrant are the best performing councils, as they achieved reductions in both euthanasia per 1000 population as well as the pound

³⁶ APWF 2022, <https://petwelfare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Aust-Community-Cat-Program-Dec-2021.pdf>.

³⁷ See APWF 2022, <https://petwelfare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Aust-Community-Cat-Program-Dec-2021.pdf> and updated data in RSPCA 2022, presentation of Keeping Cats Safe at Home to Councils United for Pets.

ethanasia rate as a share of animal intake. A selection of the highest performing councils is provided in table 5.3.

5.2 Change in euthanasia per population and pound intake per council, 2014-2020



Note: Bubbles are sized by number of cats entering pounds in 2014, some councils were excluded due to incomplete data
Data source: CIE, based on data provided by Geoff Robertson, collated from council data provided to OLG.

Camden Council reduced its euthanasia rate of cats by 98 per cent from 2014 to 2020, and its euthanasia per cat intake by 67 per cent. Policies implemented by Camden were:

- Returning animals: Rangers return animals before impounding, when possible, complete a change of address form with the owner and issue a free pet tag
- Social media: Manage a dedicated facebook page which has over 15,540 followers
- Desexing: Subsidised desexing program
- Microchipping: Rangers attend owners home for microchipping
- Helping owners keep their animals: Rangers help owners with dogs that have come under notice for barking dog issues. They provide training and advice on how manage dogs with behavioural issues
- Events: PAWS in the park started with 700 people and now attracts over 3000, wide audience to educate on responsible pet ownership

Note that some care needs to be taken around whether councils have reduced euthanasia but have led to other negative consequences. For example, councils reducing intake though not accepting cats.

5.3 Selection of councils achieving decreases in euthanasia per person and per pound intake

| Council | Change in euthanasia per 1000 population (2014-2020) | Change in euthanasia rate per intake (2014-2020) | Number of cats entering pound (2014) |
|------------------------------|--|--|--------------------------------------|
| Camden Council | -99% | -83% | 290 |
| Canterbury-Bankstown Council | -98% | -4% | 2252 |
| Campbelltown City Council | -97% | -96% | 1065 |
| Fairfield City Council | -96% | -48% | 894 |
| Snowy Valleys Council | -94% | -90% | 326 |
| Murray River Council | -93% | -84% | 39 |
| Cowra Shire Council | -93% | -92% | 104 |
| Kempsey Shire Council | -93% | -86% | 164 |
| Coffs Harbour City Council | -89% | -86% | 319 |
| Burwood Council | -88% | -69% | 23 |
| Tweed Shire Council | -87% | -68% | 253 |
| Clarence Valley Council | -86% | -80% | 238 |
| Wentworth Shire Council | -84% | -89% | 116 |
| Hilltops Council | -84% | -80% | 160 |

Data source: CIE, based on data provided by Geoff Robertson, collated from council data provided to OLG.

The very large reductions in euthanasia and euthanasia rates for cats across councils indicate that councils can reduce euthanasia within existing frameworks. Stakeholder consultations indicated that improved outcomes were highly dependent on the efforts and attitudes of council staff.

Qualitative assessment of impacts of options

The assessment of the list of possible options set out in the previous chapter has been undertaken qualitatively, initially, to determine whether the option:

- is aligned to the objectives of the Review
- is supported by evidence that the option would be effective
- has minimal other negative consequences.

The assessment is summarised in table 5.4. The pink highlighted cells represent assessments that are negative, teal is positive and light teal is not clear or marginally positive. The options that perform best are highlighted with borders.

Note that we consider it just as important to identify what will not work as what will work. A large amount of resources can be spent on policies that are not likely to be effective, diverting resources from other activities.

5.4 Qualitative assessment of options

| Policy area | Aligned to objectives | Effective at achieving objective | Minimal other negative consequences |
|---|-----------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Supply-related policies – stray cats | | | |
| 1a. Trap neuter release | Yes | Low | Yes |
| 1b. Culling | No | NA | No |
| 1c. Council to not accept stray cats | Yes | Yes | No |
| 1d. Targeted desexing programs | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 1e. Subsidised general desexing programs | Yes | No | Yes |
| 1f. Reduce council cat trapping programs | Yes | Yes | No |
| Supply related policies – other | | | |
| 2a. Requirements for people who breed cats | Yes | No | No |
| 2b. Subsidised general desexing programs | Yes | No | Yes |
| 2c. Containment policies | Potentially | No | No |
| 2d. Council to not accept surrenders or abandoned cats | Yes | Yes | No |
| 2e. Increased compliance activity on registration and desexing | Yes | No | No |
| 2f. Financial incentives for desexing through registration system | Yes | Low | Yes |
| 2g. Abolish registration step in process | Yes | Low | Yes |
| 2h. Accuracy of owner details | Yes | Low | Yes |
| Impounding | | | |
| 3a. Digital impounding for councils with animal held at rehoming organisations | Yes | Yes | Not clear |
| 3b. Define feral cats in companion animals act and have different requirements for these cats | Partly | Yes | Yes |
| 3c. Increase pound capacity through funding | Yes | Low | Yes |
| 3d. Standards for pound facilities | No | NA | Yes |

| Policy area | Aligned to objectives | Effective at achieving objective | Minimal other negative consequences |
|--|-----------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Euthanasia process | | | |
| 4a. Clear guidance on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Behaviour assessment processes for suitability for rehoming Circumstances when animals can be euthanised Who can make the assessment Who can euthanise the animal Acceptable euthanasia methods Reporting/accountability | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 4b. Mandated no kill requirements | Yes | Yes | No |
| Rehoming organisations | | | |
| 5a. Allow rehoming organisations limited access to pet registry | Yes | Low | Not clear |
| 5b. Tighter regulation and accountability for rehoming organisations to ensure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The welfare of animals in the care of the rehoming organisation Appropriate rehoming of animals. | Yes | Not clear | No |
| 5c. Mandatory desexing for rehomed cats from councils and other rehoming organisations | Yes | Not clear | Yes |
| Demand for rehomed animals | | | |
| 6a. Increase ranging of housing that accepts pets, particularly rental housing | Yes | Yes | No |
| 6b. Centralised animal marketing | Yes | Low | Yes |
| 6c. Semi-owner programs | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 6d. Support/ coordination for foster care networks across rehoming organisations and councils | Yes | Not clear | Yes |
| 6e. Provide funding to rehoming organisations to allow for lower charges for people for rehomed cats. | Yes | Not clear | Yes |

| Policy area | Aligned to objectives | Effective at achieving objective | Minimal other negative consequences |
|---|-----------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Information collection | | | |
| 7a. Entering euthanised cats in CAR, including those not chipped with pseudo chip numbers | Yes | Low | Yes |
| 7b. Separating feral and infant categories in reasons for euthanasia | Yes | Low | Yes |
| 7c. Providing standard definitions for types of cats | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 7d. Reporting to councils on outcomes for their rehomed animals | Yes | Low | Yes |
| 7e. Separating rehoming organisation reporting into dogs and cats | Yes | Low | Yes |

Source: CIE.

The sections below set out the evidence and logic behind the assessment for major options.

Definitions for cats (3b, 7c)

OLG should provide a standardised set of definitions for cats. The definition used by the RSPCA³⁸ and recommended by the APWF³⁹ is:

- Domestic cats, which have some dependence (direct or indirect) on humans, categorised into:
 - Owned cats — identified with and cared for by a specific person and are directly dependent on humans. They are usually sociable, although sociability varies.
 - Semi-owned cats — directly and intentionally fed or provided with some other care by people who do not consider they own them. These cats are of varying sociability, with many socialised to humans, and they may be associated with one or more households.
 - Unowned cats — receive food from humans indirectly such as from food waste bins. They are indirectly dependent on humans, may have casual and temporary interactions with humans, and are of varying sociability, including some who are unsocialised to humans.
- Feral cats, which can be distinguished from domestic cats because they are unowned, unsocialised, have no relationship with or dependence on humans, survive by hunting or scavenging, and live and reproduce in the wild. Feral cats do not receive food from humans directly or indirectly.

³⁸ RSPCA (2018), Identifying Best Practice Domestic Cat Management in Australia, https://kb.rspca.org.au/bfd_download/identifying-best-practice-domestic-cat-management-in-australia-findings-and-recommendations-may-2018/.

³⁹ APWF 2022, Submission to NSW rehoming practices review.

The purpose of providing a definition of cats is that this would allow for different types of cats to be treated differently.

Targeted desexing and community cat programs (1d, 6c)

The examples of Community Cat programs earlier in this chapter show immediate success in targeted desexing through reducing intake of unwanted kittens and moving semi-owned cats into being owned. The crucial part of these programs is that they have to be micro targeted at areas where kittens and complaints are coming from. There is a tendency for these programs to gradually become broader so that they are accessible to the community as a whole (e.g. Option 2b). However, this leads to the programs becoming less effective and being more likely to subsidise desexing for people who would do it anyway and less likely to subsidise desexing that impacts on cats entering pounds.

Complementing this process is clarifying ownership of the cats, which can increase the number of cats being returned to owners and spending less time in the council pound in the future.

In the next chapter we work through what the costs of this on an ongoing basis may look like and what benefits it could deliver.

Changes to microchipping and registration arrangements (2f, 2g, 2h)

The current microchipping (identification) and registration arrangements are not working in NSW. A large number of cats (and dogs) are not identified and many of those identified are not registered. As set out in the previous chapter, potentially as few as 25 per cent of pet cats are registered.

Recent amendments to the Companion Animals Act have increased the cost for having a non-desexed cat, through introducing an annual permit. While the concept of a lower fee for a desexed animal and a higher fee for a non-desexed animal is a good one, with the overall regulatory system not functioning this is almost certainly just pushing people out of the system entirely. This is particularly true for cats entering pounds, where financial barriers are very important to people owning or semi-owning these cats.⁴⁰

Some councils have begun efforts to bring cats within the system and charge annual permit fees and increase compliance and enforcement activities (Option 2e). However, our understanding is that compliance is very resource intensive, particularly for the types of animals that are ending up in pounds, and has had minimal success. We do not recommend this as a solution to reduce the number of cats entering pounds. Simple compliance programs that are broad-based (e.g. sending letters) that make people realise they are meant to register an animal may be worthwhile to raise revenue, but are not likely to reduce the cats that enter pounds.

Note that very few registered cats are not desexed. Of the 290 000 cats registered from 2010/11 to 2020/21, 280 000 were desexed at the time of registration. Some of the remainder of 10 000 cats were likely desexed but not at the time of registration. A part of

⁴⁰ APWF 2022, Submission to NSW rehoming practices review.

the non-desexed cats would also be cats intended for breeding. In 2020/21 there were only 1456 permits for non-desexed cats. This should be understood in the context of low compliance activity by councils around this, particularly during COVID-19.

The population of non-desexed cats outside of the registration system will be many times larger. Bringing in more onerous fees for people who are already complying will not solve issues for the vast majority of non-desexed cats who are not complying with existing registration requirements.

The changes to the identification and registration processes that could improve outcomes for cats are:

- removal of the annual fee for non-desexed cats — this would mean that this is at least not a barrier to Community Cat programs that desex, identify and register cats, which currently incur the annual fee for the first year if cats are older than four months and are not desexed. However, the fee would not apply if the cat was initially brought into the pound/rehoming organisation system.
- waiving registration fees for cats through Community Cat similar to the waiving of registration fees for rehoming organisations. A consequence of this is that it would reduce income flowing back to councils via registration fees unless the government subsidised this measure.
- waiving registration fees for cats that are returned to owners, although this will not have much impact for cats. Note that councils can do this already but would end up paying the 20 per cent of the registration cost to NSW Office of Local Government.

Broader changes, which are more relevant for dogs into pounds than cats could include:

- registering (i.e. paying for) an animal at the same time as identification. This would mean people selling animals would be responsible for registration payment. A possible risk from this is that this discourages microchipping
- rather than providing a higher fee for non-desexed animals, introduce a higher overall registration fee and include a voucher for desexing that goes with this fee, valid for a year. This allows for the desexing incentive to be retained, and identification and registration to be combined. It also means that the desexing incentive is not as strictly time limited as currently (4 months for cats, 6 months for dogs), which is problematic.
- require any animal sold to be registered.

These changes will not have major impacts for cats.

Culling and trap neuter release (TNR) (1a, 1b)

Culling of cats and TNR would both reduce the intake of cats into pounds if undertaken at a high level of intensity. However, the political economy of culling of cats is highly problematic. For this Review, given the objectives are to reduce euthanasia, culling is not considered an acceptable option. The evidence suggests that culling has to be high intensity and sustained to reduce cat populations.⁴¹

⁴¹ APWF 2022, Submission to NSW rehoming practices review.

TNR is currently not allowed under POCTA — this legislation does not allow animals to be released into the public, in this case after being neutered.

The RSPCA has reviewed the evidence on TNR and suggests that there may be some role., but that evidence is not conclusive about impacts in Australia and it depends on what outcomes are actually being sought.⁴² The RSPCA expects that resources would be better spent on other activities around towns and cities (such as targeted desexing) and on culling in remote areas. Given this, TNR is not considered as a focus for this Review.

Council acceptance policies for cats (1c, 1f, 2d)

Councils refusing to accept cats and not actively trapping cats, which is done by a number of councils in NSW, particularly those with ‘no kill’ policies, will undoubtedly reduce the euthanasia of cats through pounds. This is because if no cats are impounded then none will be euthanised. Examples of this can be seen in particular NSW councils, such as Liverpool, where cat impounding and euthanasia has dramatically fallen over time.

While not accepting cats will reduce euthanasia, it has other consequences such as:

- larger populations of urban stray cats — these cats may not have good welfare outcomes themselves, as well as causing nuisance problems for people and potentially impacts on other animals
- people seeking to drop cats at other locations, such as vets, directly to rehoming organisations/animal welfare organisations and to neighbouring councils’ pounds — stakeholders such as vets indicated in consultations that when a council doesn’t accept cats, people will look to the next alternative making the cat someone else’s problem
- increased abandonment of animals in the absence of the ability to drop animals to a council pound.

Given these issues, while not accepting cats would reduce euthanasia, this does not seem consistent with the broader requirements for a council in relation to animal management.

Breeder requirements (2a)

Currently, there are no significant restrictions on cat breeding in NSW. One option to reduce cat supply would be restrictions on breeding, such as licensing requirements. The cats coming into pounds are not typically part of the regulatory system as it currently exists. That is, they are not identified and registered. Restrictions on cat breeding would only be influential by people abiding by the current regulatory system. Hence these would not influence this population of cats relevant for impounding and euthanasia. As cats are generally sold for low or no cost and bred relatively easily, preventing backyard breeding and maintaining compliance will be challenging.

⁴² RSPCA Research Report, A review of trap-neuter-return (TNR) for the management of unowned cats, <https://kb.rspca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Cats-Trap-Neuter-Release-%E2%80%93-RSPCA-Research-Report-March-2011.pdf>.

Cat containment policies (2c)

Cat containment policies seek to remove the right to roam for cats, making cats the same as dogs in relation to how they are managed through councils. This has the effect of making it clearer when councils and others are able to seize cats.

Cat containment policies have been introduced in some Australian jurisdictions such as the ACT. The objective of containment appears to be related to improving the welfare of owned cats and reducing impacts on native wildlife.⁴³ Some stakeholders have strongly supported cat containment as a solution to reduce cat impounding and euthanasia and impacts on native wildlife.

In terms of impacts on cat impounding, euthanasia and rehoming, we expect the following impacts:

- the types of cats entering pounds are not likely to be contained through a containment policy
 - cats entering pounds are not in general registered or even identified. Hence it is very hard to see that someone would comply with cat containment when they haven't complied with much more basic regulations
 - cats are often not owned and these cats would therefore not be kept at home through containment policies
- cat containment would provide a stronger rationale for collection of roaming cats, compared to existing regulations. This would increase animals into pounds for some period, but may reduce animals into pounds in the longer term if this leads to better cat population control
 - this would be akin to a high intensity culling program, with cat containment providing councils with a clearer ability to seize cats than currently exists
 - as discussed above, it is difficult to envisage councils being able to maintain high intensity culling with acceptance from their communities, given the sorts of cats that generate animals into pounds have connections and are being fed by people in the community
 - when cats enter pounds, their primary avenues for leaving are being rehomed or euthanised. With insufficient appetite to rehome the increased influx of cats, increasing euthanasia is almost a certainty in the short term
- cat containment would reduce demand for cats from rehoming organisations, because some people would be less interested in owning a cat if they had to put in costly containment measures or disliked the implications of keeping a cat inside.

Given this, cat containment is not a solution to the problems that exist for cat impounding and rehoming. Whether it achieves other objectives, such as related to native wildlife impacts, is outside the scope of this review. We note very mixed evidence about native wildlife impacts of domestic cats.

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https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/open_government/inform/act_government_media_releases/chris-steel-mla-media-releases/2022/new-cat-laws-to-protect-pets-and-native-wildlife

No kill policies (4b)

No kill policies are in place in some countries and for many animal shelters, including in NSW. In practice, no kill policies have a range of exemptions, and euthanasia rates can remain high in no kill shelters. Some shelters claiming no kill in NSW have very high euthanasia rates. Overseas, no kill shelters can still see many animals euthanised or dying in the shelter.⁴⁴

For a true no kill policy, councils would be required to keep cats (and dogs) that were unsuitable for rehoming until the end of their lives.

In practice, a no kill policy closes one of the two outlets for cats in pounds (euthanasia), which leaves adoption as the sole pathway for cats leaving pounds. In response, councils will have two options available:

- 1 Decrease the inflow of animals: councils will need to stop accepting cats, which will lead to various negative outcomes as discussed above
- 2 Increase the capacity of pounds: councils will need to build extensive infrastructure to support the increase in cats under care which will come at substantial cost.

Both options will lead to significant negative consequences and not achieve the reviews objectives.

Mandatory desexing (5c)

Most councils and shelters only sell or rehome cats that are desexed. However, this is not mandatory and we are aware that it is not universally the case.

The RSPCA notes that mandatory desexing has the potential to be effective.⁴⁵ Councils and shelters should at least ensure they are not leading to problems for the cats they release, in terms of future supply of cats.

Housing policies for pets (6a)

Owners of housing, including strata properties, have automatic rights to be able to have pets. However, for renters, whether pets are allowed is up to the landlord in most cases, because the rental tenancy includes clauses in relation to pets.⁴⁶ Housing is noted as a barrier to both having a pet and is a reason why people surrender their pets to pounds and other organisations for rehoming.

⁴⁴ Večerek, V., Kubesová, K., Voslářová, E., & Bedáňová, I. (2017). Rates of death and euthanasia for cats in no-kill shelters in the Czech Republic. *Acta Veterinaria Brno*, 86(1), 109-115.

⁴⁵ RSPCA, Identifying best practice domestic cat management in Australia, https://kb.rspca.org.au/bfd_download/identifying-best-practice-domestic-cat-management-in-australia-findings-and-recommendations-may-2018/.

⁴⁶ If no clause is included then a tenant can have a pet without needing a landlord's consent.

Most other Australian states and territories leave decisions about pets for tenants as between a tenant and a landlord. However, Victoria and QLD have somewhat stronger provisions for tenant, including:

- Victorian tenants wanting a pet need to fill out a pet request form. Landlords must provide a good reason to refuse this.
- Queensland laws change in October 2022 so that tenants must fill out a pet request form, and there are a set of limited reasons allowed for a landlord to refuse this, such as existing body corporate by-laws which prevent pet ownership, if the premises are not appropriate for the pet because of size or security, or if a pet is deemed dangerous.

A change to increase the rights for tenants to have pets has much broader implications than simply in relation to impacts on animal shelters and euthanasia. Broadly, we support this direction but further work would be required to develop specific options for evaluation.

Demand-based initiatives (6b, 6d, 6e)

Ultimately, the ability to rehome more cats will depend on demand. Some aspects of demand, such as from semi-owners, are addressed under the Community Cat Programs. Other demand-related considerations can include:

- Foster care networks, which can provide both temporary and permanent homes for cats, have been shown to increase rehoming and reduce euthanasia.⁴⁷
- Centralised marketing of animals — this would provide a portal or service that multiple councils or rehoming organisations could use to show animals available.⁴⁸
- External funding that could reduce the prices charged for rehomed animals.

Councils and other rehoming organisations should look to foster care networks to increase their rehoming, as this has been shown to be a successful policy. It is not obvious that there is any way in which the NSW Government can support this.

Centralised marketing is already done through non-government organisations.⁴⁹ It is relatively straight forward for people to locate animals for rehoming through such tools and through internet searches. Hence this is not a necessary area for NSW Government to intervene.

External funding is discussed in further detail below. Price is an important factor for people in decisions around cats (see chapter 3). However, many cats are already being obtained for free, and charges from rehoming organisations for cats from consultations were not particularly high, including when thinking about the ongoing costs related to pet ownership.

It appears that there is no particular regulatory changes that would support increased demand.

⁴⁷ See for example, the evidence from Queensland shelters earlier in this chapter.

⁴⁸ See Pet Rescue as an example: <https://www.petrescue.com.au/>

⁴⁹ See Pet Rescue as an example: <https://www.petrescue.com.au/>

Funding (3c, 6d, 6e)

Funding is a significant issue across the pound and rehoming sector.

- Pounds and pound operators operate largely through funds provided by ratepayers, although some councils do collect significant amounts from fines related to companion animals and funds are also collected through animal registration.
- Rehoming organisations operate through donations, volunteer labour and revenue from rehoming of animals. They have no government source of funding.
- Animal welfare organisations receive small amounts of government funding, funding from providing services and funding through donations.

A number of submissions felt that councils were passing off their obligations and the cost of these to rehoming organisations.

As shown in chapter 2, rehoming of companion animals is much more expensive than euthanasia. Higher costs will be expected in order to achieve higher rehoming rates for the same level of intake. Some policies, such as targeted desexing of cats, could be financially neutral or even beneficial, but many other changes will cost more.

