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How a shell game is killing our pets

July 13, 2013 Comments are closed.

We tend to assume that having the RSPCA involved in the animal management process, results in better outcomes for pets. As a professional animal welfare organisation, surely they must do a better job than say, a local council left to its own devices. And sometimes, when a local pound is being run with serious deficiencies or inhumane animal treatment, this might be true.

But does having the RSPCA – with all their supposed compassion and the multi-multi-million dollar budgets – managing your local council pound result in the optimum performance? Do the maximum number of animals get saved?

As the annual figures from the NSW Division of Local Government (DLG) 'Council Data Collection System for Seizures of Cats and Dogs 2011/2012'* show, maybe not.

Here are the animal intake and outcomes for the pounds in NSW, currently operated by the RSPCA NSW .

RSPCA NSW/Council Animal Stats - 2011/12									
Council name	Impounding facility	TOTAL	Returned to owner	%	Unclaimed	Killed/died at pound	%	Remaining	Released to RSPCA
Cats									
Blue Mountains City Council	RSPCA Blue Mountains	163	18	11	145	36	22	109	109
Cessnock City Council	RSPCA Rutherford	170	2	1	168	128	75	40	40
Lake Macquarie City Council	RSPCA Rutherford	253	9	4	244	166	66	78	78
Maitland City Council	RSPCA Rutherford	57	8	14	49	37	65	12	12
Newcastle City Council	RSPCA Rutherford	218	21	10	197	151	69	46	46
Coffs Harbour City Council	RSPCA Coffs Harbour	338	11	3	327	206	61	121	121
Dubbo City Council	RSPCA Dubbo	813	23	3	790	642	79	148	148
Orange City Council	RSPCA Orange	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Port Macquarie-Hastings Council	RSPCA Port Macquarie	34	5	15	29	13	38	16	16
Shellharbour City Council	RSPCA Unanderra	202	13	6	189	97	48	92	92
Wollongong	RSPCA Unanderra	1,092	43	4	1,049	666	61	383	383
TOTAL		3,340	153	5	3,187	2,142	63	1,045	1,045
Council name	Impounding facility	TOTAL	Returned to owner	%	Unclaimed	Killed/died at pound	%	Remaining	Released to RSPCA
Dogs									
Blue Mountains City Council	RSPCA Blue Mountains	317	215	68	102	27	9	75	75
Cessnock City Council	RSPCA Rutherford	524	170	32	354	131	25	223	223
Lake Macquarie City Council	RSPCA Rutherford	611	161	26	450	189	31	261	261
Maitland City Council	RSPCA Rutherford	1,132	475	42	657	227	20	430	430
Newcastle City Council	RSPCA Rutherford	866	428	49	438	160	18	278	278
Coffs Harbour City Council	RSPCA Coffs Harbour	441	197	45	244	154	35	90	90
Dubbo City Council	RSPCA Dubbo	1,353	518	38	835	458	34	377	377
Orange City Council	RSPCA Orange	1,266	605	48	661	382	30	279	279
Port Macquarie-Hastings Council	RSPCA Port Macquarie	674	484	72	190	101	15	89	89
Shellharbour City Council	RSPCA Unanderra	525	313	60	212	118	22	94	94
Wollongong	RSPCA Unanderra	1,271	790	62	481	264	21	217	217
TOTAL		8,980	4,356	49	4,624	2,211	25	2,413	2,413
*Source - NSW Division of Local Government (DLG) 'Council Data Collection System for Seizures of Cats and Dogs 2011-12'									
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They show that around 63% of cats and 25% of dogs are killed in RSPCA NSW pounds.

Dubbo is the highest for cats at nearly 80% – while 35% of dogs are killed at Coffs Harbour.

But overall, the council contracted facilities are operating as what I would deem 'average' for Australia.

So what's the problem?

Mainly, that the RSPCA NSW isn't content with just operating council facilities – and then taking in extra animals as they have space/can rehome them. **Wholesale killing is their business.** As combining these 'pound figures', and the figures from their Annual Report for the same year show.

