



Submission: 2022/2023 State Budget

December 2021

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1. Overview

Preparation of the state budget each year provides the government with the opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to community priorities.

Community demands for better animal welfare are in line with independent survey results show most Australians believe animal welfare is important to them.

We know we speak for most Tasmanians when we say animal welfare should be a high priority for the state government.

This document sets out a number of initiatives the RSPCA believes are essential to ensure improved animal welfare outcomes in Tasmania. These are a blend of recommended actions that will improve the lives of many animals and their human companions, foster innovation, and support regional communities.

All have real, measurable benefits to the community, and can assist in economic recovery and resilience as we work through the COVID-19 pandemic.

These initiatives will enable us to continue to meet the increasing demands of the Tasmanian community for better animal welfare.

Initiative	Investment 2021/2022	Total Cost (over 3 years)	Agency
Delivering improved animal welfare outcomes			
Increased resourcing for the animal welfare inspectorate <i>(Note: this is in addition to current funding of \$550K pa)</i>	\$220,000	\$660,000	NRET
Underwriting legal fees and maintenance costs for inspectorate cases that can't be recouped	As needed	As needed	NRET
Implementing the state cat management strategy	\$220,000	\$220,000	NRET
Improving animal welfare awareness amongst young people	\$120,000	\$320,000	Education NRET
Ensuring responsible dog breeding	\$150,000	\$450,000	NRET Justice
Safe Beds Program	\$50,000	\$150,000	Communities NRET
Informing public policy	\$75,000	\$75,000	DPAC
Strengthening our human connections	\$0	\$0	Communities Health

(Note: all costs are exclusive of GST)



2. About RSPCA Tasmania

2.1 Background

Community trust and respect for our work, along with sound scientific evidence, is the foundation on which the RSPCA is built.

The community respects our knowledge of animal welfare, which is grounded in science and based on experience. In the 144 years since the RSPCA was established in the state, we have helped thousands of animals in need in all kinds of situations: in homes, backyards, on farms, in the wild and at sporting arenas.

Animals play a central role in the lives of many people. Most Tasmanians, whether they live in suburbia, rural properties, or in regional towns, say animal welfare is important or extremely important to them.

During the past three years, RSPCA has:

- Investigated over 10,000 reports of animal cruelty;
- Provided care for more than 4,500 animals; and
- Delivered information to thousands of people on animal welfare, responsible animal care and pet ownership through school, community, and online education.

Our role is to act as a conduit for the community's concerns about animal welfare, to ensure those concerns are heard by our state's decision makers.

On that basis, RSPCA is calling on the state government to show the people of Tasmania that they care for and support the welfare of all animals in our community.

This document sets out our priority expectations for funding in the 2022/2023. We urge our elected representatives to recognise these projects in developing a forward plan for Tasmania.

2.2 Who we are

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Tasmania (RSPCA) is a not-for-profit non-government organisation. We've been working to improve the lives of animals in this state since 1878.

The RSPCA is the only Tasmanian organisation named in animal welfare legislation and we enjoy the continued support of all levels of government.

The community respects our knowledge of animal welfare, which is grounded in science and based on experience. In the 143 years since the RSPCA was established in the state, we have helped hundreds of thousands of animals in need in all kinds of situations: in homes, backyards, on farms, in the wild, and at sporting arenas.