Funding related options raised by stakeholders include:

- increased funding for pounds from the NSW Government.
- funding of some sort for rehoming organisations, and
- increased funding for animal welfare organisations.

Broadly, we consider that ratepayers are the appropriate group to fund costs related to pounds and what the community as a whole expects are reasonable costs for rehoming. Where additional rehoming can occur above what the general community expects is reasonable, then rehoming organisations can illicit higher values for particular people through donations and volunteering. As such, the general model for funding is relatively sound.

Whether the system can deliver on improved rehoming and reduced euthanasia that costs more within this funding structure is questionable. Councils have many other needs for funding and animal management is often not the priority. Rehoming organisations and animal welfare organisations are limited by the extent to which they illicit donations. Councils and rehoming organisations are accountable to their specific funders in this case, which is not a weakness.

There are programs that have been put in place in other jurisdictions for funding. For example, Victoria has a grant program that covers:

- \$1 million for animal shelters and foster carers to purchase equipment or upgrade or expand their services
- \$2 million for not-for profit and community vet clinics to maintain and expand their services, and allow new low-cost clinics to be set up in areas of need around Victoria.

- \$5 million over four years to support animal rehoming services to meet the costs of veterinary treatments, purchase of specific equipment and/or services to deliver training or rehabilitation for an animal.⁵⁰

If funding was to be considered for rehoming organisations, a grant program is the logical approach, as this could properly assess the organisations seeking funding rather than having broad-based government funding related to rehoming.

There are some aspects of funding arrangements that could be improved:

- it costs councils less when they transfer animals to a rehoming organisation compared to undertaking their own adoption. Councils should consider paying rehoming organisations for taking on animals for rehoming, as long as they can monitor outcomes, to improve the financial sustainability of rehoming
- the ability of organisations such as Sydney Cats and Dogs Home to be able to finance major capital expenditure is not clear. Where obtaining loans/other financing is difficult, the NSW Government could provide direct loans or loan guarantees. This would be paid back over time through revenue from the provision of services

We are also recommending funding specifically related to targeted desexing programs for cats — avoided costs from reducing cat intake would provide councils the opportunity to increase funding allocated for other rehoming activities.

The discussion above is focused on animal rehoming. There are also funding considerations in relation to organisations with regulatory responsibilities related to POCTA, which are outside the scope of this review.

Accountability and standards (3d and 5b)

Currently there are no specific standards for pounds and rehoming organisations that set out the requirements to achieve good animal welfare outcomes. However, pounds and rehoming organisations still must comply with POCTAA requirements.

Efforts to develop standards have occurred since then but have not been adopted. This issue is not strictly within the scope of this Review and we have not made a formal recommendation in relation to this. We consider that standards should be developed and released to ensure positive animal welfare outcomes during impounding. Where this leads to a need for facility upgrades, particularly in remote and regional areas, then funding for this could be considered.

For rehoming organisations, there is a process for approval in order to be able to receive free registration of companion animals. This largely relates to reporting obligations not animal welfare obligations.⁵¹ Rehoming organisations can operate without this approval but would not receive free registration.

⁵⁰ <https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/livestock-and-animals/animal-welfare-victoria/community-and-education/animal-welfare-fund-grants-program>

⁵¹ <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/public/dogs-cats/information-for-professionals/information-for-animal-rescue-organisations/>

A number of stakeholders raised issues related to the standards for rehoming organisations and a lack of ability to determine whether successful rehoming of animals was occurring. The perception of a risk in relation to hoarders of cats was noted by many councils.

At this stage we do not see regulation of the rehoming sector as a major driver of reduced euthanasia and increased successful rehoming of companion animals. It is clear that the sector operates with minimal resourcing and a regulatory burden would take resources out of activities related to rehoming. There is no evidence of a problem in relation to rehoming organisations currently.

We do recommend that the NSW OLG make use of the CAR to periodically monitor outcomes from rehoming organisations, including ensuring that the CAR being developed currently can be used for this.

If the sector was to be regulated then this would have to come with government funding (either through councils or the NSW Government). Similarly, if government funding was allocated to the sector then this would be expected to come with increased regulation and accountability.

We note that the Victorian taskforce on rehoming pets recommended introducing a regulatory system for rehoming.⁵² This was supported by the Victorian Government.

Behaviour assessment and euthanasia protocols (4a)

The assessment of suitability of a cat for rehoming is clearly undertaken with a high degree of subjectivity. The existing data on whether a cat is euthanised because it is not suitable for rehoming or is feral/infant is likely based on very different assessments across councils and even within a council over time. We know this because of the variation in outcomes across councils and other organisations and over time. That is, councils who would be expected to have similar intake are clearly making very different assessments. And councils (and others) whose intake would be expected to stay similar over time can make very different assessments over time. Kerr et al (2018) is an excellent example of the way assessments can change, based on RSPCA shelters in Queensland.⁵³

We consider that there is merit in seeking to improve consistency of assessment but doubt that there is a single specific tool that provides an objective approach to behaviour assessment of cats. The feedback from stakeholders suggests that endless effort could be spent on developing and mandating a behaviour assessment tool.

Rather than going down the approach of a mandated tool for behaviour assessment, better options relate to the training of people undertaking assessments of suitability for rehoming and the process for ensuring decisions about euthanasia are made with evidence and due consideration.

⁵² https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/834105/Taskforce-on-Rehoming-Pets-Final-Report-December-2021.pdf

⁵³ Kerr CA, Rand J, Morton JM, Reid R, Paterson M. Changes Associated with Improved Outcomes for Cats Entering RSPCA Queensland Shelters from 2011 to 2016. *Animals (Basel)*. 2018 Jun 12;8(6):95. doi: 10.3390/ani8060095. PMID: 29895814; PMCID: PMC6025144

During the review, stakeholders indicated that best practice involved:

- using a behavioural assessor to assess suitability for rehoming (this could be a vet or not, noting some vets do not have the relevant qualifications)
- monitoring animal behaviour over at least 3 days, particularly for cats whose behaviour can be heavily influenced by a change in environment
- having a process for a manager to authorise euthanasia, based on the advice of the assessor and pound staff, and
- using a vet to undertake humane euthanasia of animals.

Given the wide variety of circumstances for councils in terms of their access to vets and behavioural assessors, we do not think the legislation should mandate this process.

Administrative changes (3a, 5a)

Stakeholders noted some administrative issues that could be addressed. These included:

- rehoming organisations cannot access the Companion Animal Register. This means that changes to information have to go through councils. This is an administrative burden on rehoming organisations and councils. It would be possible to provide access to the CAR for rehoming organisations in some capacity to be able to reduce administrative burden
- currently, an animal that moves to foster care or between foster carers of a rehoming organisation has to provide a C3A (Change of Owner) form to a local council within 3 days of the change. This seems like unnecessary administrative burden, given the animal remains under the care of the rehoming organisation.

An interesting idea was also raised for the idea of a digital or virtual pound, building off the foster care model. Under this model, rather than a seized or abandoned animal having to physically go to a pound (or approved animal welfare organisation), it would be virtually entered into the pound but could remain at another physical site. This could provide expanded capacity for pounds and leave animals in a location that is less distressing than a pound. This idea has not been developed in detail, but we welcome feedback on how this could be undertaken.

Information collection (7a – 7e)

NSW collates and publishes much more comprehensive data on outcomes from pounds and rehoming approved organisations than other jurisdictions. There are some adjustments that we recommend be made to this information to make it more useful, as follows:

- data on cats entering pounds in the Companion Animal Register is currently not useful because most cats are not microchipped before entry and if cats are then euthanised they never enter the CAR. We recommend that all cats that enter a pound have an entry in CAR, even if they are not microchipped, through another identifier, so be better able to centrally have information about animals going into pounds and being euthanised

- the reason for euthanasia should be separated for feral and infant, as these are very different reasons. The definition of feral should be consistently used as per recommendation on definitions
- rehoming organisations should separate out their reporting for cats and for dogs.

Other possible revisions to information provision that are not recommended at this stage, but could be considered through the new CAR include:

- being able to extract data on time in pound from the CAR, or councils providing this information through their annual reporting
- including outcomes and reasons for euthanasia of animals in the CAR, to allow for tracking of animals at an individual level
- reporting to councils on outcomes of their rehomed animals through using CAR. For example, time spent in rehoming organisation, any subsequent ownership transfers, dangerous/menacing declarations (dogs).

Quantitative assessment of selected options

Community cat program

The community cat program (CCP) would target problem areas within a selection of LGAs. In other jurisdictions where programs similar to the CCP have been implemented, this has been done at a suburb level geographic area. For this CBA, we assume 40 councils would be included in the program. This catchment would include an estimated annual intake of 19 499 cats into pounds. The CCP would aim to target 75 per cent of the cat intake for a council area through targeting suburbs with the highest intake rates.

In this catchment, before implementation of the CCP we would anticipate the following outcomes for cats entering pounds:

- 8 032 cats would be euthanised
- 845 released to owners
- 10 622 adopted

Based on past programs, desexing rates can be ~20-30 cats desexed per 1000 people (per year). Desexing rates are typically proportional to the amount of intake into a pound. For example, if a pound has an intake of 20 cats per 1000 people, then a program's desexing rate would be similar. Based on this, we assume that the number of cats desexed is the same as the intake rate of cats for the council, for the first 2 years of the program, reducing to 50 per cent for subsequent years. Based on past programs and targets from the APWF Community Cat Program, we allow for this resulting in a 30 per cent reduction in the number of cats for intake in the subsequent year. We assume that the reduction in intake would be distributed between outcomes as follows:

- euthanasia falls by 67 per cent of the reduced intake
- rehoming falls by 33 per cent of the reduced intake.

Costs

Cats that enter pounds will exit via three distinct pathways; euthanasia, adoption or released to owner. Each outcome has an associated cost for the pound, which comprises of daily sustenance, as well as desexing, microchipping and vaccination when necessary.

The average costs per outcome are as follows:

- Euthanasia: \$368
- Adoption: \$1361
- Released to owner: \$108

When an animal is adopted or released to its owner, there may be a fee recoverable by the pound. We assume a sale price of \$100 per cat.

The program would involve a team to respond to problem areas, conduct community engagement and set traps and collect cats. Based on feedback from comparable programs in other jurisdictions, we estimate that 1 full time equivalent employee could manage the collection of 800 cats per year for desexing, based on input from existing programs. We assume a cost of \$66 664 per FTE.

Cats would be transferred to a vet to be desexed. We assume the cost of the procedure to be \$100 per cat, based on data provided by councils.

We also assume that there is a fixed upfront cost for each council to be part of the program. This could include for obtaining traps and grant administration and assessment. We have allowed for \$20 000 upfront cost per council.

Benefits

Euthanasia of cats is not desired by the community as there is an expectation to protect the welfare of cats. While protections for the welfare of cats exist in both the *Protection of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979* and the *Companion Animals Act 1998*, actions initiated by the community show an increased preference for not euthanising cats. We observe this preference through the activities of rehoming organisations and foster carers. Rehoming organisations mobilise a network of volunteers to rehome cats that would otherwise most likely be euthanised. As a result, decreasing the euthanasia rate for cats would decrease cost born by society for the welfare loss of cats. We approximate this cost by measuring the difference between the average cost of euthanasia and the average cost of adoption. These costs are calculated based on the sustenance cost associated with the average days kept in the pound plus any additional procedures. For cats being euthanised, this includes the cost of the procedure, whereas for cats being adopted, this includes microchipping, vaccination and desexing.

Cats that roam in public can be a nuisance to the public. Nuisance cats are defined by the Act as a cat that:

- makes persistent, excessive noise that reasonably interferes with the peace, comfort or convenience of any person in any other premises; or
- repeatedly damages anything outside the property on which it is ordinarily kept.

This definition guides what is required to satisfy a complaint against someone's cat, however people may experience nuisance that is beyond this definition. Reducing the number of cats in public will decrease the nuisance costs borne by the public. We have not quantified the benefit of reduced nuisance for the CBA.

Stakeholders who work within the pound and rehoming system have reported that staff may experience significant distress when euthanising cats. While euthanasia in some instances can be tolerable, repetitious and frequent euthanasia at a facility has been reported to decrease the welfare of staff and volunteers. Stakeholder feedback reported that people generally enter this profession to improve the welfare of cats and can feel conflicted when their role includes frequent euthanasia. Decreasing the volume and rate of euthanasia would increase the welfare of pound and rehoming organisation staff and volunteers. We have not quantified this benefit in the CBA.

Results

The results of the cost-benefit analysis for the CCP are presented in table 5.5. Results are presented for low, medium and high input assumptions. Across all scenarios, the benefit cost ratio is greater than 2, meaning that for every \$1 invested greater than \$2 of benefits are received.

The overall cost of the program would be \$12.7 million to \$19.2 million in present value terms over 10 years. The annual cost not discounted is ~\$2 million per year.

The overall benefits are substantially higher than cost, because councils avoid costs of having to deal with cats in a pound. There is also a community benefit from lower euthanasia of cats.

5.5 Cost benefit analysis results of the community cat program

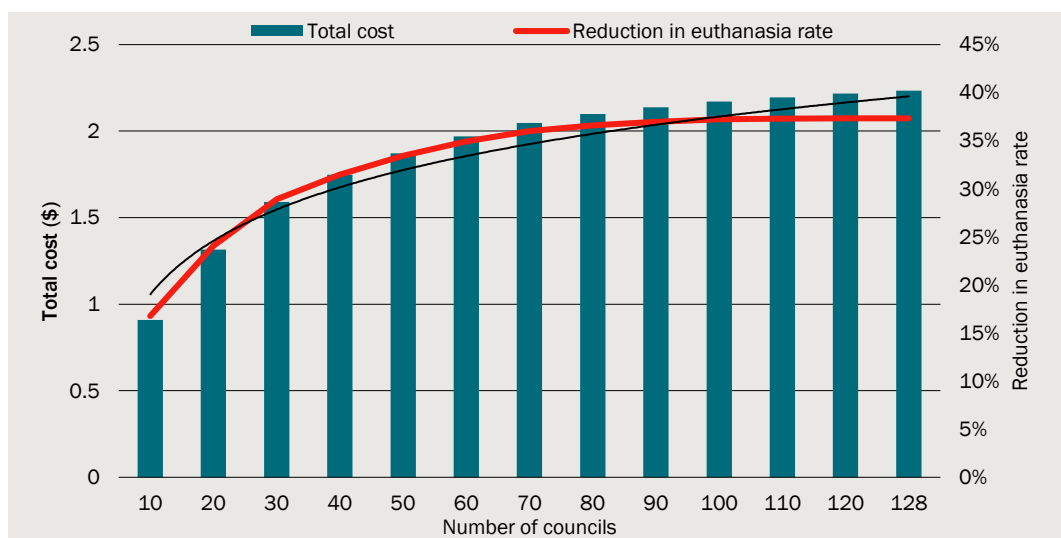
| Variable | Low | Medium | High |
|--|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| | PV \$m | PV \$m | PV \$m |
| Costs | | | |
| Desexing and chipping costs | 6.5 | 9.8 | 13.0 |
| Upfront costs | 0.7 | 0.7 | 0.7 |
| Council annual costs | 5.4 | 5.4 | 5.4 |
| Total costs | 12.7 | 15.9 | 19.2 |
| Benefits | | | |
| Avoided cost of pound - for euthanised | 4.2 | 12.9 | 22.5 |
| Avoided cost of pound - for adoption | 9.2 | 22.0 | 34.6 |
| Avoided nuisance costs | Not quantified | Not quantified | Not quantified |
| Staff welfare | Not quantified | Not quantified | Not quantified |
| Avoided community cost of euthanasia | 14.1 | 31.2 | 46.7 |

| Variable | Low | Medium | High |
|-----------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| | PV \$m | PV \$m | PV \$m |
| Total benefits | 27.5 | 66.1 | 103.8 |
| Net benefit | 14.8 | 50.2 | 84.6 |
| BCR | 2.2 | 4.1 | 5.4 |

Note: Discount rate of 7 per cent
 Source: CIE.

The hypothetical program above is based on the 40 councils with the highest cat intake rates participating. This would reduce euthanasia of cats by around one third across NSW. Expanding the program to councils with lower intake rates (or to parts of councils where intake is less intense) would lead to further reductions in euthanasia, although the majority of the impact is from the top 40 councils (chart 5.6). The impact of additional councils on the euthanasia rate diminishes as the total number of councils approaches the whole of NSW (128).

5.6 Change in total cost and reduction in euthanasia rate by number of councils involved in CCP



Data source: CIE

No kill policy

To achieve zero euthanasia councils can implement a ‘no kill’ policy, whereby cats are held under care until they are either adopted or die. The expected duration cats remaining under care could vary significantly based on the demand for rehomed cats. We estimate two scenarios, the first being where cats are adopted at the same rate as is currently observed and the second where cats are not able to be rehomed and remain in care indefinitely.

Scenario 1: previously euthanised cats adopted at current rates

If councils adopted a no kill policy and all animals were eventually rehomed, costs would increase based on the number of additional days the cats were in care, as well as the costs of microchipping, desexing and vaccination.

We estimate a lower bound cost by assuming that the cats that aren't euthanised are rehomed at the same rate as other cats. This would mean that cats would be held in care for an additional 34 days and incur approximately \$138 in costs for microchipping, desexing and vaccination. Assuming a day rate of \$20, this results in an additional cost of \$828 per cat adopted. In the financial year 2018/2019 there were 9779 cats euthanised, which if they were adopted would cost approximately \$8 million. This compares to \$43 million per year for all companion animal management activities by councils currently (for cats and dogs).

This is a highly conservative estimate of the cost increase, as unless there were efforts to increase demand for cats, much longer times would be expected for adoption.

Scenario 2: previously euthanised cats not able to be adopted

Alternatively, if the cats were not able to be rehomed and remained in care indefinitely, they would incur significantly higher costs. The average lifespan of a cat is approximately 15 years⁵⁴ and the average age of a cat entering a pound that is eventually euthanised is 2.4 years. Choosing to not euthanise a cat would result in keeping it in care for potentially 12.6 years. The average daily rate of a council pound for a cat is \$20 per day, which would result in a total cost of \$91 797 per cat over 12.6 years. Using a discount rate of 7 per cent, this results in a present value of \$43 448 per cat.

The total cost of euthanasia is \$296, which includes the procedure which costs on average \$116, plus 9 days of care which totals \$180.

Based on numbers for the financial year 2018/2019, the eventual cost per year as animal numbers build would be \$420 million per year across NSW for cats alone. The cost of euthanising these cats was \$2.9m, which is 147 times lower cost. Given annual companion animal management costs of \$43 million for councils, this is a very large increase in costs and would require a very large increase in pound capacity.

A broader conversation with the community would be required in order to be able to justify costs of this level.

⁵⁴ Science, Why we outlive our pets, accessed 14 September 2022, <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.350.6265.1182>

PART II

Dogs



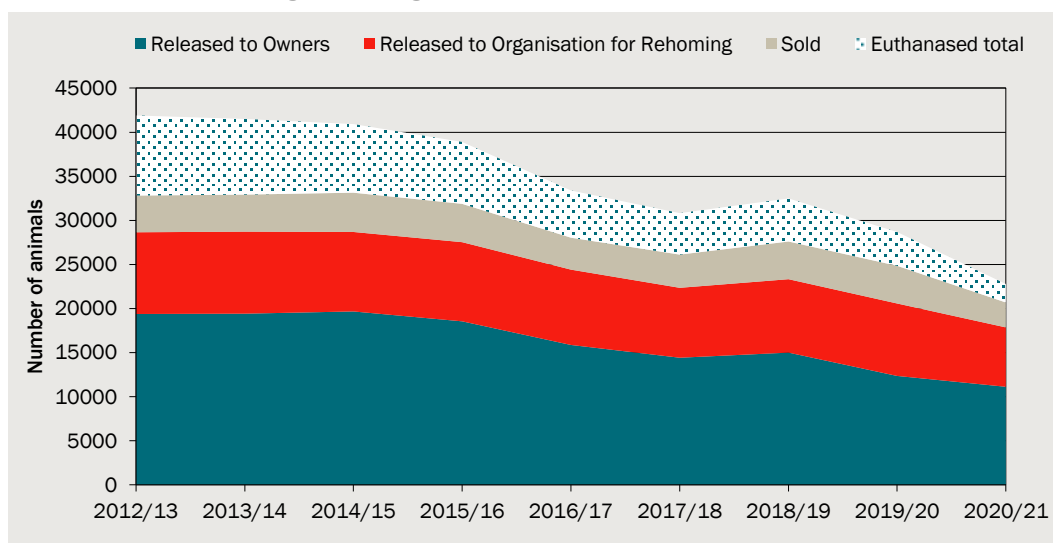
6 Problems with the current system: dogs

Outcomes

Over the past 10 years, there has been a steep decline in the number of dogs euthanised in council pounds. The number of dogs euthanised has declined by more than 80 per cent over this period. This reflects both:

- a significant decrease in the number of dogs entering council pounds (see chart 6.1); the number of dogs entering council pounds fell by around 50 per cent over this period; and
- a decrease in the share of dogs that enter council pounds that are euthanised; the share of dogs euthanised has decline from around 25 per cent to around 9 per cent.

