

Submission to:
2026 Census Topic Review



April 2023

OVERVIEW

This short submission features a quantity of data requests that are presently collected either in other Australian jurisdictions at a state or local level, or internationally. Other portions of the data requested are sourced from our experience within the animal advocacy sphere and the data that would allow for efficient and effective collaboration between NGOs, government, and the community.

RSPCA Tasmania (and other RSPCA state entities) regularly commission an independent report to measure our brand's performance and the issues that resonate with the community. The results provide a broad insight into the issues that Tasmanians want addressed relating to animal welfare. Many of these issues have been worked into the below data requests.

The data requested is summarised below

- Community views on animal welfare legislation
- Animal ownership
- Giving up animals
- Medical benefits
- Biosecurity
- Ownership responsibilities
- Animal related spending

DATA REQUESTS

Legislation

This data would provide valuable insights to both government and other organisations into how incumbent legislation is viewed within the community. This allows for government to prioritise which areas require imminent reform so as to align with community values and expectations.

Suggested questions include:

- Do you feel that animal welfare legislation in Tasmania adequately meets the community's expectations?
- What areas do you feel need the most legislative intervention regarding animal welfare?

Animal ownership

Presently, there exists little in the way of official data relating to animal ownership across Australia. Given the ever-growing prominence of animals within the Australian family, the ABS must gather data so that *all* parts of the family are captured to ensure that ABS data reflects the contemporary family.

Suggested questions include:

- Do you own an animal?
- How did you gain possession of your animal?
- Have you ever encountered suspicious sellers of animals?

Giving up animals

It is unfortunate when an animal must be given away by its family. The RSPCA Tasmania requests data as to why families have made this decision. Given this data, appropriate remedies can be suggested to Government and targeted for advocacy by other organisations.

Suggested questions include:

- Have you ever given up an animal?
 - If so, why?
 - Rental
 - Expenses
 - Personal reasons

Rentals

The rental laws surrounding animals vary greatly across Australia. Tasmania stands as one of the last remaining states to introduce legislative reform to aid potential tenants with pets. The RSPCA Tasmania requests that this data be collected so as to assess the scope of the issue within the community.

Given the abundant issues around affordable housing in Tasmania, further barriers within the market must be effectively addressed. Potential solutions include pet bonds, mandatory cleaning etc.

Further advocacy by the RSPCA Tasmania on this issue can be seen [here](#).

Expenses

As discussed above, this data would allow the RSPCA, other NGOs, and government to assess the number of pets that are being given up due to expenses. If this is a large issue, then there may be a need for subsidies, educational campaigns about costs of ownership etc.

Personal reasons

The RSPCA Safe Beds program has been developed to specifically provide short-term care for animals whilst their owners are temporarily unable to care for them. In Tasmania, the largest reasons have been due to rental situations (see 2.1.1), medical in-patients and homelessness. Our program can only service so much of the community, further, large bodies of the population may be unaware of the program.

Data on how many animals have been given up due to personal reasons would indicate the resources that would be required to grow the Safe Beds program so as to meet the need in the community.

Health benefits

As mentioned elsewhere, the collection of data on health benefits can be used in unison with the data on expenses.

Suggested questions include:

- Does your animal improve your mental health?
- Have you visited the doctor less since owning a pet?

Further examples of the use of this data would be within vulnerable communities. For the elderly, animals have been shown to provide a [myriad of medical benefits](#), which result in less cost to the

public health system. The government can perform a cost-benefit analysis using this data to explore the development of further animal-related health programs.

Biosecurity

Data on this topic would prove invaluable for the monitoring of trends in animal diseases across Australia. Whilst the period of ABS collection would prevent real time updates, it would still prove valuable to assess this data over time.

Suggested questions include:

- How many times has your pet been to the vet this year?
- Has your pet developed a disease in the last year?
 - *If yes, what disease?*

Ownership responsibilities

RSPCA Tasmania proposes that data be collected anonymously in compliance with present standards. The data must be anonymous for the data collected on issues of legality (failing to register a pet etc.).

Suggested questions include:

- Registration status
 - *Is your pet registered according to your local government legislation?*
 - *If not, why?*
- Microchip status
- Cat containment
 - *Do you keep your cat indoors?*
 - *If not, why?*
- Is your animal desexed?
 - *If not, why?*

Data under the banner of ownership responsibilities will allow both government and non-government organisations to measure the realities of policy implementation in the community. A large issue within Tasmania is the lack of enforcement of our animal welfare legislation due to inadequate resourcing. Therefore, it would be of great benefit to be able to measure compliance as this would indicate how widespread a problem is and indicate the quantity of resources that would be needed to ensure the intention of legislation is enforced throughout the community.

Animal-related spending

Pets are an integral part of most Australian families. Therefore, data on the expenses of owning an animal would be beneficial for potential pet owners. Further, if state governments wish to encourage adoption over breeding, data on ownership would provide a basis for calculating subsidies aimed at incentivising consumers to adopt.

This data can be used alongside health benefit data to perform a cost-benefit analysis of the cost of pet ownership against savings on medical expenses.

Given Australia's public health system, it would be in the interest of government to provide subsidies to pet owners if the cost of ownership is lesser than the savings to the public health system resultant of owning an animal.

Further, this data would aid in the development of a pet price index which would be valuable for consumers and organisations, especially organisations involved in the animal sector such as the RSPCA Tasmania, as it could potentially provide a more accurate basket of goods than the CPI for measuring increases in expenses for our various facilities and programs.

Suggested questions include:

- How much does your household spend on pets per month?
 - Break down this data into food, expenses, equipment etc.