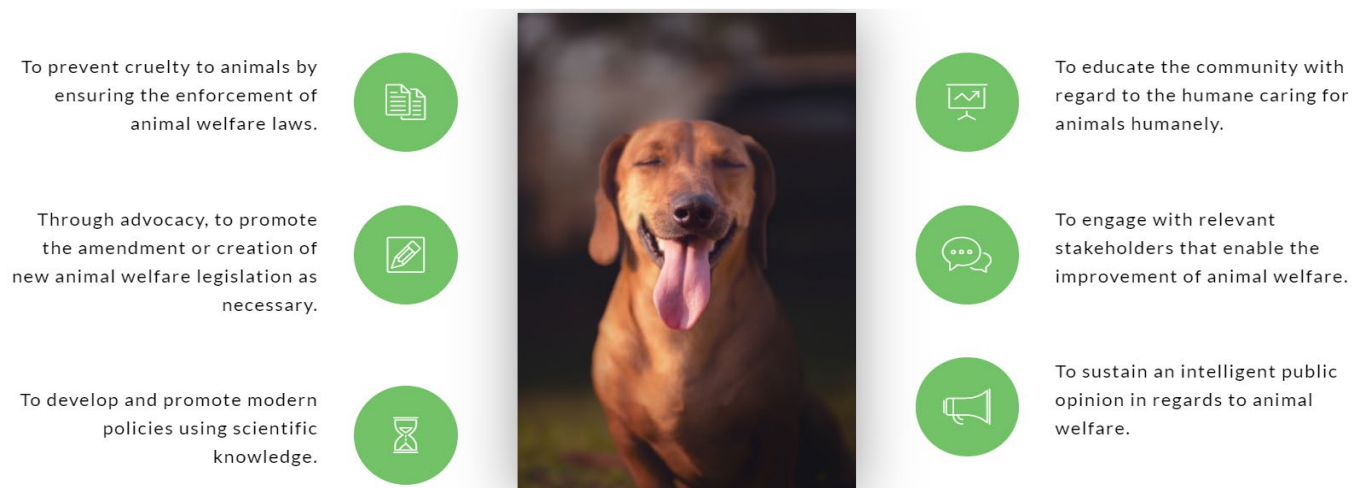
As a charity, we strive to maintain an open-door policy, so no abandoned, neglected, injured, or surrendered animal is turned away or forgotten. Along with cats and dogs, the RSPCA provides assistance to a wide range of other animals, including horses, rabbits, guinea pigs, birds, goats, and sheep.

Our role is to act as a conduit for the community's concerns about animal welfare, to ensure those concerns are heard by our state's decision makers. So our advocacy activities are a vitally important part of our work.

With an ultimate goal of improving animal welfare outcomes, we acknowledge the crucial role of humans in keeping our animals safe.

So we not only serve animals in need, but also owners and carers who require guidance and support through education and assistance in relation to domestic violence, aged care, homelessness, mental health, and more.

2.3 What we do



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

- manage costs efficiently, and grow reliable revenue streams – by removing unnecessary costs and operating within available 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

2.4 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 DPIPW in Hobart, Launceston, and Devonport, and operate across the state. This team is supported by a 24 hour call centre equipped to handle reports.

- Our team of dedicated volunteers assists across all our activities. They serve on our board; they care for animals in our ACC and ARCs; they provide foster care for our animals; 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.

2.5 Our advocacy priorities

We have identified several key policy areas which are the responsibility of the state government, and which have the potential to deliver significant improvement to animal welfare outcomes. Our engagement with stakeholders has shown that these initiatives have strong community support.

These include:

- A thorough review of our animal welfare legislation
- A strong welfare inspectorate
- Recognising the role of companion animals in all legislation and policy
- Transparency and accountability
- Stamping out puppy farms and on-line pet scams
- Banning recreational duck shooting
- Stronger regulation of greyhound racing
- Stronger regulation of horse racing – in particular, the use of whips
- Phasing out public funding for racing
- Improving animal welfare awareness amongst young people
- Secure funding for cat management programs
- Funding for safe beds programs

The initiatives outlined in this submission have been designed to address some of these priorities.

3. Animal welfare in Tasmania

3.1 Companion animals in Tasmania

Almost two-thirds of Australian households have a pet today, and 90% of us have had a pet at some time. This includes an estimated 5.1 million dogs, 3.8 million cats, 11.3 million fish, 5.6 million birds, 614,000 small mammals, 364,000 reptiles and 1.8 million 'other' pets. If this data were extrapolated across all Australian households, it would mean there are more pets than people in Australia. (*Pets in Australia, A survey by Animal Medicines Australia, 2021*).

Tasmania is the state with the highest incidence of pet-ownership, with 44% of its residents living with at least one dog, 34% living with at least one cat, and 16% living with at least one of each. (*Roy Morgan Research, 2020*).

There is no doubt that there is significant public interest in the welfare of companion animals, as evidenced by the thousands of people who sign petitions, follow animal-oriented social media pages, and the numbers of animal-centred news items in Tasmanian media publications.

Most Tasmanians, whether they live in suburbia, rural properties, or in regional towns, say animal welfare is important or extremely important to them, and most Tasmanians expect improved animal welfare outcomes should be a high priority for the state government.