6.1 Outcomes for dogs entering pounds – 2012/13 to 2020/21

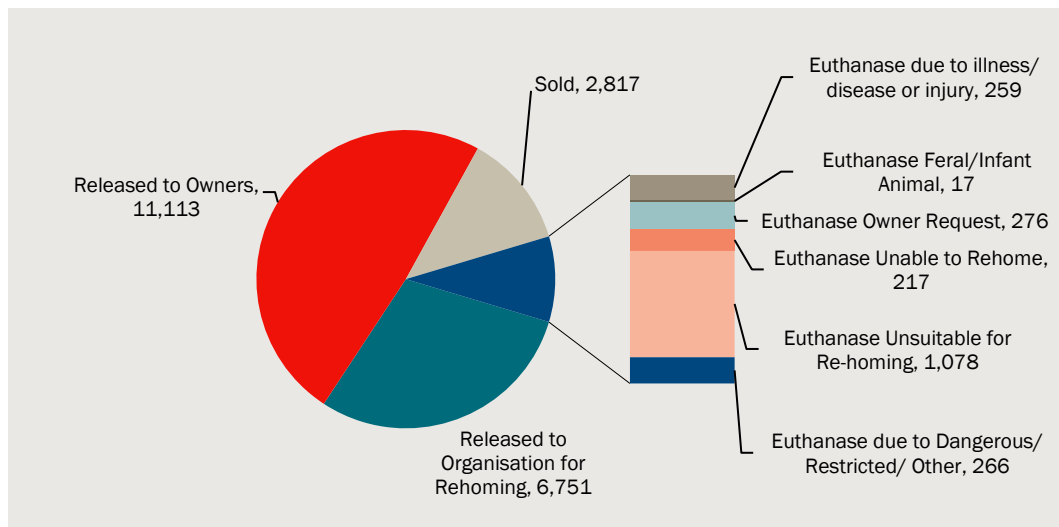


Data source: CIE analysis based on data from NSW OLG at <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/public/dogs-cats/responsible-pet-ownership/pound-and-dog-attack-statistics/> and previous years data provided by NSW OLG.

Reasons for euthanising animals included because they were sick, feral, unsuitable for rehoming, unable to be rehomed, requested to be euthanised by the owner or euthanised because dangerous.

- Of the 9 per cent of dogs euthanised, the main reason was because they were unsuitable for rehoming (chart 6.2).
- Of the 32 per cent of cats euthanised, the main reason was that the animals were feral/infant animals (chart 3.6).

6.2 Outcomes for dogs entering NSW local council pounds 2020/21

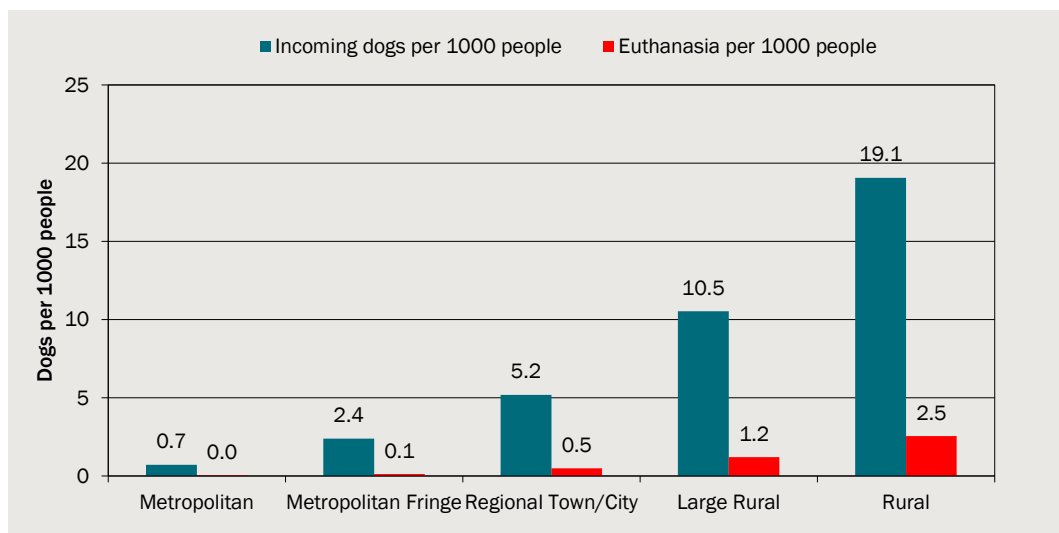


Data source: CIE analysis based on data from NSW OLG at <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/public/dogs-cats/responsible-pet-ownership/pound-and-dog-attack-statistics/>.

Variations across regions

Relative to the (human) population, the number of dogs entering pounds and also euthanised is a much more significant issue for rural and regional councils compared to metropolitan councils (chart 6.3).

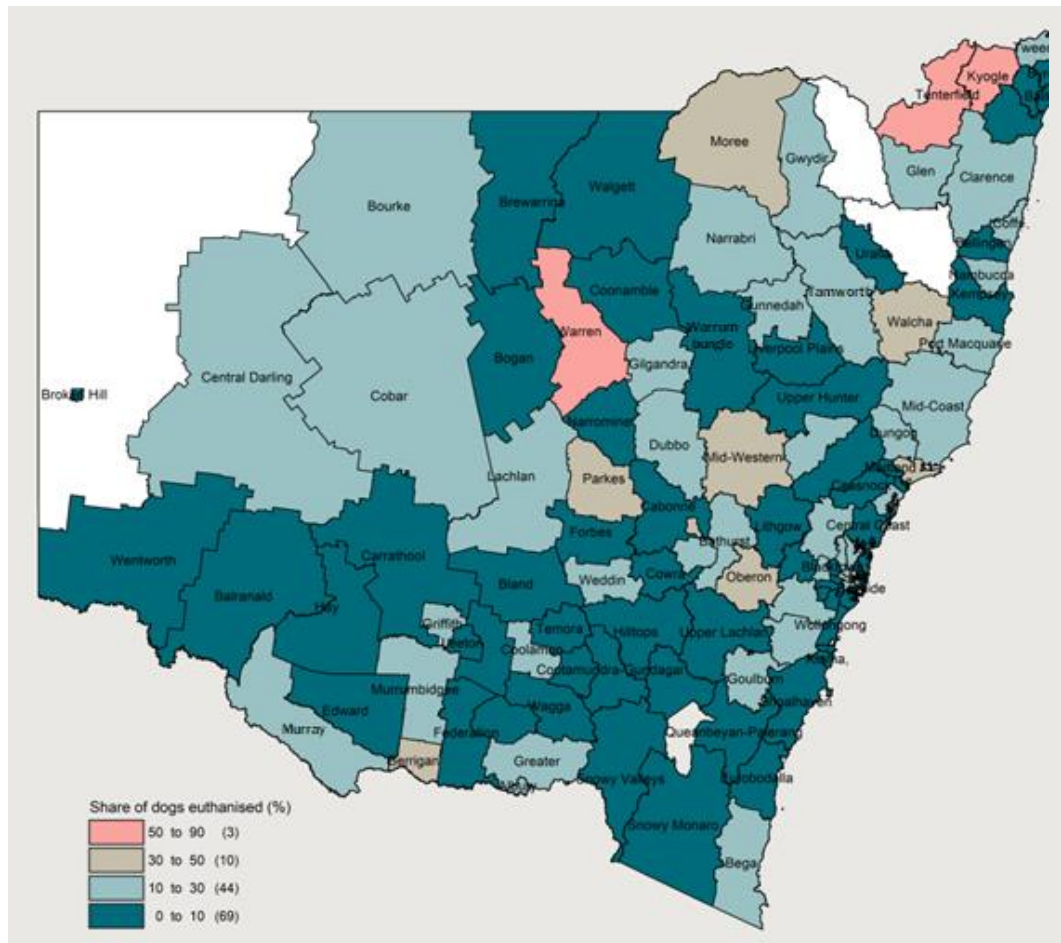
6.3 Pound entry and euthanasia rates by type of council



Data source: CIE based on OLG data.

There is some variation in the euthanasia rate (i.e. the share of dogs that enter pounds that are euthanised) (see chart 6.4 and chart 6.5); however, there are no clear regional patterns and there are councils with euthanasia rates less than 10 per cent across different types of councils.

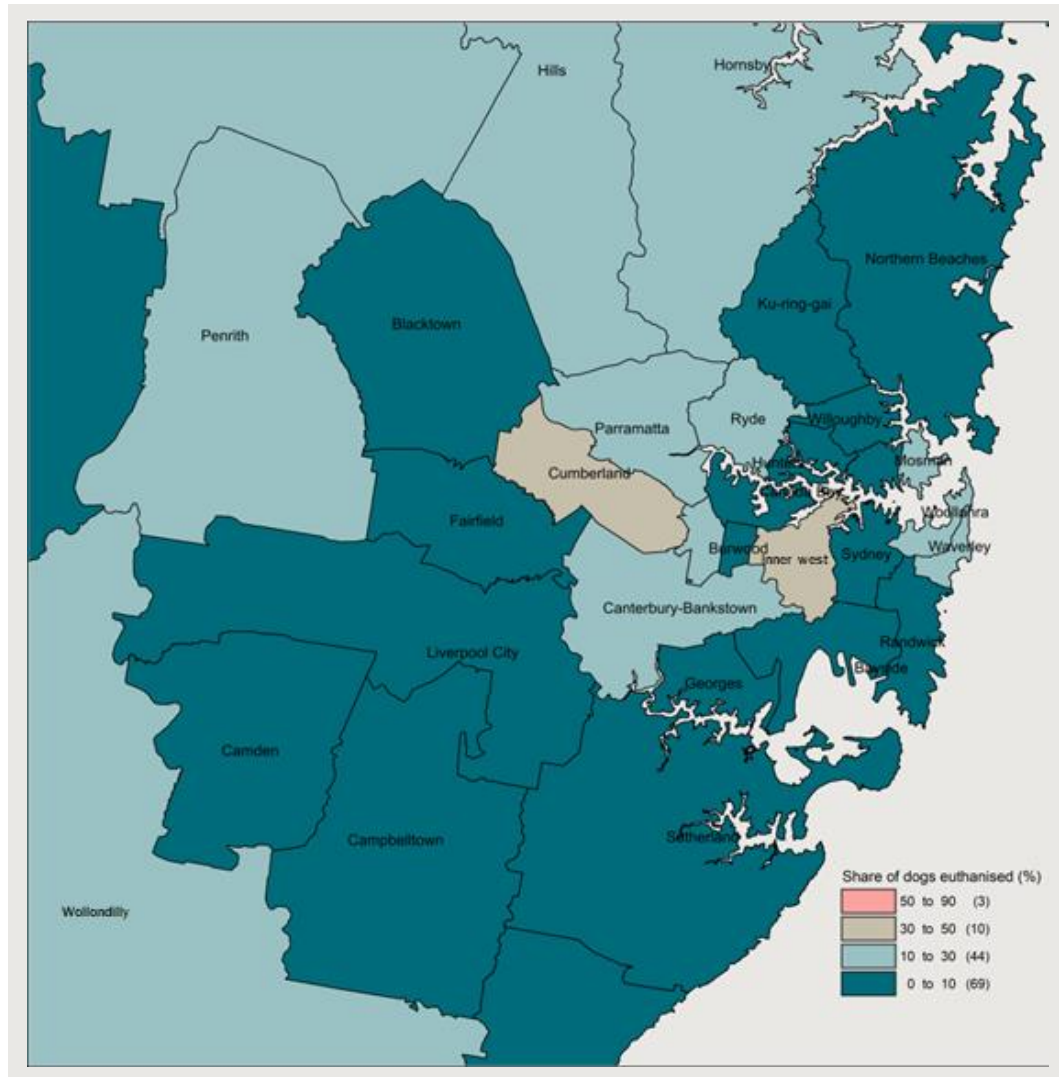
6.4 Share of dogs euthanised by local government area NSW



Note: Based on the euthanasia rate for 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21.

Data source: CIE analysis based on data from NSW OLG at <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/public/dogs-cats/responsible-pet-ownership/pound-and-dog-attack-statistics/>.

6.5 Share of dogs euthanised by local government area NSW (Sydney snapshot)



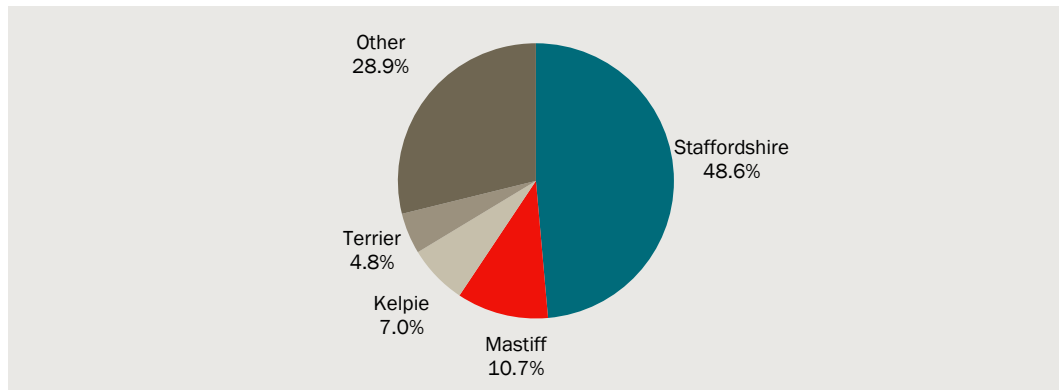
Note: Based on the euthanasia rate for 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21.

Data source: CIE analysis based on data from NSW OLG at <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/public/dogs-cats/responsible-pet-ownership/pound-and-dog-attack-statistics/>.

Characteristics of dogs euthanised in council pounds

Based on data from a sample of council pound operators, around half of all dogs euthanised were Staffordshire bull terriers (including cross-breeds). Among the dogs that were euthanised, other prominent breeds included: Mastiffs (11 per cent), Kelpies (7 per cent) and other types of terriers (5 per cent).

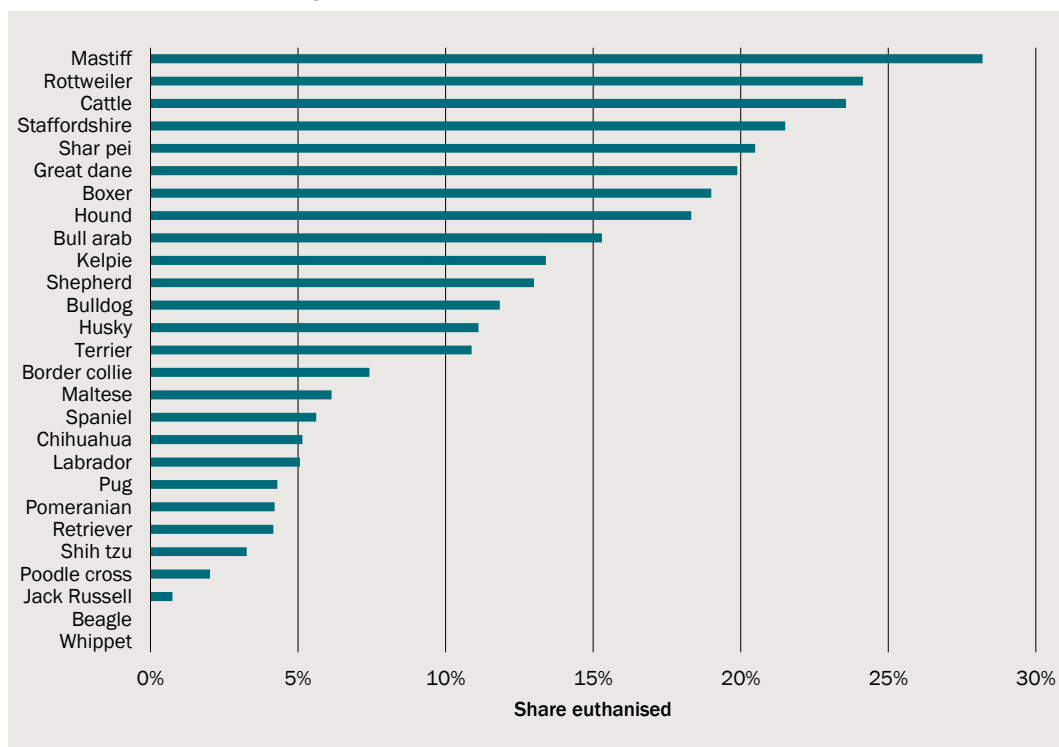
6.6 Euthanised dogs by breed



Data source: Data provided by council pound operators.

In general, euthanasia rates (i.e. the percentage of dogs that enter a pound that are euthanised) tend to be higher for larger breeds (chart **Error! Reference source not found.**).

6.7 Euthanasia rates by breed

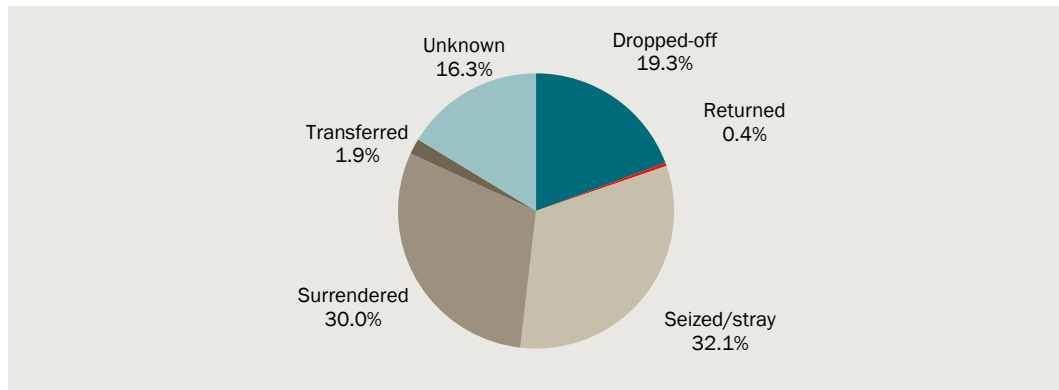


Data source: CIE, stakeholder consultations feedback, council pound reports provided for selected councils to CIE.

The source of dogs that were euthanised in council pounds is shown in chart 6.8.

- Close to one-third of euthanised dogs were either seized from the owner or appeared to be a stray animal brought in by the council ranger
- Around 30 per cent of euthanised dogs were surrendered by the owner
- A further 20 per cent were dropped off at the pound by others (such as a vet or member of the community)

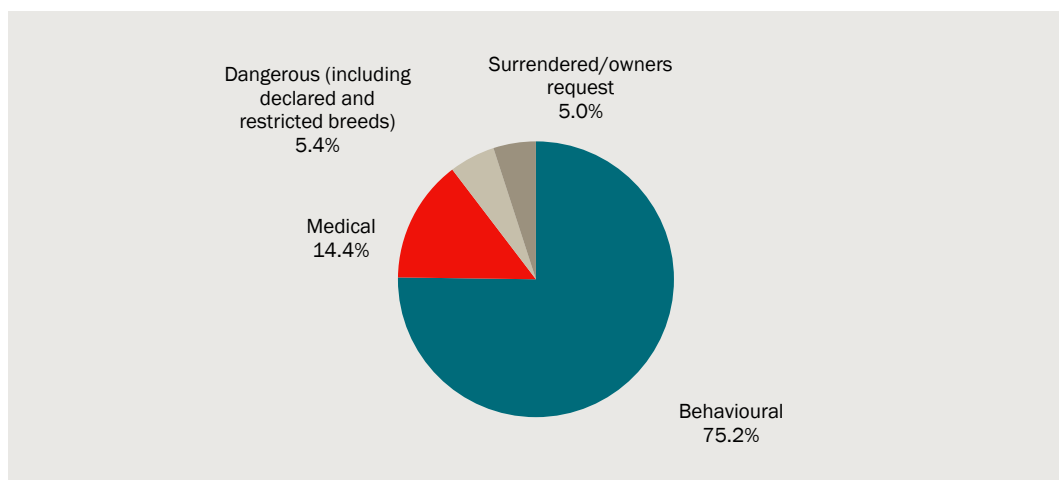
6.8 Source of euthanised dogs



Data source: CIE, stakeholder consultations feedback, council pound reports provided for selected councils to CIE.

For selected councils, the reasons for euthanasia are shown in table 6.9. This aligns to the overall NSW data but provides a stronger indication of the high share euthanised for behavioural reasons outside of a dog being dangerous.

6.9 Reasons for euthanasia

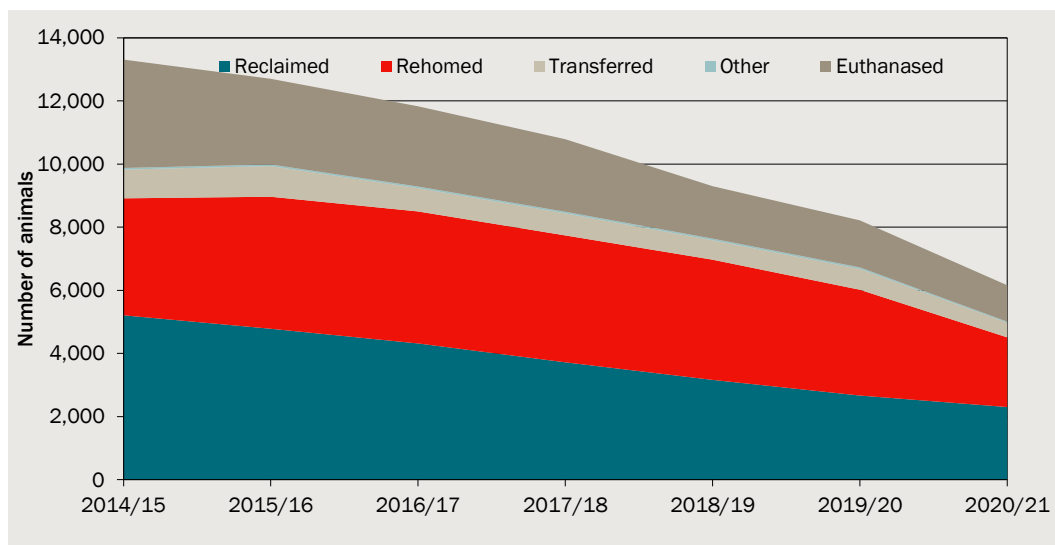


Data source: CIE, stakeholder consultations feedback, council pound reports provided for selected councils to CIE.