ABOUT THE RSPCA TASMANIA

Who we are

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Tasmania (RSPCA) is a not-for-profit non-government organisation. We have been working to improve the welfare of animals within our state since 1878.

Tasmania has a unique affinity with its animals and the RSPCA Tasmania has become an embedded part of our state's culture with 77% of those aware of our organisation reporting a high level of brand confidence. We are the only Tasmanian organisation to be explicitly named in animal welfare legislation and our long history of effective cooperation has allowed us to work with all manner of stakeholders, from charities to government, towards the benefit of animals.

We recognise that connections with the community are vital to furthering welfare reform and so vast amounts of resources are used on maintaining and developing our connection with the Tasmanian community; In a 2023 survey from Kantar commissioned by the RSPCA Tasmania, of those aware of the RSPCA Tasmania, 82% report that they feel positive about us, whereas only 4% reported feeling negative. Our efforts within animal welfare advocacy have been recognised by the community with 84% of people believing that we care and 78% agreeing that we are effective in our efforts. Further, 77% reported a high level of trust towards our organisation. This metric stands as a testament to our dedicated commitment to building relationships with the community and ensuring we are improving Tasmania's level of animal welfare towards contemporary community expectations.

During the past three years, the RSPCA Tasmania has:

- Investigated over 25,000 reports of animal cruelty;
- Provided care for more than 6,670 animals;
- Delivered information to thousands of Tasmanians through online resources, community engagement and the recent addition of our AWARE program that is being rolled out this year to teach children about the importance of animal welfare.
- Helped our state Government push through further amendments to the Animal Welfare Act 1993.

Of those that feel negative towards our organisation, the vast majority of these issues can be linked to a lack of resources. One of the key issues we are pushing for is a level of government funding that reflects our contribution and the quantity of services rendered to the community. In our Kantar Brand Perception Survey, the majority of negative comments related to a lack of response following cruelty reports. Our inspectors work tirelessly to answer reports, and whilst all reports are responded to, the time frame this occurs in could be drastically reduced through further funding.

Our key services for the Tasmanian community have been recognised as pet adoption, investigation and prosecution of animal cruelty and neglect, and educating owners on caring for their pets.

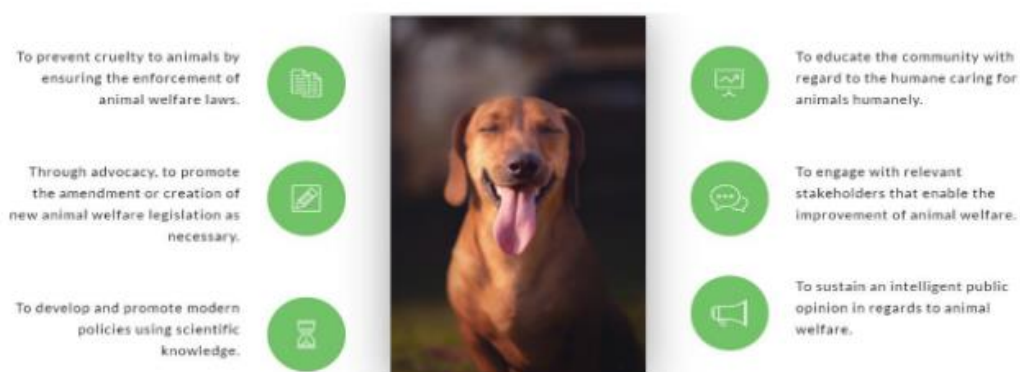
Further, our services have become an integral part of Tasmania's animal welfare with 75% of the Tasmanian public aware of our investigation and prosecution services and roughly the same amount of people stating they were using our services or would do so in future.

We're not just here to serve Tasmanian animals, but we're here to serve the Tasmanian community and the animals that form an invaluable part of our state.

What we do

Our strategic priorities are built on the pillars of Animals, Sustainability, and Our People. Within that framework we aim to:

- Constantly push for economic efficiency to maximise the use of our resources.
- Achieve the best welfare outcome for every animal in our care – through adopting socially conscious sheltering principles, improving the capability of our facilities, and increasing adoptions and foster care arrangements.
- Reduce animal cruelty and neglect – through advocacy that delivers legislative change, and community education that improves awareness and welfare outcomes.
- Reduce the number of surrendered and homeless animals – through increased desexing and microchipping programs, and providing support to people in difficult circumstances
- Support our people to do their great work – by building an exceptional workplace culture, and a dedicated network of foster carers, volunteers, and animal specialists.



How we work

- Our Animal Care Centre (ACC) at Devonport is dedicated to caring for, rehabilitating and rehoming animals.
- Our Adoption and Retail Centres (ARCs) in Latrobe, Launceston, and Hobart are our bases in the community. Animals are surrendered and rehomed through these centres; owners can access advice and supplies for their companion animals; and our ARC teams assist with local microchipping and education activities in their communities.
- Our Inspectorate operates under delegated powers from the state government to investigate and prosecute instances of alleged animal cruelty. Inspectors are co-located with NRE in Hobart, Launceston, and Devonport, and operate across the state. This team is supported by a call centre equipped to handle reports.
- Our team of dedicated volunteers assists in all our activities. They serve on our board; they care for animals in our ACC and ARCs; they organise fundraising events; and they support us in many other activities. We could not do what we do without these wonderful people.
- Our corporate office is in Launceston. Supporting our frontline teams, a group of dedicated professionals work across many areas – including fundraising and marketing, policy and advocacy, volunteer organisation, project delivery and – last but not least – our administration team who answer the phones and keep the lights on.