RSPCA NSW 2011/12					
Cats	Council (combined)	%			
Reclaimed	153	5			
Rehomed	0	0			
Killed	2,142	63			
Transferred to the RSPCA	1,045	31	Transferred to the RSPCA	1,045	
TOTAL	3,340	100	RSPCA Annual Report		%
<i>Total cat intakes</i>			Reclaimed	243	2
<i>Pound (3,340) + RSPCA (14,363) - transfer (1,045) = 16,658</i>			Rehomed	4,589	32
			Killed	9,531	66
			TOTAL	14,363	100
Dogs	Council (combined)	%			
Reclaimed	4,356	49			
Rehomed	0	0			
Killed	2,211	25			
Transferred to the RSPCA	2,413	27	Transferred to the RSPCA	2,413	
TOTAL	8,980	101	RSPCA Annual Report		%
<i>Total dog intakes</i>			Reclaimed	896	8
<i>Pound (8,980) + RSPCA (10,679) - transfer (2,413) = 17,246</i>			Rehomed	4,921	46
			Killed	4,862	46
			TOTAL	10,679	100
<small>Source: NSW Division of Local Government (DLG) 'Council Data Collection System for Seizures of Cats and Dogs 2011/2012'</small>					
<small>RSPCA Australia National Statistics 2011-2012</small>					
<small>www.savingpets.com.au</small>					

The RSPCA NSW are 'double-dipping' their killing. That is, they kill 63% of cats while in the pound, 'transfer' out 1,045 of them, then they kill a further 66% of their overall intakes in their high-kill shelters.

Dogs, they kill 25% of pound intakes. Then they transfer out 2,413 dogs to their other kill facilities. Then they kill 46% of overall intakes in their own high kill shelters.

However, despite being RSPCA run pounds, the original pound statistics aren't included in the end-of-year Annual Report. Effectively meaning around half of all animals processed by the RSPCA NSW are 'invisible' to potential donors and supporters.

The shell game

Moving pets from one location to another and deliberately limiting the amount of information the public can access on operations, helps high kill shelters sanitise their figures and keep killing out of the public eye. Like the proverbial 'cup and ball trick' thousands of pets vanish, with little hope of the public ever being able to see through the slight of hand.

Unlike local councils, who are accountable to the public and are required to produce animal management data under Freedom of Information, or Right to Information laws, private charities can pick and choose what statistics they present to the public. If data is too damning, they can simply choose not to publish it. Meaning, not only could your local pound be worse off under the management of a major charity - *you might not be able to find out in the future how it is operating at all.*

The RSPCA NSW, once a year, publishes a single total of pets processed combining all locations. Not only is this information painfully out of date by the time it becomes public, it is practically useless for animal advocates to use to assess their individual city's performance. A transparent approach would see each RSPCA produce monthly figures for each location – including all pound figures and transfers – to allow local communities to appraise their local situation.

But don't hold your breath

A safe future for pets will come when shelters stop killing behind closed doors, implement all eleven components of the No Kill Equation, and regain the public's trust and support. No Kill demands transparency. It gives animal lovers the tools they need to assess their local shelter, regardless of who is in charge.

Only by **rejecting all convenience killing**, can we as a community change the operations of shelters like the RSPCA NSW, who continue to use the 'overpopulation' they artificially created, to justify continuing to kill in the face of alternatives.

We need to demand the killing stop today. Get informed. Get statistics. And become the change in your community.

**Figures from the DLG will be released when they are formatted.*

3 comments

1. *Caren Hall* | July 14, 2013 | The RSPCA is also 'double dipping' with their title. Private charities/shelters do what they do FOR PETS, not for profit. The RSPCA has laws for it only, therefore turning it into a government institution. They sell themselves as contractors for council pounds, therefore they are funded by the government.

To the public, they're not a government run body, they're a charity that's not funded. Where's the \$139million in their bank account coming from? True charities are ALWAYS run at a loss, so how can the RSPCA afford billion dollar upgrades?

2. *GeoffD* | July 14, 2013 Thanks Shel for this analysis.

This is why it's so important for councils, as ratepayers' representatives, to ask the right questions. Cessnock council recently forced RSPCA to report back the results for animals from its impounding contract with RSPCA Rutherford, regardless of whether they were killed at pound or later in RSPCA's high kill shelters. The 2012-

2013 part year results to date were 31% kill rate and 77% for cats (total 49%) – much higher than what they will admit in the 2013 DLG figures when these finally come out, and much, much higher than the final year 2010-2011 figures that the RSPCA contract replaced.

This deception of the public is entrenched: the contract between Cessnock council and RSPCA NSW contains a clause specifically directed to this manipulation of their data.

3. *Katrina* | July 15, 2013 A really elegant piece of analysis. Devastating that the figures are even worse than they seemed to be, and they seemed to be awful and devastating the RSPCA should be willing to stray so far from its mission and treat the lives of animals so cavalierly.