Outcomes for dogs entering other organisations

The RSCPA reports on outcomes for dogs entering its facilities. This overlaps with council data, as it provides services for some councils. The trends for RSPCA are very similar to those for councils with declining intake and declining euthanasia rates (chart 6.10).

6.10 RSPCA outcomes in NSW for dogs



Note: RSPCA data includes data for council pounds managed by the RSPCA.

Data source: RSPCA annual statistics, <https://www.rspca.org.au/what-we-do/our-role-caring-animals/annual-statistics>.

Comparison with other jurisdictions

There have been few comparisons of outcomes for companion animals across jurisdictions because of the lack of data available. A 2017 study (Chua et al 2017) sought to obtain data across Australian jurisdictions for the 2012/13 year related to dogs.⁵⁵ This study found:

- In 2012–2013, 43,900 dogs (1.9 per 1000 residents) were euthanised across Australia, which represented 21 per cent of national admissions or 40 per cent of unclaimed admissions.
- New South Wales had the highest euthanasia percentage at 29 per cent of admissions with 46 per cent of unclaimed admissions ending with the dog being euthanized.
- Australia had lower euthanasia rates compared to the US but substantially higher than the UK.

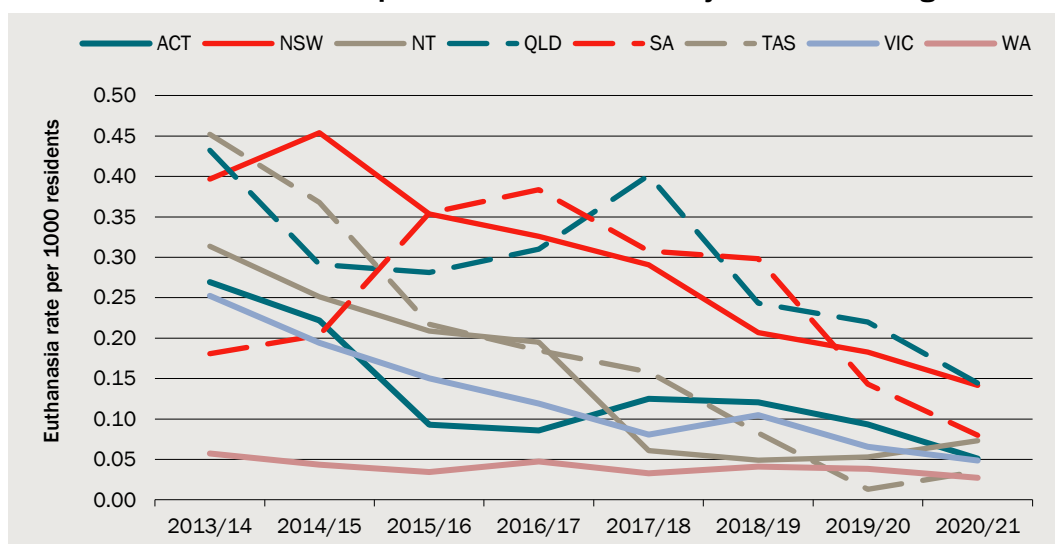
It is clear that outcomes have changed dramatically since this study. For example, in 2020/21, the euthanasia percentage was 9 per cent for NSW pounds, in 2019/20 it was 2 per cent for animal rehoming organisations and in 2019/20 it was 17 per cent for the RSPCA NSW. Chua et al (2017) suggested that a euthanasia rate less than 10 per cent is generally accepted as representing zero euthanasia of healthy and treatable animals. However, a number of stakeholders have noted that lower euthanasia is achievable, to which we agree.

⁵⁵ Chua, D., Rand, J., & Morton, J. (2017). Surrendered and Stray Dogs in Australia-Estimation of Numbers Entering Municipal Pounds, Shelters and Rescue Groups and Their Outcomes. *Animals : an open access journal from MDPI*, 7(7), 50. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani7070050>.

At this stage we do not have a more recent comprehensive comparison of euthanasia rates across jurisdictions. This will be a task for the review. We do have access to RSPCA data across jurisdictions. This suggests:

- rapidly falling euthanasia rates per 1000 residents for dogs across most jurisdictions (chart 6.11), NSW is towards the top end of rates. However, comparison across states using only this data is not meaningful given different roles that the RSPCA has
- a falling euthanasia rate per admitted animal dogs in NSW, compared to relatively stable rates for dogs in other jurisdictions and falling rates for cats in most jurisdictions. The euthanasia rate per admitted animal is higher in NSW than nearly other jurisdictions. Whether this reflects the type of RSPCA operations or a real difference is not clear.

6.11 RSPCA euthanasia rate per 1000 residents across jurisdictions – dogs



Note: RSPCA data for NSW includes data for council pounds managed by the RSPCA.

Data source: RSPCA annual statistics, <https://www.rspca.org.au/what-we-do/our-role-caring-animals/annual-statistics>.

Summary of problems identified

In general, the outcomes for dogs entering council pounds have improved significantly and are much better than for cats. There remains a range of issues, identified by stakeholders and analysis and set out below.

System costs

An overarching issue relates to the costs incurred by various parties associated with supporting current practices, including the following.

- Councils collectively incur a net cost associated with companion animal management. Although councils receive some revenue, this covers a small proportion of overall costs.

- Extrapolating from the companion animal management costs incurred by a sample of councils, we estimate that councils collectively incur a cost of around \$43 million per year for cats and dogs as set out in chapter 2.
- Payments to councils from the Companion Animal Fund are around \$8 million per year (2021).
- Councils can also earn revenue by selling dogs that enter the pound. However, only 10-20 per cent of dogs entering pounds are sold.
- Rehoming organisations are also constrained by the resources available. Rehoming organisations generally rely on volunteer labour, donations and other community fund-raising efforts.

Capacity constraints and long-term sustainability

Closely related to the above, there is some evidence that the pound and rehoming system is reaching capacity, raising questions about sustainability in the longer term.

- Although there was significant variation across council pound operators and rehoming organisations, some reported that:
 - there had been a significant recent increase in the demand for their services, which was attributed to various factors, including:
 - ... the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, where there was an increase in pet ownership and as restrictions have eased, some pet owners have found that
 - ... increases in the ‘cost of living’ has meant that the number of people who are unable to afford their pets has increased.
 - they were at or close to capacity.
- There is quantitative evidence to support qualitative evidence from stakeholders of a significant increase in dog ownership during the pandemic.
 - Based on evidence from surveys, Animal Medicines Australia estimated that across Australia between 2019 and 2021:⁵⁶
 - ... the number of households in Australia that own dogs has increased by around 800 000 (from around 3.8 million to 4.6 million)
 - ... the number of dogs owned by Australian households increased by around 1.2 million (from 5.1 million to 6.3 million) an increase of around 25 per cent.
 - This is broadly consistent with data from OLG showing that the number of dogs microchipped in NSW increased by around 21 per cent in 2021-21.
- Although these trends are not yet reflected in the data, there is a risk that the number of dogs entering pounds will increase significantly in the period ahead. This would put pressure on:
 - council pound capacity (and council budgets)
 - the capacity (and budgets) of rehoming organisations to rehome additional animals.

⁵⁶ Animal Medicines Australia, *Pets and the Pandemic, A social research snapshot of pets and people in the COVID-19 era*, p. 9.

- There is some evidence of emerging pound capacity constraints in some areas, although this will be at least partly offset by increasing capacity elsewhere.
 - RSPCA currently (or previously) operates pound facilities for several councils (including Wollongong, Shellharbour, Blue Mountains, Newcastle, Coffs Harbour, Cessnock, Lake Macquarie, Maitland), but is in the process of ceasing its role to focus on other animal welfare responsibilities.
 - The Sydney Dogs and Cats Home (SDCH) provides pound facilities for 8 metropolitan councils. However, SDCH has been evicted from its premises. A site on crown land has been provided, but the SDCH does not have funding certainty to develop the site and build the facility.⁵⁷
 - On the other hand, Blacktown Council is planning to build a large pound facility that could potentially service several LGAs.

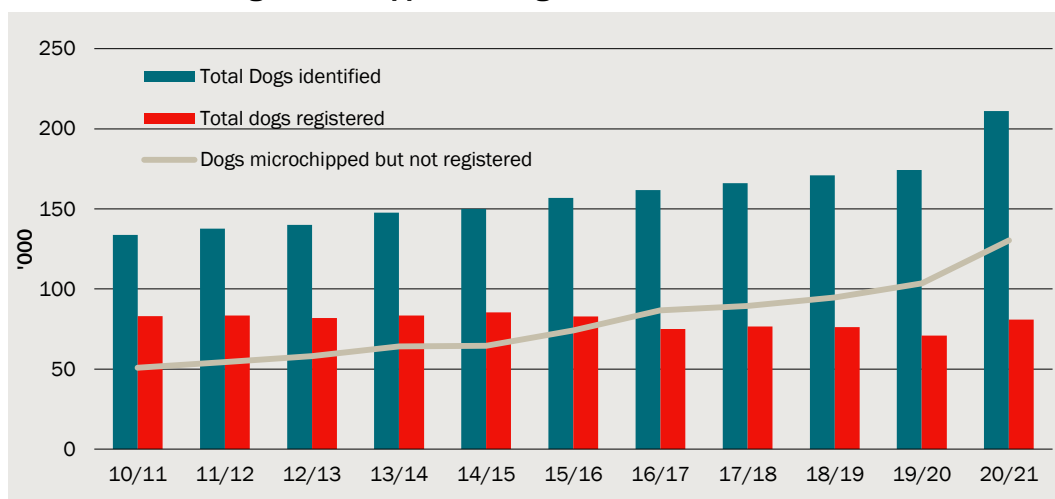
Given these trends, there is a risk that some of the improvements in performance observed over recent years will unwind.

Low compliance with registration requirements

Part of the reason that registration fees cover a small share of the overall costs of companion animal management is that compliance with registration requirements is generally low and has been declining over time.

- OLG data suggests that the number of microchipped dogs has increased steadily over time, with a sharp increase (around 21 per cent) observed in 2020-21, coinciding with the COVID-19 pandemic (chart 6.12).
- By contrast, the number of dogs registered has been broadly stable.

6.12 Number of dogs microchipped and registered

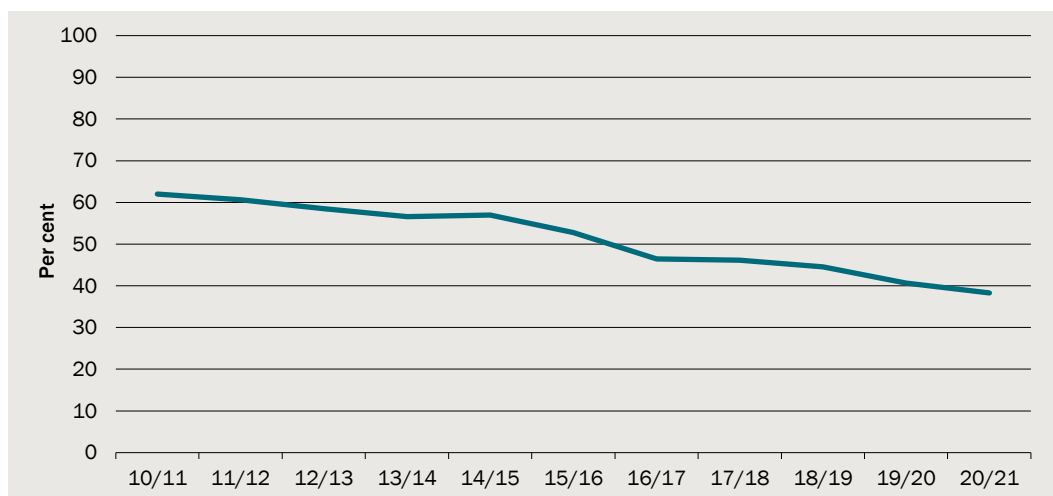


Data source: Office of Local Government, CIE.

⁵⁷ ABC website, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-09-08/sydney-dogs-and-cats-home-animal-shelter-pet-surrenders/101414942>, accessed 13 September 2022.

These trends have meant the share of dogs that are registered has declined over time (chart 6.13). The number of dogs registered as a share of dogs microchipped has declined from more than 60 per cent in 2010-11 to less than 40 per cent in 2020-21. Note that this measure does not take into account the number of dogs that are not microchipped; pound data provided by the RSPCA shows that around half of all dogs entering pounds are not microchipped (although dogs that are not microchipped are more likely to end up in council pounds). This nevertheless shows that compliance with registration requirements is even lower than shown.

6.13 Dogs registered as a share of dogs microchipped



Note: Chart shows the number of dogs registered as a share of the number of dogs microchipped. This measure does not take into account the number of dogs that are not microchipped.

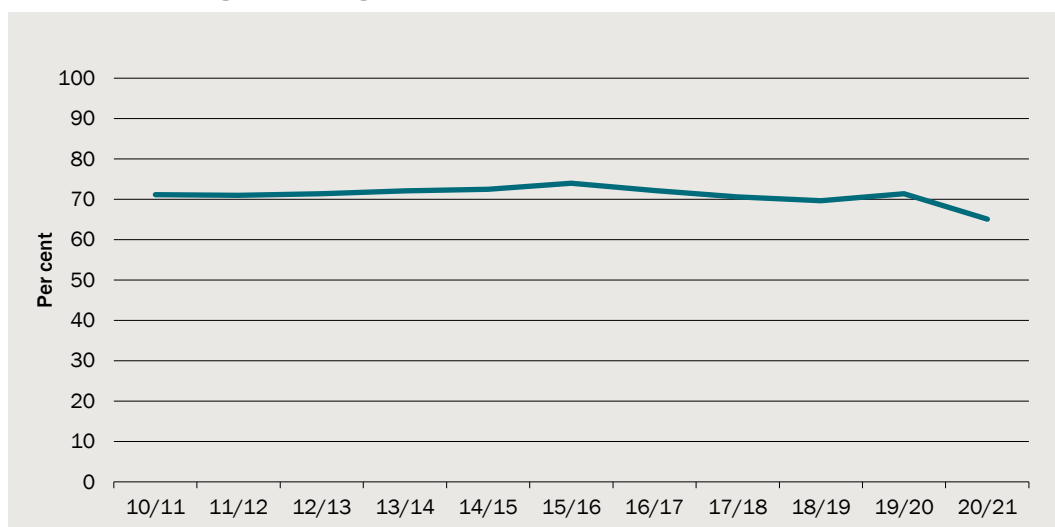
Data source: CIE based on data provided by OLG.

Issues with current microchipping and registration arrangements

A number of issues with the current microchipping and registration arrangements have emerged during the review.

- Separating the microchipping and registration process and the different timeframes for each is confusing to dog owners and may help to explain the relatively low registration rates.
- Some stakeholders noted that the desexing timeframes (6 months) do not align with the optimal timeframe for all dogs. Once that period has passed (and in-principle a higher registration fee has been paid), there is no longer any incentive for the dog to be desexed.
- Most councils require that registration fees are paid before a dog can be released to its owner. Some stakeholders noted that this discourages some owners from reclaiming their dog from a pound (particularly in low socio-economic areas).
- Discounting of registration fees does not appear to have been effective in encouraging owners to desex their dogs. The share of registered dogs that are desexed has been broadly steady over the past 10 years at around 70 per cent (chart 6.14).

6.14 Share of registered dogs that are desexed



Data source: OLG data.

Limited and ineffective compliance activity

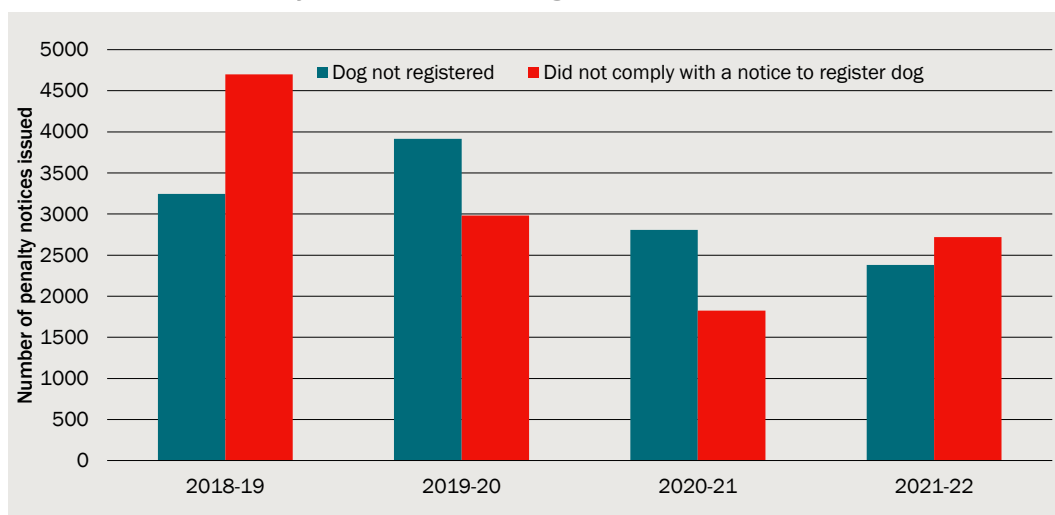
There is limited evidence of effective compliance and enforcement activity in relation to unregistered companion animals.

- There are few penalty notices issued in relation to unregistered companion animals (relative to the number of unregistered companion animals). Limited compliance activity can encourage non-compliance as owners may perceive there is a low probability of being caught.
- There is some evidence to suggest that compliance activities are ineffective at improving registration rates. Many stakeholders noted compliance activities as achieving little.
- Non-punitive measures have been noted as having had success in some cases (eg sending letters to register). Although in other cases, councils have spent considerable resources without achieving much change in registration.

Although the OLG data implies that there were around 130 000 dogs that were unregistered in 2020-21 (up from around 50 000 in 2010-11), there are relatively few penalty notices issued each year.

- Based on data from Revenue NSW's penalty notice database, there have been only around 3000 penalty notices issued for failing to register a companion animal (which could include cats as well as dogs) per year over the past 4 years (chart 6.15).
- In addition, there were a similar number of penalty notices issued for failing to comply with a notice requiring a companion animal to be registered (under section 10B of the Companion Animals Act 1998). Our interpretation of this finding (i.e. there are a similar number of penalty notices for: not registering a companion animal; and for failing to comply with a notice requiring a companion animal to be registered) is that compliance activities are relatively ineffective in increasing registration rates.

6.15 Number of penalty notices issued – registration



Data source: Revenue NSW Penalty Notice database, <https://www.revenue.nsw.gov.au/help-centre/resources-library/statistics>, accessed 12 September 2022.

Supply issues

In general, there is some evidence that oversupply of dogs is one contributor to the costs incurred by council pounds and the demand for rehoming services.

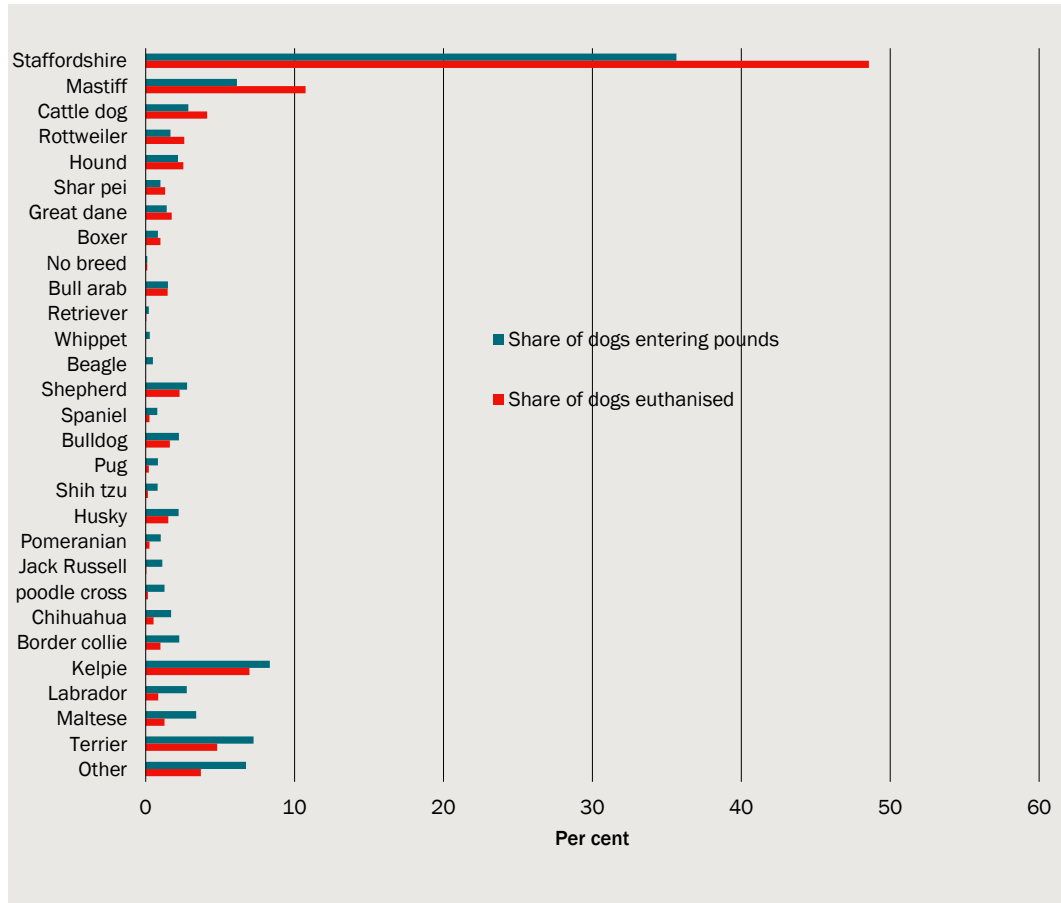
- Data provided by council pound operators for which an estimated age on entry into the pound is available (covering 8678 dogs), around **23 per cent** of dogs entering pounds were under the age of 1 year.
- Dogs under 1 year are over-represented in the euthanasia statistics. Around **31 per cent** of the dogs that are euthanised were under 1 year old.