3.2 Animals cared for by the RSPCA

A total of 1285 animals came into our care during the year. This represented an increase of 7.44% when compared with the previous year.

Of this total,

- 67.86% (872) were rehomed or reclaimed
- 14.24% (183) remained in care at the end of the year
- 17.90% (230) were euthanised

Unfortunately, some animals that come into our care are injured, seriously unwell, or unable to be socialised. In these cases, the most humane option for the animal is euthanasia. We aim to have a euthanasiation rate of less than 15% pa.

However, as part of our role as a cat management facility, there has been a significant increase in the number of trapped cats coming into our care. Many of these cats are feral and not able to be socialised. This has resulted in a higher than usual rate of euthanasiation.

During the year, 1129 animals that came into our care received veterinary attention. We have a network of volunteer and community vets who support us in this work. Over the period, we spent \$158,500 in vet costs, with an average of \$140 per animal treatment which is below our target of \$150.

There is a noticeable downward trend in the number of dogs coming into care. This is consistent across all dog rescue and shelter organisations within the state; and also consistent with the situation being seen nationally.

The number of stray and surrendered cats decreased during the past year, while there was an increase in captured colony and feral cats. Despite that, overall euthanasiation rates for cats fell from 2.7% to 1.3% over the period, which reflects improved outcomes for socialisation of captured cats.

In future, we will separately record data related to our cat management facility activities, to depict our performance more accurately to targets.

Table 1: Animals in Care

Animal	Status	2020/2021	2019/2020	2018/2019*
Dogs	Received	109	123	452
	Rehomed/reclaimed	83	103	225
	In care	7	9	3
	Other	0	4	0
	Euthanised	19	7	44
Cats	Received	971	939	1325
	Rehomed/reclaimed	662	718	756
	In care	114	23	186
	Other	13	26	7
	Euthanised	182	172	376
Horses	Received	8	7	7
	Rehomed/reclaimed	5	4	6
	In care	2	2	0
	Other	0	0	1
	Euthanised	1	1	0
Livestock	Received	4	9	86
	Rehomed/reclaimed	2	6	81
	In care	1	2	0
	Other	1	0	5
	Euthanised	0	1	0
Wildlife	Received	0	2	19
	Released	0	2	9
	In care	0	0	3
	Other	0	0	0
	Euthanised	0	0	7
Other	Received	193	116	145
	Rehomed/reclaimed	120	95	93
	In care	40	12	9
	Other	5	8	7
	Euthanised	28	1	36
TOTAL		1285	1196	2034

Source: RSPCA Australia National Statistics 2020/2021

*RSPCA shelters in both Hobart and Launceston ceased operation during 2018/2019, hence the decrease in numbers.

3.3 Inspectorate Activity

The RSPCA and Biosecurity Tasmania are jointly responsible for undertaking investigations and enforcement action with respect to issues under the *Animal Welfare Act 1993*.

Biosecurity Tasmania is an agency within the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania (DNRET) (formerly the Department of Primary Industries Parks Water and Environment - DPIPWE).

During 2020/2021, the RSPCA Animal Welfare Inspectorate received 2,034 calls to the Animal Cruelty Hotline (compared to 2,171 in the previous year).

Of these complaints,

- 1,827 were investigated by RSPCA
- 184 cases were transferred to Biosecurity Tasmania
- 23 cases were transferred to police or local government authorities.

An analysis of RSPCA and Biosecurity Tasmania (DNRET) data for the last reporting period showed:

- Most complaints related to companion animals. However, that is not necessarily indicative of the seriousness of the complaints;
- Geographically, the location of complaints is commensurate with the species trends ie the areas with the most complaints tend to be around human population centres which are areas where a higher population of companion animals could be expected;
- In terms of outcome, only very few matters are of a nature that require penalties, and then even less that require significant penalties;
- In most circumstances, issues can be and are resolved through the work of the officer attending to it; either by educating or instructing owners or those with care and charge to take action;
- The influence of the COVID-19 pandemic became apparent in the last quarter of the period, at which time there was a slight reduction in complaints.

The total reports of animal welfare issues across the state for 2020/2021, split by response agency, are shown in the chart below.