The standout finding from our analysis of the council data was the over-representation of Staffordshire bull terriers (including cross-breeds) and to a lesser extent Mastiffs (including cross-breeds) both in terms of dogs entering pounds and in the dogs that are being euthanised.

These appear to be mostly cross-breeds and therefore likely to be coming from (commercial or non-commercial) ‘backyard breeders’. There is some evidence of significant ‘informal’ markets for dogs. A recent national survey conducted by Animal Medicines Australia (AMA) found that:

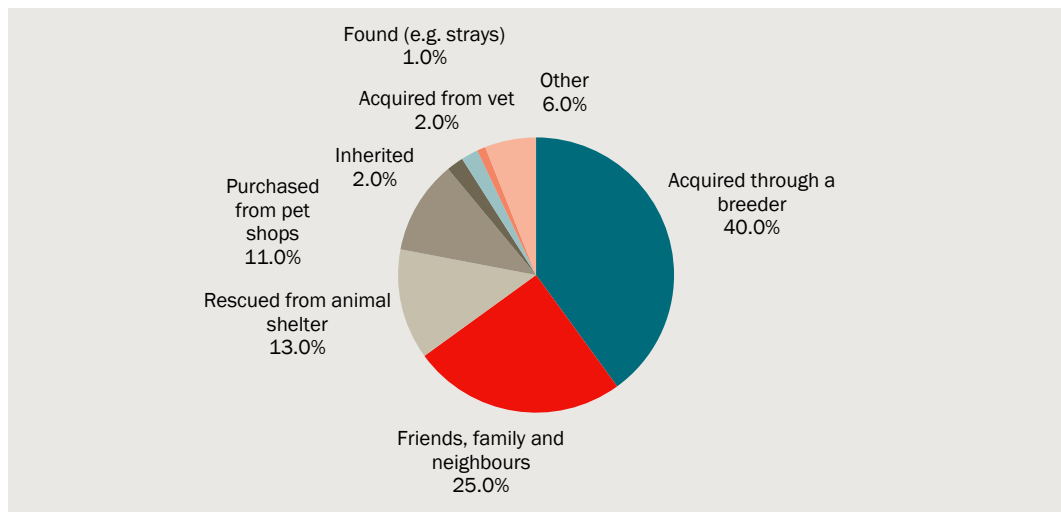
- around 33 per cent of dog owners acquired their dog for free
- around 25 per cent of dog owner acquired their dog from family, friends or neighbours (chart 6.17).

6.16 Share of dogs entering pounds and euthanised by breed



Data source: CIE, stakeholder consultations feedback, council pound reports provided for selected councils to CIE.

6.17 Dog acquisition



Data source: Animal Medicines Australia, Pets and the Pandemic, A social research snapshot of pets and people in the COVID-19 era, p. 19.

Practices in council pounds

A range of issues in relation to practices in council pounds were identified during the stakeholder consultations.

Subjective behavioural assessment

Although the data suggests that there are few dogs that are 'rehomeable' are euthanised, several stakeholders pointed out that assessments on whether a dog is 'rehomeable' are subjective and differ across councils and over time.

A recent Australian study investigated the predictive value of a standardised behaviour assessment protocol currently used in an Australian shelter for dog behaviour post-adoption.⁵⁸ For a sample of 123 dogs, aged 1–10 years, the pre-adoption assessments were compared with actual behaviour of the dogs in their new homes, based on a survey completed by the new owner 1 month after adoption. Key findings of the study included:

- Friendly/social, fear and anxiousness identified in the shelter assessment significantly predicted corresponding behaviours post-adoption.
- However, behaviour problems, such as aggression, food guarding and separation-related behaviours, were not reliably predicted by the standardised behaviour assessment.

Furthermore, some stakeholder pointed out that councils have little incentive to report that euthanised dogs may have been suitable for rehoming.

This suggests that the available data potentially provides a misleading picture of the number of potentially rehomeable dogs that are euthanised. For example, OLG data suggests there was only 217 dogs that were euthanised in 2020-21 because they were unable to be rehomed. However, a further 1078 were recorded as being unsuitable for rehoming. Some proportion of these dogs may have actually been suitable for rehoming.

Welfare standards in some council pounds

Some stakeholders raised concerns over welfare standards in some council pounds. Some evidence of poor welfare standards in some council pounds was provided; however, it is not clear how widespread this issue is.

We understand that the Department of Primary Industries had been developing a mandatory code of practice for council pounds, but this has not resulted in approved standards at this stage.

Issues arising from the recent amendments

Many councils and others raised concerns about the recent amendments in relation to dogs. In particular, the recent amendments effectively require councils to offer all dogs to

⁵⁸ Clay L, Paterson MBA, Bennett P, Perry G, Phillips CCJ. Do Behaviour Assessments in a Shelter Predict the Behaviour of Dogs Post-Adoption? *Animals (Basel)*. 2020 Jul 18;10(7):1225. doi: 10.3390/ani10071225. PMID: 32708444; PMCID: PMC7401658.

at least 2 rehoming organisations, unless they are formally declared as a dangerous dog or a menacing dog (under section 34 of the *Companion Animals Act 1998*). This has meant that some councils have felt obliged to offer dogs to rehoming organisations that they consider unsuitable for rehoming.

Councils are concerned that some rehoming organisations take the view that euthanasia must be avoided 'at any cost' (although we did not encounter these views during consultations with rehoming organisations). This attitude could lead rehoming organisations to try to rehome dogs that are not suitable, leading to poor outcomes that could include:

- poor experiences with rehomed dogs, which over time could reduce the demand for rehomed dogs
- in some cases, unsafe dogs could be rehomed. Some councils were concerned over the potential community safety and legal liability.

Practices in rehoming organisations

Some stakeholders were also concerned about animal welfare practices in some rehoming organisations. This included the following:

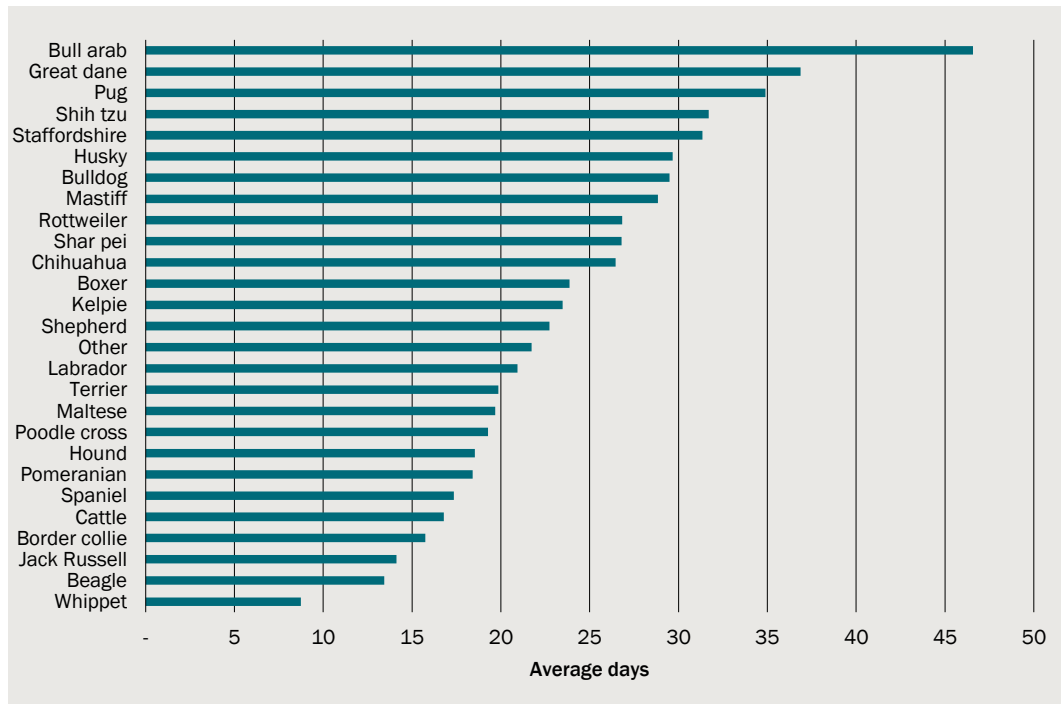
- Some stakeholders expressed concern over the limited regulation of rehoming organisations
- As noted above, some Councils were concerned that rehoming organisations may try to rehome a dog that is unsafe.

Limited demand for larger dogs

During consultations, councils noted there is limited demand for rehoming larger breeds. This is best illustrated by the data provided by council pound operators on the average days to adoption. Chart 6.18 shows that larger breeds tend to remain in the pound longer before they are adopted (although there are exceptions).

Consultations and the data provided indicate that dogs that are likely to come from registered breeders, such as smaller pure breed dogs, are not the type of dogs that are being euthanised. This indicates that any focus on regulations for breeding is not expected to solve problems in relation to dog intake at pounds and euthanasia.

6.18 Average days to adoption



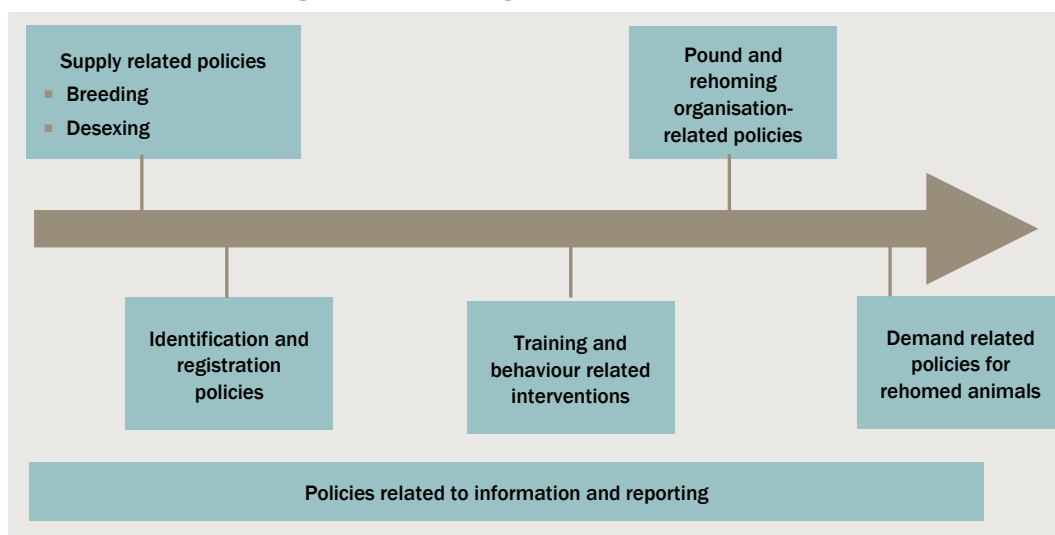
Data source: CIE, stakeholder consultations feedback, council pound reports provided for selected councils to CIE.

7 Options to achieve the Review's objectives for dogs

Review objectives

The focus of this review is on **reducing unnecessary euthanasia** and **increasing successful rehoming** of companion animals. As for cats, different outcomes for dogs can be driven by policies across different stages of an animal's life, from breeding to training to impounding to demand for impounded animals (chart 7.1).

7.1 Policies impacting at different stages of an animal's life



Data source: CIE.

Summary of options

Options for achieving the objectives of the review are summarised in table 7.2. This list has been developed through the discussions with stakeholders, the nature of problems and review of studies on outcomes for animals entering pounds. Note that not all these options are expected to be aligned to the Review's objectives or to be effective, as assessed in the next chapter.

7.2 Potential policy directions to improve euthanasia and rehoming practices

| Policy area | Impact |
|-------------------------|--------|
| Supply-related policies | |

| Policy area | Impact |
|---|---|
| 1a. Mandatory licensing of breeders, including limitations on who can breed/sell dogs | In principle, tighter restrictions on dog breeders could potentially reduce the supply of dogs and therefore reduce the number of dogs entering council pounds. However, there is a significant 'informal' market for dogs, where dogs are bred (possibly accidentally) and given away to family, friends and neighbours. It is not clear how these requirements would be enforced and therefore its not clear whether this type of arrangement would be effective |
| 1b. Greater compliance and enforcement activity | This could include compliance and enforcement around registration and in relation to breeding |
| 1c. Mandatory desexing of dogs | Mandatory desexing of all dogs unless valid reason, such as for breeding purposes |
| Identification and registration policies | |
| 2a. Increased compliance activity on registration | Increase compliance activity and fines for people with non-registered dogs |
| 2b. Financial incentives for desexing through registration system | This would continue/adapt existing policies of providing reduced registration fees for desexed dogs. |
| 2c. Abolish registration step in process | Details of the owner would be recorded when the animal is microchipped and will be updated when the animal is transferred between owners. There are significant compliance issues with registration as people are often confused by the difference between microchipping and registering. If the core purpose is to raise revenue, it is not achieving its objective while shifting the burden to the limited people who follow the system. The impact would be a simplification of monitoring the owners of animals. |
| 2d. Accuracy of owner details | A downside of lifetime microchipping/registration is that there is generally no process to prompt owners to update relevant information. Link registration to Service NSW – integrating systems will make it easier for pet owners to update details while managing other government services (e.g. car registration) Automatic registration reminders |
| Impounding | |
| 3a. Digital impounding for councils with animal held at rehoming organisations | Rehoming orgs could hold animals surrendered/seized by pounds while the statutory process is ongoing. This would increase capacity of pounds as lower risk cats can be held externally and the rehoming process can be underway immediately. |
| 3c. Increase pound capacity through funding | Would allow animals to be kept for longer, increasing likelihood of rehoming |
| 3d. Standards for pound facilities | A set of updated standards in relation to the facilities provided by a pound to support animal welfare in pounds. |
| Euthanasia process | |
| 4a. Clear guidance on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Behaviour assessment processes for suitability for rehoming ▪ Circumstances when animals can be euthanised ▪ Who can make the assessment ▪ Who can euthanise the animal | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Would increase consistency and accountability of processes used for euthanasia of animals, to reduce euthanasia rates ▪ Ensure that sick and suffering animals are euthanised without prolonging suffering ▪ Improved welfare outcomes for euthanised animals, as euthanised humanely |

| Policy area | Impact |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acceptable euthanasia methods Reporting/accountability | |
| 4b. Mandated no kill requirements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require councils to have no kill policies except in particular circumstances |
| Rehoming organisations | |
| 5a. Allow rehoming organisations limited access to pet registry | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rehoming orgs will be able to check if an animal is stolen or reported missing before accepting it as well as verifying the details of person surrendering. Rehoming orgs will be able to process administration themselves and not rely on councils to update details, which can cause significant delays in the process. Increasing the speed of the process will allow more throughput of animals through rehoming organisations. |
| 5b. Tighter regulation and accountability for rehoming organisations to ensure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The welfare of animals in the care of the rehoming organisation Appropriate rehoming of animals. | <p>Policy options could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Code of Practice relating to welfare standards Rehoming orgs could be required to undertake checks of prospective adopters. This may increase successful rehoming through reducing the number of animals returning in the system. Higher standards to achieve accreditation <p>Potential to improve animal welfare outcomes while under the care of rehoming organisation and avoid unsuccessful rehoming.</p> |
| 5c. Mandatory desexing for rehomed dogs from councils and other rehoming organisations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would ensure that rehomed animals are not contributing to future supply of dogs, but would also increase the cost of rehoming |
| Demand for rehomed animals | |
| 6a. Increase ranging of housing that accepts pets, particularly rental housing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revise rental laws so that there is a right for people to have pets in rental accommodation, similar to the change made for owners in strata accommodation |
| 6b. Centralised animal marketing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central point for animals to be found by prospective buyers |
| 6c. Provide funding or coordination for foster care networks across rehoming organisations and councils | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foster care networks would allow reduced cost of rehoming and increase rehoming |
| 6d. Provide funding to rehoming organisations to allow for lower charges for people for rehomed dogs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding would allow for rehoming organisations to be able to better provide services and rehome more cats |
| Information collection | |
| 7a. Entering euthanised dogs in CAR, including those not chipped with pseudo chip numbers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides clearer tracking of euthanised dogs |
| 7d. Reporting to councils on outcomes for their rehomed animals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would provide greater clarity to councils about the success of rehoming of their animals |

Source: CIE.

Options

Details of the options for achieving the review objectives include the following.

Policies aimed at reducing supply of dogs

One policy approach that could potentially reduce the number of dogs that are euthanised are interventions aimed at reducing the supply of dogs into pounds. This could include the following interventions.

- Tighter regulation around breeding — several states require some form of licensing for some or all dog breeders, although there are no such requirements in NSW. This could include licensing requirements for dog breeders to be licensed.
- More compliance and enforcement of breeding regulations — as a significant proportion of puppies appear to be bred by ‘backyard breeders’ (both semi-commercial and non-commercial), it is not clear how councils could cost-effectively enforce regulations for this segment of the market. Based on consultations, one approach is to monitor online advertisements. However, this approach appears to be resource-intensive and would not identify some non-commercial activities, such as where puppies are given away to friends, relatives and neighbours.
- Mandatory desexing — all dogs being required to be desexed unless there is a valid reason, such as the dog being used for breeding.

These interventions could potentially reduce the supply of dogs and in-principle this could reduce the number of dogs entering pounds. However, it is not clear how these requirements would be enforced.

Identification and registration policies

In NSW, the processes for microchipping and registration are separated.

- Microchipping potentially contributes to lower euthanasia rates by helping pound operators to identify owners so that impounded dogs can be returned. There is no regulatory fee for microchipping, which could provide a disincentive for dogs to be microchipped.
- On the other hand, registration requirements:
 - provide revenue to (partially) offset the costs incurred by councils and OLG associated with managing companion animals;
 - provides an incentive to have dogs desexed through lower lifetime registration fees for desexed dogs
 - provides an incentive to choose a rehomed dog (through waiving registration fees).

However, as discussed above, there are a range of issues with current identification and registration policies, including:

- the timing for microchipping and registration are not aligned, which is potentially confusing and could be contributing to low compliance with registration requirements.

- the high prevalence of unregistered dogs is a disincentive for owners to reclaim their dog from the pound
- lifetime registration means that there is no ongoing engagement with the regulatory system and therefore no prompt to update relevant contact details.

Changes to the identification and registration system

One approach to streamlining the microchipping and registration process could involve the following.

- The breeder is required to microchip and register the dog in a single process before the dog is 12 weeks old or the dog is sold or given away, whichever is first (the current timeframe for microchipping).
- At this time, the breeder pays the registration fee plus a fee reflecting the approximate cost of desexing (these costs are presumably passed onto the buyer).
- The animal would receive a 'voucher' (either a physical voucher or an electronic voucher recorded on the Companion Animal Register) that can be redeemed from the Government if and when the dog is desexed.

This approach has several advantages over the existing arrangements.

- Microchipping and registration payment is a single-step process completed by the breeder.
 - This should reduce confusion and increase compliance with registration requirements (to the extent that confusion around the difference between microchipping and registration requirements is a factor contributing to low compliance).
 - Compliance with registration requirements would be the responsibility of breeders, rather than owners. It is possible that compliance rates would be higher among reputable breeders than owners.
 - The administrative burden on owners would be lower.
- There is a stronger incentive for dogs to be desexed.
 - Under current arrangements, owners pay an additional upfront fee of around \$165 (more for pensioners); however, this is likely to be lower than the cost of desexing the dog, so owners still have a financial incentive not to desex the dog.
 - Under the above proposal, the extra fees could be several hundred dollars, which would be kept by the Government (or paid into the Companion Animal Fund) if the owner chose not to desex the dog. In principle, a choice to desex a dog would be financially neutral for the owner (although some owners may pay extra if a vet charges more than the voucher amount).
- Desexing could occur at a time appropriate for the relevant breed.
- The incentive to have a dog desexed provided by the registration system also does not expire once the specified period has lapsed.

On the other hand, aligning registration fees with microchipping could provide a disincentive for the dog to be microchipped. It is the provision of accurate owner's details, which does not necessarily require registration, that aligns with the objective of

the review to reduce unnecessary euthanasia of companion animals. Note that these issues are interlinked, as a number of stakeholders indicated that people would not provide accurate owner details if their dog was not registered, as this would leave them open to fines.

Another option to increase registrations is the introduction of a rewards program. Pet owners who register their pets would receive a gift or prize which could enable an increase conversions from identification to registration, as well as encourage owners to keep their details correct in the pet registry. The gift cards or prizes could be organised in partnership with pet stores.

Automatic text messages to remind owners to update relevant details

The above proposal does not address the lack of a prompt to encourage owners to keep their contact details (and other relevant information) up-to-date in the Companion Animal Register.

This could be addressed through measures, such as the following.

- Linking the Companion Animal Register to other Service NSW services (such as drivers licences) so that when an address is updated on one document, there is a process to prompt people to also update their contact details on the Companion Animal Register.
- An annual prompt via text message (or email), to remind dog owners to update their details on the Companion Animal Register.

Impounding arrangements

There are various regulatory requirements placed on pounds, as well as restrictions placed on them. These policies could potentially be adjusted to achieve the review objectives and/or address some of the issues identified in chapter 7.

Some stakeholders expressed concern over the welfare of dogs in council pounds. A mandatory code of practice has previously been considered to address general welfare standards of animals kept in council pounds. There was support among some stakeholders for this approach. The details of these requirements are beyond the scope of this review.

Unlike cats, dogs are not allowed to roam freely due to potential safety risks. As such, councils cannot choose not to accept dogs into the pound. There are however, other policy options for adjusting current policy settings that could reduce euthanasia of dogs in council pounds and increase rehoming.

Behavioural assessments

As noted above, the main reason given for euthanising dogs in council pounds is some form of behavioural assessment. However, these tests can be highly subjective. Furthermore, a behavioural assessment in the pound environment might not be a good indicator of the dog's behaviour in a home environment.