Chart 1: Reports of animal welfare issues 2020/2021

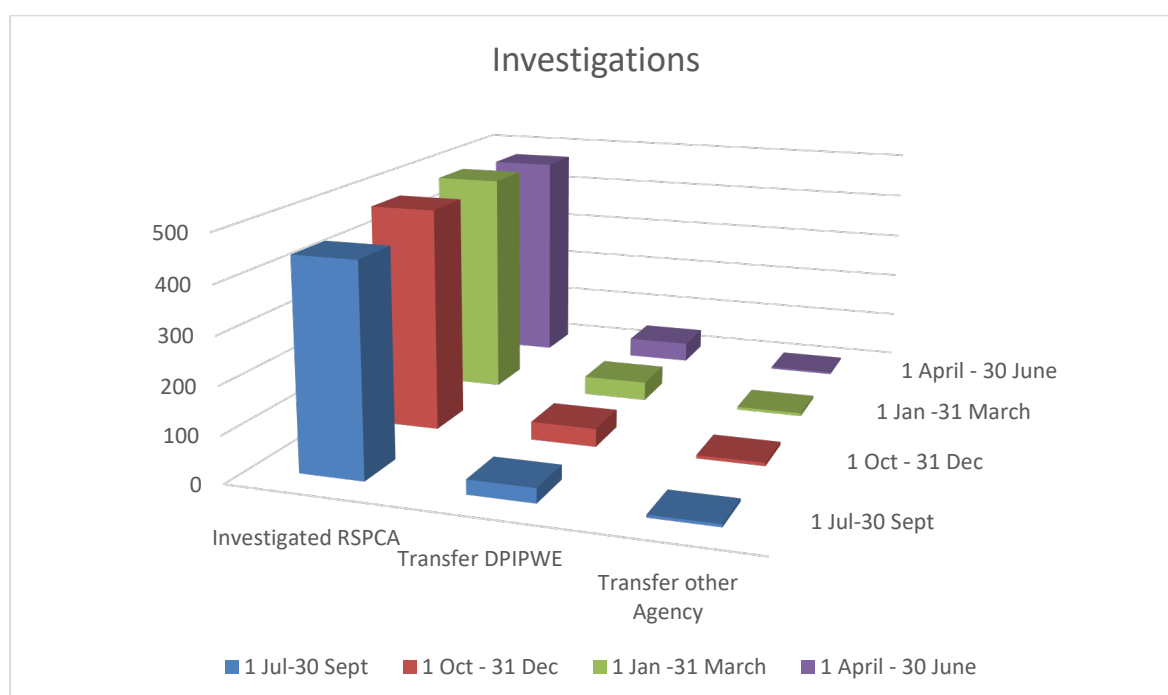
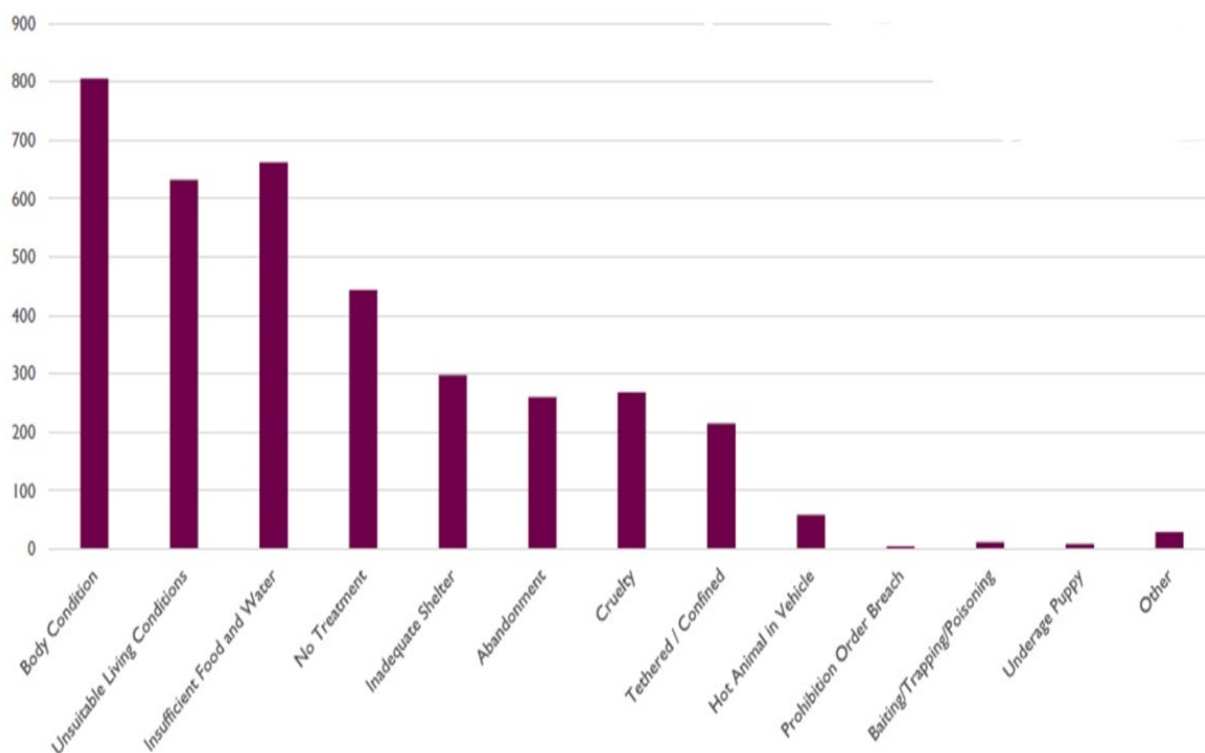