Previous attempts to develop an objective behavioural assessment tool have generally proved unsuccessful. It therefore seems unlikely that a mandated behavioural assessment tool could remove all subjectivity.

During consultations, it was clear that different stakeholders have significantly different views on what is considered 'rehomeable'.

- An underlying concern of some councils was the safety of some dogs and the potential for the council to be held liable for any damage caused by a rehomed dog. Councils therefore tended to have a higher standard for what was rehomeable
- An alternative view held by some rehoming organisations and animal welfare advocates tended to consider most (but not all) dogs 'rehomeable' with enough training (or retraining).

An underlying factor driving these different views is an implicit assessment of the costs. This alludes to a key trade-off between euthanasia rates and cost.

To the extent that a truly subjective behavioural assessment is unlikely to be possible, regulation around behavioural assessments could consider questions such as:

- Who can undertake a behavioural assessment? This could include:
 - a council officer
 - a vet
 - an animal behaviour specialist (which may be a vet or not).
- What (if any) training/qualifications should be required to complete a behavioural assessment?
- Should a second opinion be required and in what circumstances?
- When and where should a behavioural assessment be conducted?

There could also be requirements for the euthanasia process, such as who is signing off and undertaking euthanasia.

Restrictions on euthanising dogs in pounds

There are already some restrictions placed on euthanising dogs in council pounds. For example, before a dog can be euthanised, the recent amendment requires that councils:

- give at least 2 rehoming organisations a dog is available for rehoming for at least 7 days
- take reasonable steps to advertise on a webpage or through a social media platform that an animal is available for rehoming
- must not destroy the animal within 7 days of a rehoming organisation indicating it is able to rehome an animal.

These arrangements/requirements could potentially be adjusted. Options that could be considered include the following.

- One approach that would reduce euthanasia rates and possibly increase rehoming rates would be to effectively prohibit euthanasia in council pounds (except in tightly defined circumstances).

- Adjustments to the current requirements could include:
 - increasing/decreasing the number of days a dog must be held before it can be euthanised
 - increasing/decreasing the number of rehoming organisations that must be contacted.

Pound capacity

Related to the above, regulatory measures to reduce euthanasia rates are likely to increase the number of dogs held in pounds at any given time (unless there is a commensurate increase in rehoming capacity). In the longer-term, this is likely to require an increase in pound capacity.

However, spending on companion animal management (including capital spending to increase pound capacity) often appears to be a low priority for councils. Furthermore, the involvement of other organisations such as the RSPCA is not continuing and Sydney Cats and Dogs Home is in an uncertain position with regards to funding for a new facility. Furthermore, it is not clear whether these organisations would have the capacity to borrow money to build new facilities.

This is essentially a funding issue. One option to solve this issue would be for the NSW Government to provide funding to expand pound facilities, such as grants or loans. Or councils can prioritise companion animal expenditure more highly than may otherwise be the case through their existing funding sources.

Rehoming organisations

Regulation of rehoming organisations

To address concerns over animal welfare standards of dogs while under the care of rehoming organisations, as well as safety practices of rehoming organisations the NSW Government could consider tighter regulation.

Funding for rehoming organisations to increase capacity

As for council pounds, the capacity of rehoming organisation essentially depends on the availability of funding.

Training and behaviour-related interventions

Based on data from a sample of council pounds, behavioural issues are the main underlying reason that dogs are being euthanised in council pounds. Behavioural issues were the underlying reason for around 75 per cent of all dogs euthanised in council pounds.

To some extent, behavioural issues could be avoided through better training, particularly while still a puppy. However, encouraging owners to train their dogs better is a challenge from a policy perspective.

- As there is already a large volume of information on how to train a puppy freely available, the provision of basic information is unlikely to be effective.
- There are also commercial dog training classes; however, the cost could be a barrier for some dog owners.
- One approach would be for councils to provide subsidised dog training classes either through:
 - providing the classes themselves
 - subsidising owners to participate in commercial dog training classes.

Demand for rehomed animals

The section on cats provides information on these options, which include possible options for dogs.

Information collection

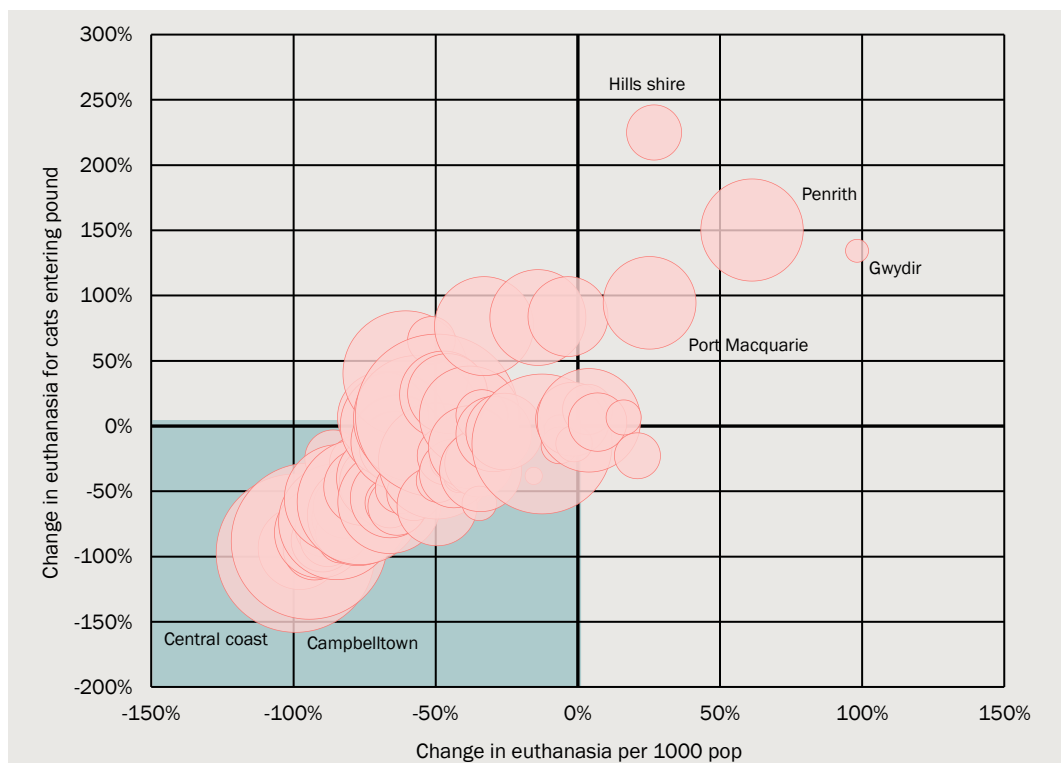
The section on cats provides information on these options.

8 Assessment of options for dogs

Variation in performance across LGAs

Chart 5.2 shows the performance of a selection of councils with high dog intake over the period measured against the rate of euthanasia per person, as well as the rate of euthanasia for dogs entering pounds. The size of the bubble represents the number of dogs entering each pound in 2014. Councils in the bottom left quadrant are the best performing councils, as they achieved reductions in both euthanasia per 1000 population as well as the pound euthanasia rate as a share of animal intake. A selection of the highest performing councils is provided in table 5.3.

8.1 Change in euthanasia per population and pound intake per council, 2014-2020



Note: Bubbles are sized by number of cats entering pounds in 2014, some councils were excluded due to incomplete data
 Data source: CIE, based on data provided by Geoff Robertson, collated from council data provided to OLG.

The council examples make clear that dramatic reductions in euthanasia rates are achievable for councils within existing regulatory frameworks. We do not have a full understanding of drivers across each council, but based on consultations:

- changes in contractors for services can lead to large changes in outcomes (such as Central Coast) — contractors will be influenced by the financial incentives that exist within their contracts
- establishing relationships with rehoming organisations is a critical way councils can reduce their euthanasia rates, and
- the efforts of individuals in councils and rehoming organisations are a major driver of reduced euthanasia, rather than the regulatory settings.

8.2 Selection of councils achieving decreases in euthanasia per person and per pound intake

| Council | Change in euthanasia per 1000 population (2014-2020) | Change in euthanasia rate per intake (2014-2020) | Number of dogs entering pound (2014) |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|--------------------------------------|
| Central Coast council | -99% | -97% | 1936 |
| Snowy Valleys Council | -98% | -93% | 532 |
| Murray River Council | -95% | -82% | 97 |
| Campbelltown City Council | -94% | -88% | 1878 |
| Kempsey Shire Council | -93% | -94% | 306 |
| Bayside Council | -92% | -76% | 423 |
| Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council | -91% | -82% | 633 |
| Narromine Shire Council | -90% | -88% | 290 |
| Leeton Shire Council | -90% | -88% | 304 |
| Ballina Shire Council | -89% | -78% | 246 |
| Cowra Shire Council | -88% | -86% | 237 |
| Walgett Shire Council | -86% | -25% | 247 |
| Bourke Shire Council | -85% | -87% | 129 |
| Maitland City Council | -85% | -73% | 1038 |

Data source: CIE, based on data provided by Geoff Robertson, collated from council data provided to OLG.

Analysis of policy options

A key overarching issue for dogs is the trade-off between euthanasia rates and cost. In principle, it should be possible to reduce euthanasia rates towards zero (except where necessary for medical reasons) and for all dogs that enter pounds to be rehomed. However, these outcomes would only be achievable by incurring additional cost.

Measures to reduce supply

Based on the data available, puppies less than 1 year old make up:

- around 23 per cent of dogs entering pounds
- around 31 per cent of dogs that are euthanised.

These dogs could be a result of excess supply. Therefore, reducing the supply of dogs could reduce this component of the problem.

There are a number of reasons to suspect that regulatory measures to reduce supply would have limited effect. There is a risk that tighter regulation on breeders could impose higher costs on reputable breeders that are doing the right thing, while encouraging more breeders to operate outside the regulatory system.

- The market for dogs has a significant informal segment, as evidenced by the AMA survey which found:⁵⁹
 - around 25 per cent of dogs are acquired from family, friends or neighbours; and
 - around 33 per cent are acquired for free (although this would include dogs from a pound or rehoming organisation, a significant proportion)
- The informal segment of the market is hard to regulate:
 - there is already low compliance with registration requirements, and
 - compliance efforts do not appear to be effective.
- It is not clear how these tighter regulations would be enforced in relation to informal and commercial backyard breeders. Without a clear enforcement strategy, these measures are unlikely to be effective.
- Several stakeholders argued that tightening regulation is unlikely to be an effective strategy in achieving the review objectives.
- A comprehensive review of the literature found that most studies show no effects of desexing on population control in companion or shelter dogs (although there is evidence for population control effects in free-roaming dogs).⁶⁰ In the US context, this was attributed to the fact that around two-thirds of litters are intentional.

Identification and registration arrangements

Options to address some of the issues in relation to identification and registration are set out below.

Single-step process with desexing vouchers

To some extent, the payment of registration fees are a transfer from dog owners to the Government (which is then distributed between the NSW Government and local councils), although fees can also encourage a change in behaviour.

To the extent that the proposed reforms to encourage greater compliance with registration requirements, this would largely be considered a transfer from owners to councils (and OLG).

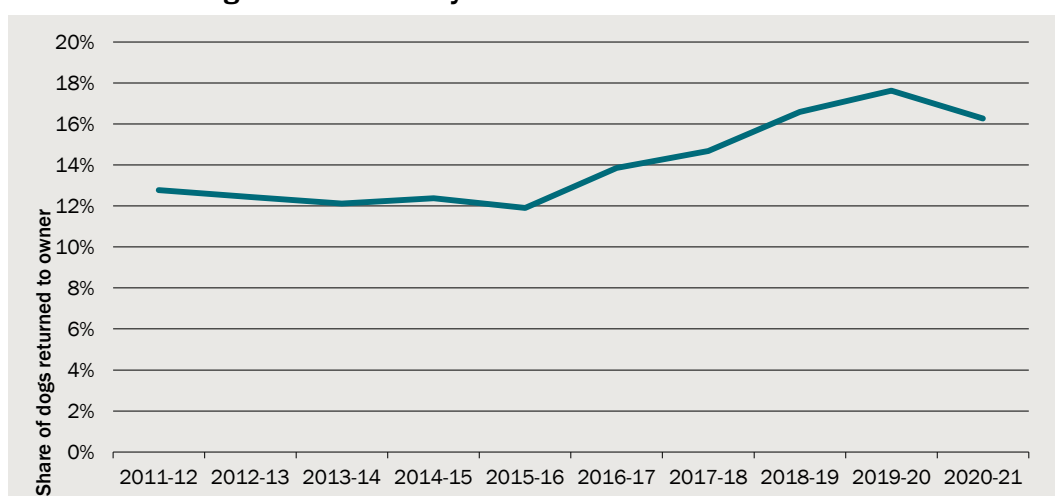
⁵⁹ Note the AMA survey was a national survey, rather than a NSW-specific survey.

⁶⁰ Urfer, S.R. and Kaeberlein, M. 2019, Desexing Dogs: A Review of the Current Literature, *Animals*, p. 1.

Automatic reminder text messages

A microchip with up-to-date contact details can help councils to locate a dog's owner. In some cases, this allows the dog to be returned to the owner without it entering the pound system. In recent years, around 17 per cent of dogs that have interacted with council pounds or council rangers have been returned directly to the owner without entering the pound at all (chart 8.3). Many councils noted this was an effective strategy for dogs as effort spent on this reduced effort needed once an animal entered the pound system, as well as complications arising from people being unable to pay fees or other costs (such as for registration).

8.3 Share of dogs returned directly to owner



Data source: Data provided by Geoff Robertson.

Automatic text messages to remind owners to update their contact details and other relevant information on the CAR would be expected to increase the number of dogs with up-to-date information and therefore increase the number of dogs that can be returned to the owner without entering the pound.

Where dogs are returned directly to the owner, the costs associated with impounding the animal are avoided. These cost savings depend on the outcome for the dog once it enters the pound system. To the extent that up-to-date microchip information avoids a dog entering the pound, it seems likely that the most likely outcome for that dog had it entered the pound would have been that it would have ultimately been released to the owner. In that case, the cost saving for the pound would be on average around \$600 (on average, dogs that are released to their owner are held in council pounds for 5 days).

Although the effectiveness of automatic SMSs to encourage pet owners to update relevant information on the CAR is not known, it is likely that the benefits of this intervention could outweigh the costs.

- The cost of sending an SMS reminder to all dog owners in NSW is estimated at around \$77 550 per year. This is based on the following:

- The unit cost of bulk text message services depends on the number of text messages sent, but appears to be around 5.5 cents per text when over 250 000 text message.⁶¹
- We estimate there could be around 1.41 million households that own dogs in NSW. This estimate is based on the following:
 - ... A recent survey by Animal Medicine Australian found that around 47 per cent of households own one or more dogs.⁶²
 - ... There are around 3 million households in NSW based on the 2021 Census.
- Based on a cost saving for each additional dog that interacts with a council pound and/or ranger, an additional 129 dogs would need to be returned directly to the owner (rather than entering the pound and then being released to the owner) for the benefits to break-even with the costs.
 - In 2020-21 there were more than 11 000 dogs released to the owner having entered the pound. The break-even point therefore represents around 1.2 per cent of all dogs released to the owner.
 - Although the effectiveness of automatic SMSs to encourage pet owners to update relevant information on the CAR is not known specifically, this seems plausible.
 - ... There is good evidence that SMS reminders are effective strategy in achieving behaviour change in a range of contexts (see box 8.4).
 - ... An increase in compliance rate of 20-30 per cent is broadly plausible based on the effectiveness of SMS reminders in other contexts.

⁶¹ SMS Comparison website, <https://www.smscomparison.com.au/bulk-sms-australia/>, accessed 14 September 2022.

⁶² Animal Medicines Australia, *Pets and the Pandemic, A social research snapshot of pets and people in the COVID-19 era*, p. 19.

8.4 Effectiveness of SMS reminders

There is evidence that SMS reminders are an effective strategy in achieving behaviour changes in a range of contexts. Some examples include the following.

- There is a significant body of evidence showing that SMS reminders can significantly reduce the rate of missed healthcare appointments. A systematic review of a range of studies found that automated reminders for hospital appointments reduce the ‘did not attend’ rate by 29 per cent (compared to the baseline value).⁶³
- Through a randomised control trial, the Behavioural Economics Team of the Australian Government found that SMS reminders increased the number of Newstart Allowance and Youth Allowance recipients that reported their income on time by 13.5 percentage points, from 53.1 per cent to 66.6 per cent.⁶⁴
- Behavioural Science Aotearoa found that a text message reminder increased fine payment behaviours by around 10 percentage points from 38 per cent to around 48 per cent.⁶⁵

Impoundment practices

No kill policy in council pounds

An effective ban on euthanasia in council pounds is likely to increase the number of dogs held in council pounds and therefore pound management costs significantly.

- As dogs are not allowed to roam freely (unlike cats), councils are generally compelled to accept dogs into their pound. This means that councils have less control over intake than for cats. Councils could seek to redirect owner surrenders elsewhere, such as directly to vets for euthanasia of an animal. Offsetting this, no kill policies could encourage more owners to seek to surrender their dogs knowing that councils are under an obligation not to kill it. Given this, the net impact might be a small increase in the number of dogs entering council pounds.
- Regulatory changes (such as an effective ‘no kill’ policy) on their own are unlikely to substantially change the capacity of councils and rehoming organisations to rehome dogs. An effective no kill policy in council pounds could potentially reduce the incentive of some rehoming organisations to rehome dogs (if avoiding euthanasia of dogs in council pounds is a key motivator for some rehoming organisations).

⁶³ Hasvold, P.E. and Wootton, R. 2011, Use of telephone and SMS reminders to improve attendance at hospital appointments: A systematic review, *Journal of Telemedicine and Telecare*, p. 36.

⁶⁴ Behavioural Economics Team of the Australian Government, Effective use of SMS: timely reminder to report on time, December 2017, p. 9.

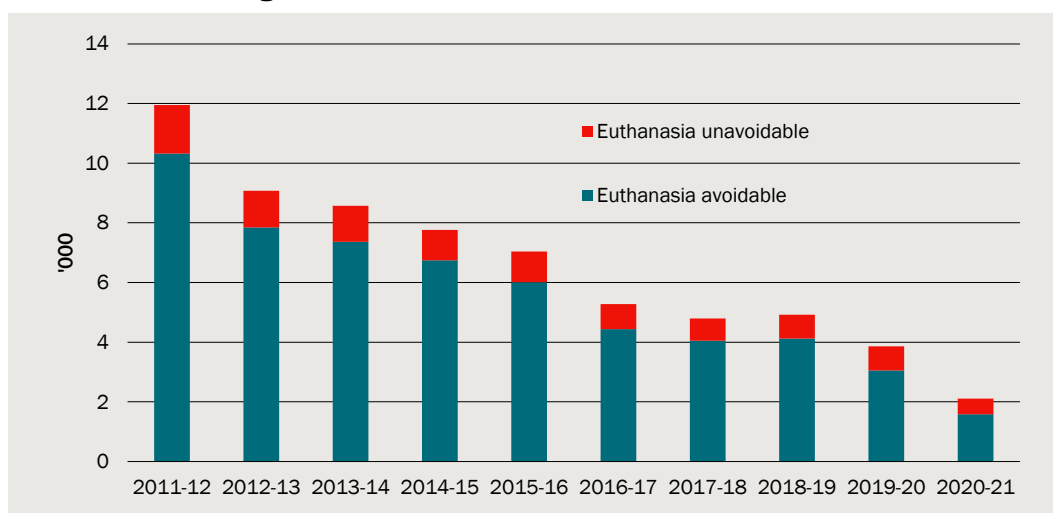
⁶⁵ Behavioural Science Aotearoa, 2021, *Text message reminders to increase timely fine payments*, Applying behavioural science to fine collections through timely reminders, p. 13.

- If councils are unable to rehome dogs, they would have little choice but to keep them in the pound. The net effect would be a significant increase in the number of dogs held in council pounds.

To estimate the additional cost of such a policy, we assume that council pounds would be able to euthanise dogs for a limited number of reasons where euthanasia is unavoidable. We assume that this could include: illness, disease or injury; restricted dogs; and dogs that have been declared dangerous). We assume that councils would not be able to euthanise dogs for any other reason.

Based on OLG data, the number of dogs euthanised that an effective ‘no kill’ policy avoid has fallen from more than 10 000 in 2011-12 to around 1600 in 2020-21 (chart 8.5). It is possible that the low numbers observed over the past couple of years is partly affected by COVID-19. Using the average over the 3 years prior to the pandemic implies that this policy could avoid around **4200** dogs per year being euthanised.

8.5 Euthanised dogs



Data source: CIE based on data provided by Geoff Robertson.

The additional cost to councils for each dog is estimated at around \$53 000 in present value terms over the life of the dog, using the NSW Government’s preferred discount rate of 7 per cent. This assumes that additional rehoming does not occur and that dogs remain in council care.

- The **additional** time spent in the pound is estimated at around **2700 days** based on:
 - an average life expectancy of around 11.2 years (note that a dog in a pound might not reach the average life expectancy)
 - the average age of dogs that are euthanised in pounds is estimated at around 3.8 years (based on data from council pound operators)
 - on average dogs that are euthanised in council pounds spend 16 days in the pound.
- The average cost of keeping a dog in a pound is estimated at around \$40 per day.
- The cost of euthanising the dog is around \$176 (this cost is avoided by not euthanising the dog).

These estimates imply that councils across NSW would incur an additional **\$223 million** in present value terms (using a discount rate of 7 per cent) over the lifetime of the dogs saved each year. With around 3 million households in NSW, this would require rates to increase by around **\$75** per household per year to cover these costs.

The benefits of this policy would reflect the community's preference to avoid euthanasia of dogs in council pounds. Conceptually, these preferences are reflected in the community's 'willingness to pay' to avoid dogs being euthanised council pounds.

In principle, community preferences can be measured through a stated preference survey. However, we are not aware of any relevant studies. As such, there is limited information to understand how NSW households weigh up the (assumed) preference for fewer dogs to be euthanised against the additional costs incurred by councils, that are ultimately passed onto households through higher rates. Based on evidence about costs that pet owners themselves would be willing to bear⁶⁶, it is unlikely that a cost of the level estimated would be acceptable.

Another important consideration is whether keeping a dog in a pound environment indefinitely is humane.

Regulatory changes that increase waiting periods

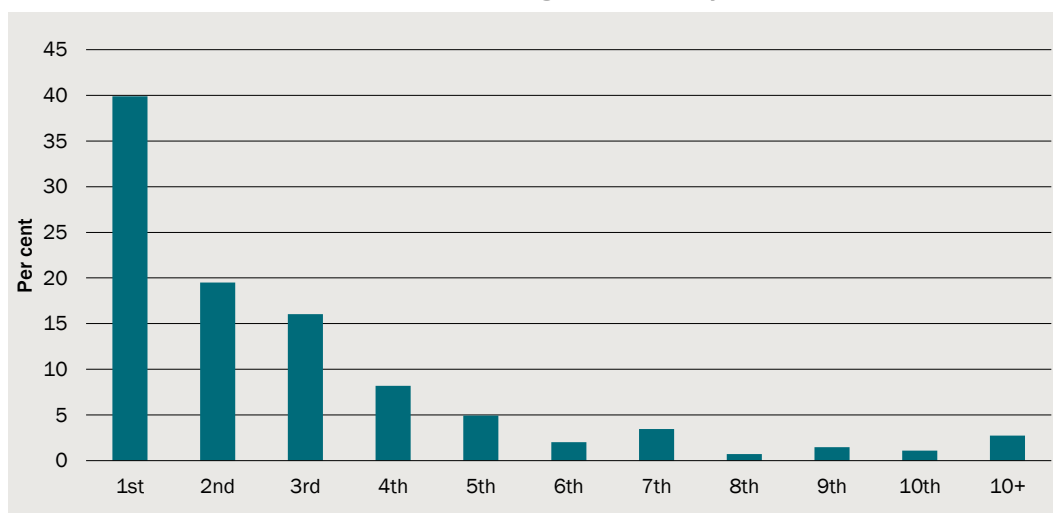
Less restrictive policy options to try to reduce euthanasia rates could include regulatory changes that affect the period a dog is held in the pound before it can be euthanised. This could include: increasing statutory waiting periods or specifying conditions that must be met before a dog can be euthanised (similar to the recent amendments).

Chart 8.6 shows a frequency distribution of the time dogs are kept in council pounds (in weeks) before they were euthanised (for the dogs that relevant information is available). This shows that in:

- around 40 per cent of cases, dogs were euthanised within the first week of entering the pound; and
- around 60 per cent of cases, dogs were euthanised in the first two weeks of entering the pound.

⁶⁶ Budget Direct, Pet costs survey 2021, <https://www.budgetdirect.com.au/pet-insurance/guides/pet-costs-survey.html#32-how-did-you-acquire-your-oldestonly-pet>. This survey found about half of pet owners would be willing to spend more than \$10 000 to address a health issue with their pet.

8.6 Time kept in pound for euthanised dogs – frequency distribution



Data source: CIE, stakeholder consultations feedback, council pound reports provided for selected councils to CIE.

Much of this data relates to the period prior to the recent amendment; it is not clear that euthanising such a high proportion of dogs within such a short space of time would be possible under the new regulatory arrangements.

As an indicative estimate of the additional costs associated with this type of regulatory measure, we use the above data to estimate the potential cost associated with specifying:

- a minimum timeframe of 14 days before a dog can be euthanised
- a minimum timeframe of 21 days before a dog can be euthanised
- a minimum timeframe of 28 days before a dog can be euthanised.

Indicative additional costs of applying these minimum timeframes is shown in table 8.7. These estimates assume:

- a cost of around \$26 for each additional day a dog is kept in a pound
- around 5000 dogs are euthanised every year based on the average over the 3 years to 2018-19 (as 2019-20 and 2020-21 may have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic).

8.7 Additional cost of minimum timeframes

| Minimum requirement | Additional days in pound (weighted average) | Average additional cost per dog ^a | Additional annual cost ^b |
|---------------------|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| | No. | \$ | \$ million |
| 14 days | 5.2 | 134 | 0.67 |
| 21 days | 9.9 | 257 | 1.29 |
| 28 days | 15.4 | 401 | 2.00 |

^a Assumes an additional cost of \$26 per day. ^b Based on 4994 dogs euthanised in council pounds.

Source: CIE, stakeholder consultations feedback, council pound reports provided for selected councils to CIE.

These indicative estimates show that regulatory measures that increase the time that dogs are kept in pounds before they are euthanised can impose significant additional costs on

councils, although much less than a complete no kill policy. The extent to which these types of measures reduce euthanasia rates are unclear.

Training and behaviour-related interventions

As noted by Harris et. al. (2019), some behaviour problems in dogs may be amenable to being tackled pre-emptively with classes educating owners on basic dog training and understanding behaviour.⁶⁷

Dog training courses can cost several hundred dollars, so subsidising these courses for all dog owners could be an expensive exercise. It is also questionable whether all ratepayers (including those that do not own pets) should be subsidising the private choices of some members of the community, particularly those that can afford dog training classes.

A more affordable approach might be to target members of the community that may be unable to afford dog training courses through some form of means testing. However, Harris et. al. (2019) found that people with low socio-economic status may face non-course fee-related barriers to attending dog training classes, implying that the effectiveness of subsidised dog training courses is questionable.

Harris et. al. (2019) investigated this issue, through a pilot free-to-use dog training and owner education classes in areas with high levels of economic deprivation, both in the traditional face-to-face format and online. It was hypothesised that providing an online dog training course may help people overcome practical barriers by allowing them to complete training modules in their own time.⁶⁸ However, the key findings were as follows.

- High drop-out rates were observed in both formats:
 - For the online courses, there was a 100 drop-out rate (i.e. none of the participants completed the course)
 - For the face-to-face courses, the drop-out rate was 43 per cent.
- This compared to a drop-out rate of 24 per cent for a course of paid dog training classes running in the same area.
- Participants who completed the face-to-face classes had significantly higher household incomes and were less likely to receive means-tested benefits than participants who dropped out.

⁶⁷ Harris, L. Durston, T. Flatman, J. Kelly, D. Moat, M. Mohammad, R. Smith, T. Wickes, M. Upjohn, M. and Casey, R. 2019, Impact of Socio-Economic Status on Accessibility of Dog Training Classes, *Animals*, p. 1.

⁶⁸ Harris, L. Durston, T. Flatman, J. Kelly, D. Moat, M. Mohammad, R. Smith, T. Wickes, M. Upjohn, M. and Casey, R. 2019, Impact of Socio-Economic Status on Accessibility of Dog Training Classes, *Animals*, p. 1.

PART III

Recommendations and other issues



9 Specific issues of interest

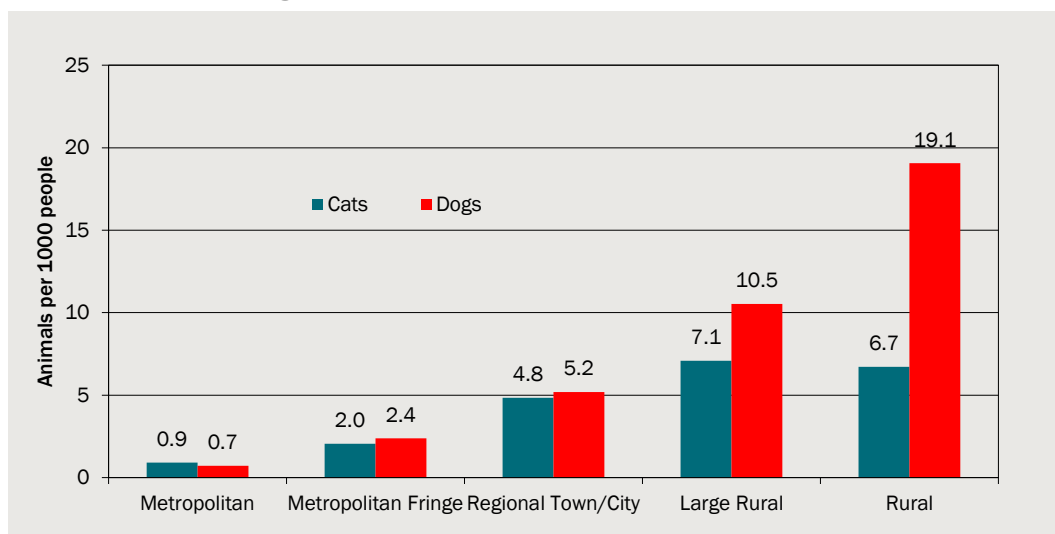
Specific issues for rural and regional councils

As with a range of other issues, the challenges facing rural and regional councils in relation to companion animal management are significantly different to those facing metropolitan councils.

Burden on rural and regional councils

Companion animal management places a significantly greater burden on rural and regional councils, compared with metropolitan councils. Relative to the human population, the number of dogs and cats entering council pounds increases significantly as LGAs become less urbanised (chart 9.1).

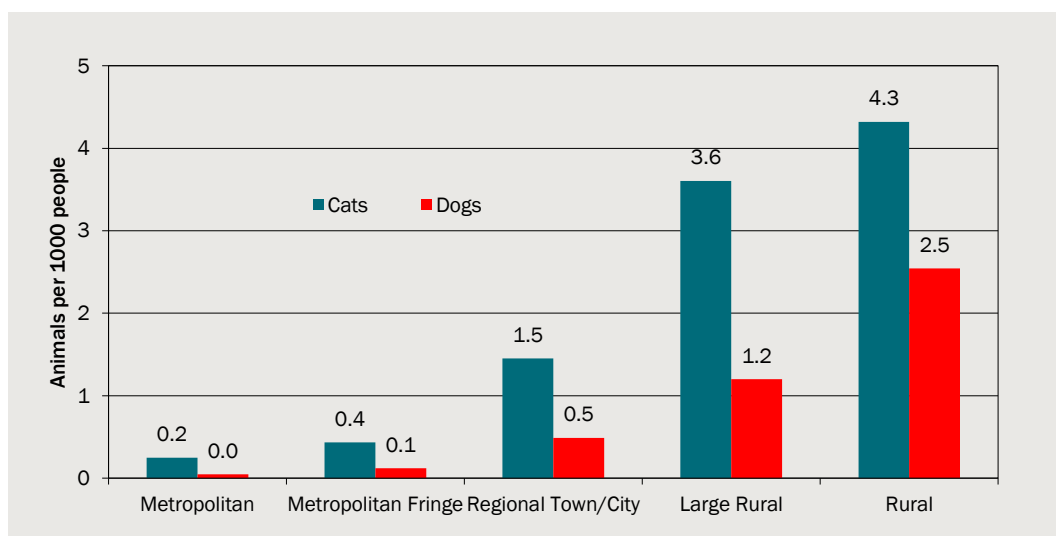
9.1 Animals entering pounds relative to human population



Data source: CIE based on OLG data.

Similarly, the number of animals euthanised per person increases as LGAs become less urbanised (chart 9.2).

9.2 Animals euthanised in council pounds relative to human population



Data source: CIE based on OLG data.

The reasons for these patterns are not clear. This could reflect factors such as: higher pet ownership in rural and regional areas; different attitudes towards pets; less containment of pets or other socio-economic factors.

Other issues

There are other potential issues that are unique to rural and regional councils (or are more likely to be faced by rural and regional councils).

- Councils in less urbanised areas are more likely to encounter genuinely feral cats; that is, cats that have had little contact with humans, as distinct from unowned urban cats that live among humans, even if they do not have a specific owner. Some rural and regional councils may have feral cat trapping programs (trapping programs run by councils can target both feral cats and unowned urban cats given inconsistencies in the terminology used). This distinction is important.
 - There is minimal prospect of rehoming a feral cat, so any requirement to impound a feral cat for any length of time would unnecessarily add to the costs incurred by the council, without improving euthanasia or rehoming outcomes. Some stakeholders also argued it is cruel to keep feral cats in pounds for any length of time.
 - It is possible to rehome many unowned urban cats (or encourage people who already may provide food to adopt the cat), although this could take some effort.
- There is more limited availability of some commercial services in rural and regional areas that are widely available in metropolitan areas. This includes: vets, animal behaviouralist (including assessments provided by animal behaviouralists), and commercial dog training services. This is likely to mean that any regulatory change that requires the use of these services would create greater challenges for rural and regional councils. In particular, the costs are likely to be higher for rural and regional councils because:

- The council may need to pay for a service provider from outside the area to periodically visit.
- The lack of ready access to these services may mean that animals need to be held in the pound for a longer period.
- Demand for rehomed animals is typically in major population centres. There are significant costs to move animals from rural areas that are remote from population centres to where they could be rehomed
 - this issue impacts rehoming organisations, who go to substantial effort when they transport animals from remote areas
 - it also impacts on councils, in terms of their having less interest from rehoming organisations and/or holding animals for longer prior to transfer.

Assessment of recent amendments to the Companion Animals Act

Another key area of interest is the impact of the recent amendments to the *Companion Animals Act 1998* arising from the *Companion Animals Amendment (Rehoming Animals) Act 2022*.

Recent amendments to the Companion Animal Act

The *Companion Animals Amendment (Rehoming Animals) Act 2022* received assent on 4 March 2022. These amendments originated from a private members bill. Key changes included the following.

- Before euthanising a companion animal, councils must:
 - give written notice to at least 2 rehoming organisations that the animal is available for rehoming
 - take reasonable steps to advertise on a webpage or through a social media platform that the animal is available for rehoming.
- The animal must remain available for rehoming for at least 7 days from the date the notice is given.
- If a rehoming organisation gives written notice that it is able to rehome an animal, then the council must not destroy the animal and make arrangements for the collection of the animal, unless the rehoming organisation fails to take custody of the animal within 7 days (or a longer period agreed to by the council and the organisation).
- An exception to requirements only if in the opinion of a veterinary practitioner, an animal is so severely injured, so diseased or in such a physical condition that it is cruel to keep the animal alive

Impact of the amendments

The amendments to the Companion Animals Act have created some confusion among councils. Effectively, these amendments have shifted responsibility for assessments away from councils and pound operators onto other parties.

- The responsibility to assess whether it is cruel to keep an animal has been shifted onto vets.
- As councils must offer all animals to at least 2 rehoming organisations (even if the council considers the animal unsuitable for rehoming), the responsibility for assessing whether an animal is suitable to be rehomed has effectively been shifted onto rehoming organisations.

Stakeholder views

While well intentioned, few stakeholders were supportive of the changes.

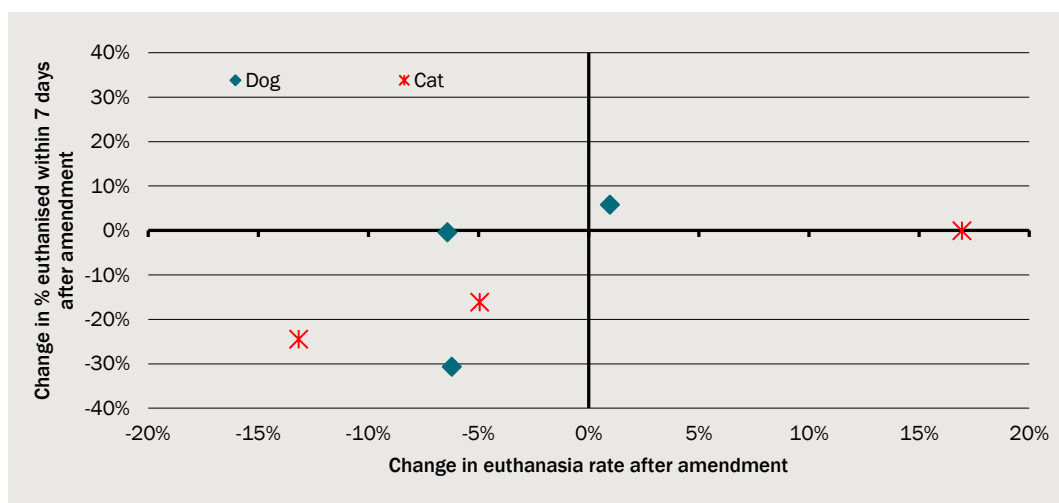
- Councils and shelters indicated that they now had to keep animals for longer, which would then be euthanised in any case. This increases the costs incurred by councils without improving euthanasia or rehoming outcomes.
- Councils did not feel comfortable allowing rehoming organisations to make decisions about suitability for rehoming, given a lack of training for some organisations and limited regulation. Councils were also concerned that the attitude of some rehoming organisations is to avoid euthanasia ‘at any cost’ and this attitude could lead to poor rehoming outcomes.
 - Councils were concerned that attempting to rehome an animal that is unsuitable could lead to unsatisfactory outcomes for the new owner. Over time, this could reduce demand for rehomed animals.
 - Some councils also had safety concerns in relation to unsuitable dogs (as well as concerns over council being held liable for any safety incidents). To avoid the requirement that animals are offered for rehoming, the council would need to formally declare a dog as either dangerous or menacing.
 - ... There was a view among some councils that this process can be cumbersome and increase costs.
 - ... Some dogs may be unsuitable for rehoming without fitting the definition of dangerous or menacing.
- Rural councils indicated that it was problematic and costly to obtain a vet assessment in relation to cruelty.
- Councils indicated there were other reasons for not keeping animals longer in relation to work health and safety.
- Some rehoming organisations felt that they now had responsibility for rehoming and bore guilt if they could not accept an animal.

Evidence of impacts on pounds and euthanasia rates

As the amendment has only been in effect for a few months, there is not as yet sufficient data available to evaluate the impact of the amendment on euthanasia rates and council costs in full. This partly reflects the availability of data over a sufficiently long timeframe and also some councils appear to still be working through how to best respond to these amendments — the interpretation of the new requirements and responses have varied across councils.

Where quantitative evidence is available, which is a very small set of councils, the days animals are held and then euthanised has generally increased, with a smaller share of animals euthanised within seven days (chart 9.3). We also observe that for some councils the dog and cat euthanasia rate has decreased and for others it has increased. The changes have also occurred at the time of other significant influences on animals entering pounds and demand, related to coming out of COVID-19, as well as there being seasonality in pound intake and outcomes, which make interpretation of short periods more problematic.

9.3 Change in euthanasia rate and share of animals euthanised within 7 days after the recent amendment



Data source: CIE, stakeholder consultations feedback, council pound reports provided for selected councils to CIE.

Assessment

At this stage the Review considers that councils should make decisions about suitability for rehoming, rather than rehoming organisations. Councils have accountability to their community and have published statements about their performance.

Collectively, councils have achieved significant improvements in euthanasia rates under the pre-existing regulatory framework. There is a risk that imposing prescriptive requirements on councils (such as the new requirements under the recent amendments) can lead to unintended outcomes.

10 Findings and recommendations

Draft recommendations

The draft recommendations of the Review, based on the evidence presented in this report, are as follows.

- 1 The NSW Government to establish an ongoing funding arrangement for a community cat program which councils can apply to and could be run in partnership with the RSPCA or a similar experienced body. This would be targeted to councils with the highest cat intakes. Councils would need to show that they can target the areas with the highest problems and to report on outcomes. The expected cost of a program that would reduce cat euthanasia by one third is \$2 million per year on average, initially run over a five year period. Councils would benefit financially from this through reduced pound intakes. However, rather than seeking co-funding from councils, this cost saving would allow councils to redirect resources into increasing adoption rates for remaining animals.
- 2 The NSW Government provide a definition for types of cats, with a model definition below:
 - a) Domestic cats, which have some dependence (direct or indirect) on humans, categorised into:
 - i) Owned cats — identified with and cared for by a specific person and are directly dependent on humans. They are usually sociable, although sociability varies.
 - ii) Semi-owned cats — directly and intentionally fed or provided with some other care by people who do not consider they own them. These cats are of varying sociability, with many socialised to humans, and they may be associated with one or more households.
 - iii) Unowned cats — receive food from humans indirectly such as from food waste bins. They are indirectly dependent on humans, may have casual and temporary interactions with humans, and are of varying sociability, including some who are unsocialised to humans.
 - b) Feral cats, which can be distinguished from domestic cats because they are unowned, unsocialised, have no relationship with or dependence on humans, survive by hunting or scavenging, and live and reproduce in the wild. Feral cats do not receive food from humans directly or indirectly.
 - c) Infant cats, which is a cat in the first stage of existence and that is not able to feed and fend for itself or is of such age that keeping it within a pound facility would place the cat's welfare at risk

- 3 For annual information reporting to OLG, the NSW Government make the following revisions:
 - a) the reason for euthanasia currently classified as ‘feral/infant’ be split into ‘feral’ and ‘infant’
 - b) euthanised cats and dogs are entered into a future Companion Animal Register (CAR) if they are not already identified so that all animals are tracked within this system. These animals would have an identifier but would not actually be physically microchipped
 - c) approved rehoming organisations report separately for cats and for dogs
 - d) consideration be given to reporting of animal complaints
 - e) consideration be given to being able to prepare automatic reports to councils on rehoming outcomes from rehoming organisations through the redeveloped CAR
- 4 Administrative arrangements for rehoming organisations be adjusted to:
 - a) allow approved rehoming organisations limited access to the CAR to minimise administrative requirements for rehoming organisations and councils
 - b) remove the requirement to provide information when an animal changes from one foster home to another. Animals would be linked to the rehoming organisation
- 5 Behaviour assessment arrangements be revised so that:
 - a) councils are able to undertake assessments of whether an animal is suitable for rehoming before advertising to rehoming organisations
 - b) councils are able to euthanise animals where there are work health and safety concerns for keeping the animal
 - c) training programs for behaviour assessment for council staff are supported by NSW OLG, which could include financial support and coordination.
- 6 The identification and registration system be revised to:
 - a) remove the annual permit fee for non-desexed cats
 - b) waive registration fees for cats through Community Cat programs similar to the waiving of registration fees for rehoming organisations
 - c) waive registration fees for animals that are returned to owners from pounds, where this is needed as an incentive for return to owner
 - d) make registration (i.e. payment) for an animal occur at the same time as identification. This would mean people selling or giving away animals would be responsible for registration. Note that we would like stakeholder feedback on whether this would reduce animals being microchipped
 - e) registration payments would be equal and include a voucher for desexing that goes with this fee, valid for a year. This allows for the desexing incentive to be retained, and identification and registration payment to be combined. The desexing would therefore not be as time limited as is currently the case
 - f) require any animal sold or given away to be registered

- 7 OLG should send messages to all dog and cat owners via text (or email) to remind them to update any relevant information on the CAR — this is already being advanced through the rebuild of the Companion Animal Registry
- 8 Make it mandatory for animals rehomed or sold through council pounds or rehoming organisations to be desexed, unless there is a cruelty or health reason not to.