Chart 2 shows the scope of alleged issues dealt with in the 2020/2021 year. The categories of complaint are those employed by RSPCA inspectorates nation-wide, and they do not always directly align to a single section/regulation of Tasmanian legislation.

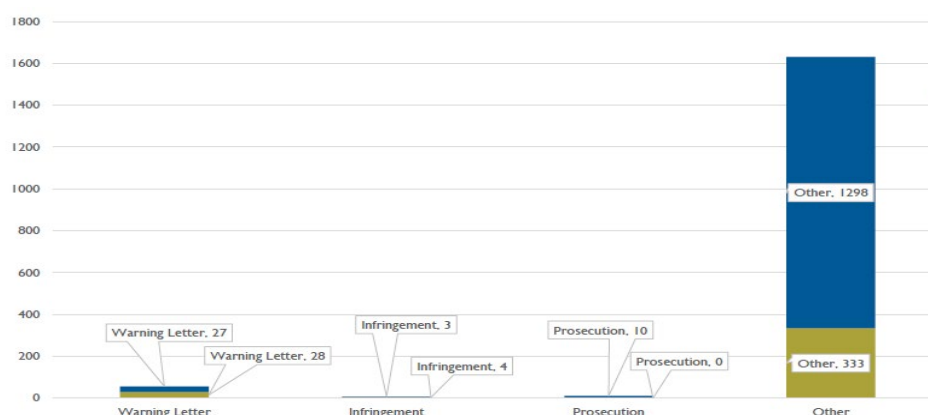
DNRET data is not included in this chart. However, given most matters come through RSPCA to DNRET, the relative proportions of types of matter are reasonably representative.

Chart 2: Alleged animal welfare issues 2020/2021



The next chart shows that most outcomes were dealt with at the 'lower' end of the compliance spectrum. Outcomes classified as 'other' might be reports where no issue existed, or where compliance was successfully achieved without penalty. Obviously, this data reflects only situations where formal reports were made. It also is restricted to outcomes achieved within the reporting period (ie matters ongoing past 30 June 2021 are not included).

Chart 3: Outcomes of animal welfare reports 2020/2021



The largest number of complaints related to dogs, with cats being the next largest category.

Chart 4: Animal welfare reports by species 2020/2021

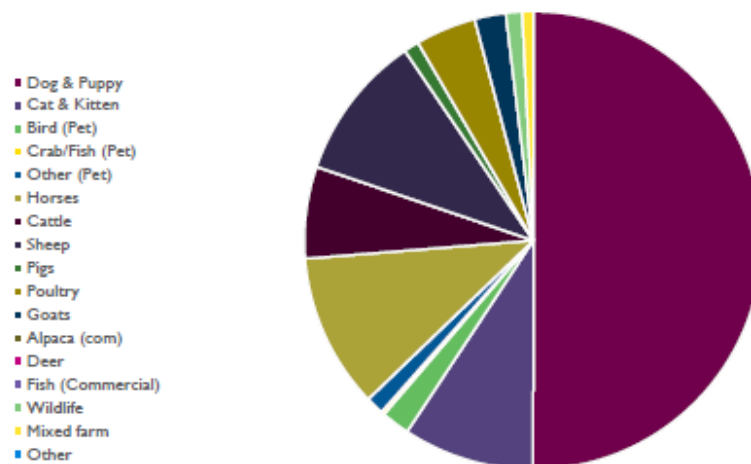
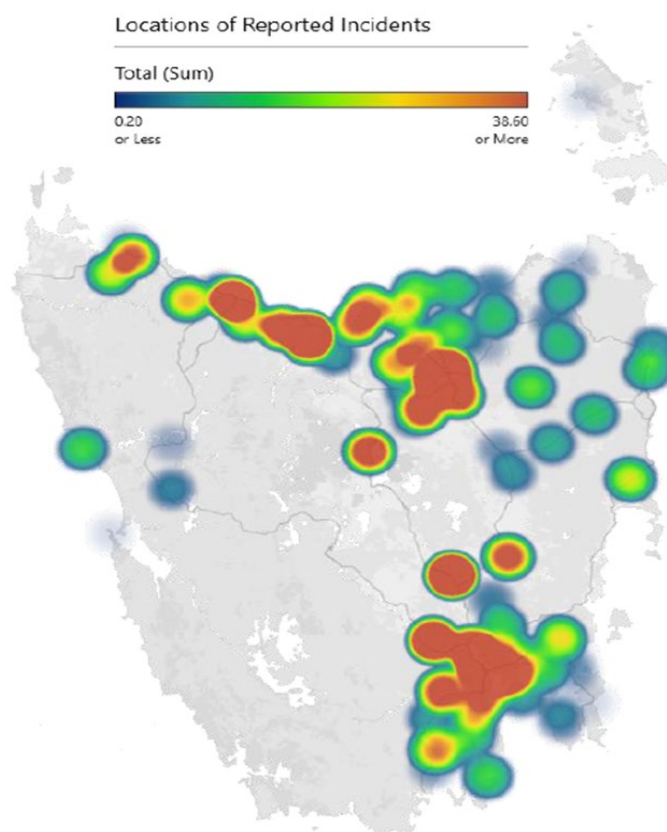


Chart 5 shows locations of reports received. It is not an indication of outcome, ie proven offence, or of species involved.

Chart 5: Animal welfare reports by location 2020/2021



4. Budget initiatives

4.1 Delivering improved animal welfare outcomes

Why is this a priority?

The scope of work undertaken by the RSPCA Inspectorate is outlined above.

RSPCA Inspectorate staff are highly qualified experts in their area, and no other organisation in Tasmania is as well equipped to deal with animal cruelty reports. Therefore, focus should be placed on expanding the resources of the Inspectorate, both through increases in funding and through expanding on links with other enforcement agencies, such as Biosecurity Tasmania and Tasmania Police

In 2013, the Parliamentary Standing Committee of Public Accounts found that the level of funding to the RSPCA to run the Inspectorate service was inadequate given government expectations of the organisation. The Inquiry noted that the RSPCA was bearing the cost of administering government legislation and was not being sufficiently remunerated for the cost of doing so.

In 2018, the government increased Inspectorate funding from \$400,000 to \$550,000 pa. However, there has been no provision for annual CPI increases to this funding and so the level of funding has remained unchanged since. Furthermore, the funding provided is not directly related to level of services required and provided.

This amount does not cover the costs of addressing current demands on the service, let alone provide scope for expansion of activities into new areas (eg puppy farms) or proactively enforce existing regulations (eg regular inspections of breeding establishments). Activities outside the current funding envelope are underwritten by the RSPCA from donations and other fundraising activities.

The RSPCA does not believe that our organisation should have any responsibility for funding enforcement of the Government's legislation. We consider the current arrangement to be an outsourcing contract for DNRET. The RSPCA provides this service to government at a much lower cost than government would incur in providing a similar level of services internally, and certainly considerably less than the cost of any private company providing a comparable level of service.