We seek feedback from stakeholders to further develop these recommendations, including potential problems and unintended consequences.

Other findings

We consider that revised standards for pound facilities to ensure animal welfare standards should be developed. This is not a formal recommendation as it is not within our terms of reference. However, it has been raised by numerous stakeholders.

Activities that we are not currently recommending but could be considered further in the future include:

- increased regulation of rehoming organisations alongside government funding for these organisations, or a grant program if euthanasia rates for animals remain steady or increase
- government support in terms of loan guarantees or loans for major new pound facilities
- increasing the rights of tenants to have pets, similar to changes made in Victoria and Queensland
- introducing a rewards system for people who register their pet in partnership with pet stores.

We seek feedback from stakeholders on whether there are practical ways to implement actions in these areas that could contribute to the objectives of the review, and their benefits and costs.

Activities not recommended in relation to the Review's objectives

Activities that **we do not recommend** in relation to the objectives of this review:

- mandatory no kill policies for councils and other shelters
- cat containment policies
- more stringent requirements for breeders of animals for sale
- continuation of amendments that place onus for rehoming on rehoming organisations rather than councils
- TNR and culling programs for unowned and semi-owned cats, and
- development of standardised behaviour assessment tools.

These activities may meet other objectives. However, they are not recommended in relation to the objectives of this review.

We seek feedback from stakeholders on our conclusions that these activities will not materially achieve the objectives of the review or have sufficiently negative other consequences that they are not supported.

A Pound regulations in other jurisdictions

Recent reviews and legislative amendments

All jurisdictions have conducted a review and amended state animal welfare and management legislation in the past 5 years, see table A.1 for a summary.

A.1 Recent reviews and legislative changes for companion animals between jurisdictions

| State | Amendment | Key changes for companion animals |
|-------------------|---|--|
| New South Wales | Companion Animals Amendment (Rehoming Animals) Bill 2021 | Introduced need for councils to give written notice to at least 2 rehoming organisations that the animal is available for rehoming and will remain available for at least 7 days from the date the notice is given. Increase record keeping requirements of animals being destroyed |
| Victoria | Domestic Animals Amendment (Reuniting Pets and Other Matters) Bill 2021 Domestic Animals Amendment (Puppy Farms and Pet Shops) Act 2017 | Under the DA Act, shelters and participating vets will be able to reunite lost pets with their owners more efficiently and without the need for a written agreement with local council The PFPS Act amended the Act to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ limit the number of fertile female dogs breeders can keep ■ restrict pet shops to selling dogs and cats sourced from shelters, pounds or enrolled foster carers ■ define 'recreational breeders' and 'microbreeders' ■ introduce the animal sale permit system ■ improve traceability of cats and dogs through the establishment of the Pet Exchange Register |
| Queensland | The Animal Care and Protection Amendment Bill 2022, 12 May 2022 | Prohibition of the use and possession of pronged dog collars. A requirement for dogs to be secured on a vehicle, with an exemption for working dogs. Clarification of some inspector powers in relation to entry and compliance with animal welfare directions. |
| Western Australia | May 2019 commissioned the Independent Review (the Review) of the operation and effectiveness of Animal Welfare Act 2002. Dog Amendment (Stop Puppy Farming) Bill 2021 (the Bill) | The Bill Increase the transparency of, and information on, the source of dogs Enhance the ability of authorities to identify and detect puppy farms Enhance the ability of authorities to prevent irresponsible breeders from breeding dogs Decrease the number of puppies and dogs that are bred indiscriminately Improve community understanding about responsible purchase and care of dogs Transition pet shops into adoptions centres for unwanted dogs. |
| ACT | Domestic Animals Legislation Amendment Act 2022 | Cats will be required to be registered from 1 July 2022 |

| State | Amendment | Key changes for companion animals |
|-----------------|--|---|
| | The Canberra Dog Model (the Model) was released in 2019 Canberra Cat plan 2021-31 released in 2021 | |
| South Australia | Dog and Cat Management Act 1995 amendment 2015 | <p>Improve the ability of pounds and shelters to return lost dogs and cats to their homes</p> <p>Reduce the number of lost dogs and cats that end up in shelters</p> <p>Provide assurance to people that the puppy or kitten they are buying comes from a reputable breeder</p> <p>Enhance the ability of authorities to detect and prosecute 'puppy farms'</p> <p>Enhance local councils' capacity to manage dogs and cats</p> |
| Tasmania | The Tasmanian Parliament passed the Dog Control Amendment Act 2019 (the Act) on 28 November 2019. Amendments to the Cat Management Act 2009 change the way cats are cared for and managed in Tasmania. Some of the changes commenced on 1 March 2021 and the remaining changes on 1 March 2022. | <p>The Act amends the Dog Control Act 2000 to include a new offence for where a dog attacks sensitive wildlife, such as Little Penguins.</p> <p>A cat that is being cared for at a cat management facility must be microchipped and desexed before being reclaimed from the facility.</p> <p>A person is permitted to humanely trap a cat on their private property</p> |

Source: State and Territory legislature.

The sections below outline state arrangements for:

- pound responsibilities
- euthanasia policies
- breeding policies
- pet shop policies, and
- registration policies.

Pound responsibilities

The statutory holding period for an animal seized or accepted by the pound is relatively similar across jurisdictions, with NSW having the longest period. NSW is the only jurisdiction to have obligations to try to rehome an animal (table A.2).

A.2 Pound responsibilities across jurisdictions

| State | Statutory holding period | Pound responsibilities for rehoming |
|-----------------|---|--|
| New South Wales | For dogs/cats: 14 days after giving notice, 7 days after if no notice given | Give written notice to at least 2 rehoming organisations and take reasonable steps to advertise on a webpage the animal is available for rehoming before destroying animal |
| Victoria | For dogs/cats: Seized 8 days Abandoned 14 days | No obligations |

| State | Statutory holding period | Pound responsibilities for rehoming |
|-------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| Queensland | For dogs: Seized with owner identified 3 days Seized without owner identified 14 days No policy for cats identified | No obligations |
| Western Australia | For dogs/cats: Owner identified, 7 days from notice Owner is not identified, 3 days | No obligations |
| ACT | For dogs/cats: 7 days | No obligations |
| South Australia | For dogs, 3 days Cats no time limit | No obligations |
| Tasmania | For dogs/cats: Owner identified 5 days Owner not identified 3 days | No obligations |
| United Kingdom | For stray dogs, 7 days from notice given to owner No guidance for cats found | No obligations |

Source: State and Territory legislature

Euthanasia policy

Across jurisdictions, euthanasia is permissible when an animal is trespassing on protected land (farm or nature) and when a dog is aggressive. Some jurisdictions allow for immediate destruction of feral and infant cats. Queensland stands alone in requiring the destruction of a regulated dog as soon as practicable after surrender. Reporting of euthanasia is only required in NSW and Western Australia, with Victoria considering a review into this topic (table A.3).

A.3 Euthanasia policies across jurisdictions

| State | When permissible | When required | Reporting |
|-----------------|---|---|---|
| New South Wales | When dog/cat enters enclosed lands and harasses animals on the land When a restricted dog is seized. If proposed declaration, 7 days after notice is given to the owner After statutory period lapses and rehoming notification process completed Dangerous, menacing or restricted dog entering pound | Under a destruction order from the Court Companion Animals Act | A council must keep records of the dog/cat destroyed and the actions the council took to rehome the animal when required to follow the process Companion Animals Act |

| State | When permissible | When required | Reporting |
|-------------------|---|---|---|
| Victoria | <p>When dog or cat found in certain areas (forests, conservation zones) or any area specified by council</p> <p>If dog is dangerous or council decides to not renew registration. Council must record reasons for decision within 24 hours after seizure and council must decide to destroy dog within 48 hours</p> <p>After seizure, end of the statutory period for cats and dogs</p> <p>Immediately after seizure if cat is unidentifiable or diseased</p> | <p>Restricted dog that cannot be recovered must be destroyed immediately after stat period</p> <p>After seizure when advised by Vet</p> <p>When advised by court due to dog attack</p> | <p>Not mandatory, current review ongoing to establish mandatory reporting of animal fate data</p> <p>If dog danger to public then must be reported after destroyed</p> |
| Queensland | <p>For seized regulated dogs, The authorised person may, without notice, immediately destroy the dog if—</p> <p>(a) the person reasonably believes the dog is dangerous and the person can not control it; or</p> <p>(b) an owner of the dog has asked the person to destroy it</p> <p>If animal is a biosecurity threat or on rural land and is not under control</p> | <p>The local government must destroy a surrendered regulated dog as soon as practicable after the surrender.</p> | <p>No specific policy</p> |
| Western Australia | <p>May destroy immediately if the operator believes on reasonable grounds that the cat:</p> <p>(i) is feral, diseased or dangerous; and</p> <p>(ii) has caused or given, or is likely to cause or give, serious injury, or serious illness, to a person, another animal or itself;</p> <p>When dog endangers livestock</p> | <p>Court ordered after attack</p> | <p>Required for all establishments such as pounds, pet shops and breeders with more than 5 fertile females</p> <p>Standards and Guidelines for the Health and Welfare of Dogs</p> |
| ACT | <p>If the animal is viciousness, injured or diseased it may be destroyed instead of seized</p> | <p>The registrar must destroy the dog if satisfied that—</p> <p>(a) a dog attacked a person or an animal; and</p> <p>(b) the attack caused—</p> <p>(i) the death of the person; or</p> <p>(ii) serious injury to the person; or</p> <p>(iii) the death of the animal.</p> | <p>No specific policy</p> |
| South Australia | <p>If dog is harassing animals within national parklands, or cat is present in national parklands</p> <p>If dog is dangerous and cannot be seized</p> <p>If dog is sick or diseased and cannot be maintained</p> <p>If cat is 1km from any place generally used as a place of residence</p> <p>If cat is unidentifiable</p> | <p>No specific policy</p> | <p>No specific policy</p> |

| State | When permissible | When required | Reporting |
|----------------|---|--------------------|--------------------|
| Tasmania | If dog is dangerous If dog/cat is unauthorised on farm land or nature land if cat is more than 1 kilometer from usual residence and found on primary production land If ordered by court | No specific policy | No specific policy |
| United Kingdom | After statutory holding period When advice from vet given for animals best interest | No specific policy | No specific policy |

Source: State and territory legislature

Breeding policy

There is considerable variation in the desexing policies across jurisdictions, for both species and age of animal. Each jurisdiction has incentives for desexed animals, such as cheaper registration. Most jurisdictions enforce a limit on litters per bitch and queen, however Victoria is the only jurisdiction to limit the number of fertile females for a breeder (table A.4).

A.4 Breeding policies across jurisdictions

| State | Desexing | Limits for fertile females | Limits for litters |
|-----------------|--|---|---|
| New South Wales | Not mandatory | None identified | Bitches must not have more than two litters in any two year period, unless excepted by vet Queens must not have more than 3 litters in any two year period, unless excepted by vet |
| Victoria | Council sets policy. Not mandatory, reduced registration fees if desexed. In the Casey Council dogs desexing is not mandatory, for cats it is mandatory If dog/cat seized by pound, must be desexed before release | Microbreeder: 1-2 fertile female cats/dogs. Recreational breeder: Less than 10 fertile female cats/dogs and is a member of an Applicable organisation. Domestic animal business: More than 3 fertile dogs/cats and not an applicable organisation. More than 10 cats/dogs must comply with code and seek approval from the Minister. Cap of 50 dogs | A female dog must have no more than 5 litters in her lifetime, after which she must be retired from breeding |

| State | Desexing | Limits for fertile females | Limits for litters |
|-------------------|---|---|---|
| Queensland | Not mandatory but encouraged unless dangerous or restricted breed. Desexed dogs/cats must be tattooed. Local government must incentivise desexing with registration fee | No, breeders require a permit for more than 2 dogs for breeding and any number of cats for breeding | A bitch should not be allowed to have more than two litters in an 18 month period. Cat breeding regulated by local Council |
| Western Australia | Mandatory for dogs by age of 2 unless breeder Mandatory for cats by 6 months of age unless breeder | 5 or more female dogs requires adherence to code for establishments from the Standards and Guidelines for the Health and Welfare of Dogs, similar to pounds | A breeder must not use a bitch to produce more than: (a) two litters in any eighteen month period; and (b) five litters before the dog is retired from breeding. |
| ACT | Mandatory for dogs and cats | No limit found | For dogs max 4 litters, max one litter per 18 months For cats max 8 litters, max 3 times in 2 year period |
| South Australia | Mandatory for dogs and cats by 6 months | No limit found | The owner must not permit a bitch to have more than five litters over her lifetime The owner must not permit a queen to have more than eight litters over her lifetime, and no more than two litters in 12 months SA standards and guidelines for the breeding and trading of companion animals |
| Tasmania | Mandatory for cats | No policy located | No policy located |
| United Kingdom | Not mandatory | No policy located | The licence holder must ensure that no bitch— (a) is mated if aged less than 12 months; (b) gives birth to more than one litter of puppies in a 12-month period; (c) gives birth to more than six litters of puppies in total; (d) is mated if she has had two litters delivered by caesarean section. The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 |

Source: State and territory legislature

Pet shop policy

Victoria and Western Australia enforce a rule on pet shops that they can only sell dogs and cats that are being rehomed. NSW and QLD encourage pet shops to form relationships with rehoming organisations (table A.5).

A.5 Pet shop policies across jurisdictions

| State | Policy for rehoming |
|-------------------|---|
| New South Wales | Encouraged, but not mandatory, to develop relationships with pounds and shelters |
| Victoria | Can only sell puppies and kittens sourced from a registered pound, shelter or voluntarily enrolled foster carer |
| Queensland | Encouraged, but not mandatory, to develop relationships with pounds and shelters |
| Western Australia | Need to be approved and can only sell dogs sourced from a refuge |
| ACT | No policy |
| South Australia | No policy |
| Tasmania | No policy |
| United Kingdom | No policy |

Source: State and territory legislature.

Registration policy

All jurisdictions require registration for dogs whereas for cats there are considerable differences. Some jurisdictions delegate this decision to local government. NSW is the only state to mandate a one-time only registration, where other jurisdictions require either annual confirmation of details or a recurring payment. Some councils in Western Australia may offer between 1 year and lifetime registration (table A.6).

A.6 Registration policies across jurisdictions

| State | Registration system | Renewal |
|-------------------|---|--|
| New South Wales | Required for dogs/cats by the time it is 6 months old | One time only |
| Victoria | Required for dogs and cats, Mandatory for release from pound | Annual with fee |
| Queensland | Required for dogs Local council determines for cats | Set by local council, maximum 3 years |
| Western Australia | Dogs and cats must be registered and microchipped by age of 3 months (dogs) and 6 months (cats) and wear tags in public | Various from 1 year to lifetime |
| ACT | Mandatory for dogs over 8 weeks old Mandatory for cats from 1 July 2022 | No, however details must be confirmed annually |
| South Australia | For dogs mandatory Cats set by each council | Annually for dogs |
| Tasmania | Mandatory for dogs, council sets rules for cats | Annually for dogs |
| United Kingdom | No | n.a. |

Source: State and territory legislature

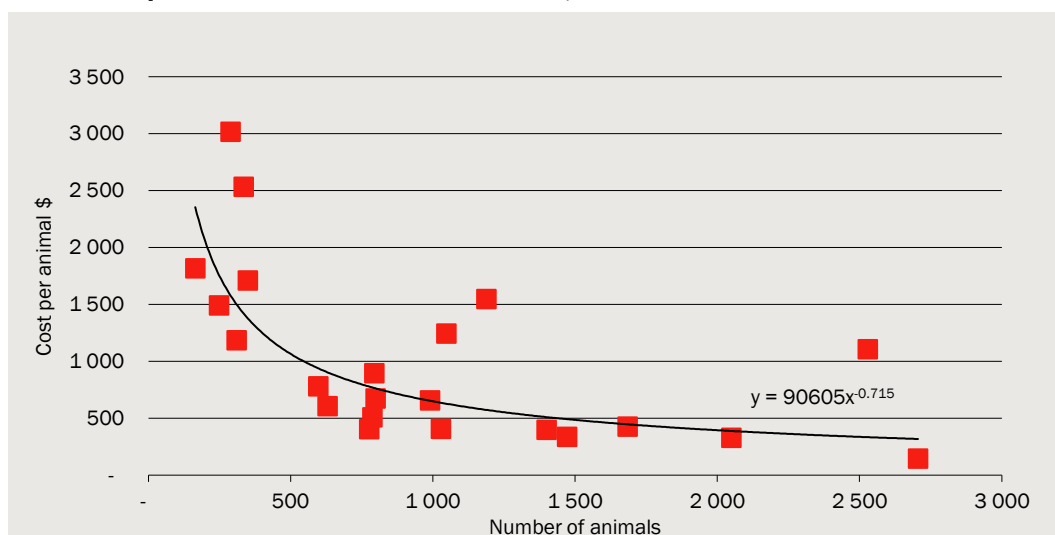
B Total costs of the NSW companion animal management system

Companion management activities for NSW councils extend across managing pounds, responding to call outs, rehoming, education and community outreach. The biggest cost driver is the management of pounds, which involves providing sustenance and supervision to all animals under care.

Across all councils in NSW, there were 23 621 dogs and 21 063 cats entering pounds in the financial year ended 2021. Variable costs such as sustenance, increase with each additional animal received. We observe economies of scale whereby the larger the intake of animals within an LGA, the lower the cost per animal. The cost of companion animal management was extracted from the annual reports of the councils listed in table B.2

Chart B.1 shows the cost per animal and number of animals received by the LGA for 2021. We extrapolate this relation⁶⁹ to the total number of animals received by each LGA to estimate the total costs per LGA. This results in a total cost of companion animal management in NSW being \$42.7 million for the financial year ended 2021.

B.1 Cost per animal and number of animals, 2021



Data source: CIE, Council annual reports

⁶⁹ Cost per animal = 90605*(number of animals)^{-0.715}

B.2 Sample councils animal intake, expense and cost per animal, 2021

| Council | Total intake of animals | Total companion animal expense | Cost per animal |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| | # | \$ | \$ |
| Blacktown City Council | 2 529 | 2 800 000 | 1 107 |
| Campbelltown City Council | 2 049 | 675 956 | 330 |
| Penrith City Council | 990 | 653 018 | 660 |
| Georges River Council | 799 | 540 397 | 676 |
| Newcastle City Council | 1 047 | 1 305 000 | 1 246 |
| Liverpool City Council | 335 | 849 061 | 2 535 |
| Dubbo Regional Council | 2 706 | 397 725 | 147 |
| Central Coast Council | 1 472 | 500 000 | 340 |
| Wagga Wagga City Council | 1 400 | 558 252 | 399 |
| Tamworth Regional Council | 1 028 | 419 747 | 408 |
| Tweed Shire Council | 289 | 871 930 | 3 017 |
| Blue Mountains City Council | 310 | 368 170 | 1 188 |
| Sydney City | 165 | 300 000 | 1 818 |
| Bayside Council | 349 | 597 173 | 1 711 |
| Fairfield City Council | 248 | 370 330 | 1 493 |
| Maitland City Council | 1 684 | 721 735 | 429 |
| Shoalhaven city council | 1 188 | 1 838 469 | 1 548 |
| Port Macquarie-Hastings Council | 776 | 315 684 | 407 |
| Orange City Council | 794 | 711 931 | 897 |
| Goulburn Mulwaree Council | 630 | 382 160 | 607 |
| Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council | 597 | 466 504 | 781 |
| Lake Macquarie City Council | 787 | 400 000 | 508 |

Source: CIE, Council annual reports.

C Stakeholder list

Organisations consulted with directly during the first consultation period are set out below.

C.1 Organisations consulted during fist consultation period

| Councils and pound operators | Rehoming organisations | Other organisations |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|---|
| Albury | Dog Rescue Newcastle | The Cat Protection Society of NSW |
| Bourke | Monika's Doggie Rescue | Australian Pet Welfare Foundation |
| Sydney Dogs & Cats Home | Safe Animal Rehoming | Cat Fanciers Association |
| Blacktown | Tiki Animal Rescue | Australian Veterinary Association |
| Gilgandra | Maggies Rescue | Veterinary Practitioners Board |
| Bathurst | Ninth Life Foundation | NSW DPI |
| Liverpool | | Animal Care Australia |
| Sutherland | | RSPCA |
| Wollondilly | | Greyhound Welfare Integrity Commission |
| Central Coast | | Animal Welfare League NSW |
| Wollongong | | LGNSW |
| Shoalhaven | | Animal Liberation |
| Tweed | | Animal Services Australia |
| Murray River | | Australian Institute of Animal Management |
| Councils United for Pets | | Banyule City Council |
| Council Rangers Annual meeting | | Responsible Pet Ownership Reference Group |

Source: The CIE.



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