Within current funding and resourcing levels, RSPCA has a number of concerns about the level of Animal Welfare Act enforcement possible, including:

- the safety of our inspectors who operate as lone workers;
- inadequate servicing of rural areas;
- restricted capacity to respond to engage with welfare incidents in the racing industry;
- restricted capacity to handle large or complicated prosecutions;
- inability to proactively investigate and respond to issues such as puppy farming and online puppy scams; and
- limited ability to influence behaviours through education rather than prosecution.

The RSPCA has actively pursued efficiencies in operations and cost reduction strategies.

However, as an agent of the government in enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act, we would also appreciate assistance from the government with implementing other cost reduction opportunities.

These opportunities include, but are not limited to:

- access to government procurement contracts (vehicles, equipment etc)
- access to government communications systems including the GRN network
- support for legislative reforms that would improve the efficiency of the legal process.

Another concern relates to organisational capacity limitations facing the RSPCA in enforcing the Animal Welfare Act where it becomes embroiled in significant and complex prosecutions.

As a corporate entity, the RSPCA operates within finite financial resources. In this respect, it is different from other bodies who are responsible for commencing summary public prosecutions, such as Tasmania Police or DNRET. Although budget limitations restrict all prosecuting authorities, those government departments operate with a degree of security knowing that ultimately any significant costs incurred in relation to a particular matter will be covered by the state government. The RSPCA does not enjoy that same comfort.

A defendant will not be denied costs simply because the RSPCA is a benevolent, not-for-profit organisation engaging in public interest litigation. In fact, costs awarded against the RSPCA in pursuing welfare prosecutions must be funded from organisational fundraising efforts – and this is an unacceptable risk.

A further complication arises from the fact that, in an increasing litigious society, defendants may choose to launch civil proceedings, seeking in detinue costs against the RSPCA itself and also criminal charges, personally against inspectors and veterinarians who work for the society, for actions undertaken during the course of their employment.

Clearly, without the support or guarantee of government backing, financial constraints may potentially have a very real impact on the exercise of prosecutorial discretion. Quite simply, the RSPCA may have to choose not to proceed with a prosecution of a worthy case if the risks of an adverse finding and costs would unduly affect the organisation's financial position.

The RSPCA therefore proposes that the government provide a guarantee for costs incurred in relation to matters where costs are awarded against RSPCA or where civil actions are instigated in relation to prosecution cases or seizure of animals under animal welfare legislation.

Furthermore, the RSPCA receives no funding to cover the cost of maintaining animals in care whilst cases are prosecuted or otherwise resolved. In some cases, animals can be in care for long periods of time eg a dog from one case recently finalised was in care for more than 3 years. Over that time, the RSPCA was responsible for all his accommodation and veterinary costs, as well as providing enrichment and socialisation experiences. In another inspectorate case, extensive veterinary issues resulted in bills of more than \$5,000. Whilst we can make claims to recoup these costs from the defendants, there is no guarantee that we will receive the funds at all – let alone in a timely manner.

Governments are charged with providing services required by the community, and there is a clear expectation by the Tasmanian public that more, not less, needs to be done to protect animals in this state. It is not realistic to expect a charitable organisation to be subsidising public services.

What investment is needed?

The RSPCA is seeking an increase in the funding for the RSPCA Inspectorate from \$550,000 to \$750,000 per annum, and for the funding to be indexed annually to keep pace with the CPI.

The funding will be used to assist the RSPCA to:

- appoint another inspector to ensure two inspectors are available in each of the north, north-west and southern regions of the state;*
- ensure inspectors can operate two-handed in high-risk situations;*
- upgrade safety equipment/systems and vehicles for inspectors in the field;*
- upgrade web-based reporting and case management systems;*
- increase proactive education and investigation activities; and*
- facilitate expanded co-operation between the RSPCA Inspectorate and other agencies.*

The RSPCA is seeking a guarantee from the government to reimburse expenses incurred in relation to inspectorate cases where:

- costs are awarded against RSPCA or where civil actions are instigated in relation to prosecution cases or seizure of animals under animal welfare legislation; and*
- costs incurred in maintaining animals during legal actions are not fully recouped within 12 months of the matter being finalised.*

The funding will be used to assist the RSPCA to:

- recoup legal costs related to inspectorate prosecutions; and*
- cover unfunded costs of maintaining animals whilst awaiting finalisation of inspectorate prosecutions*

4.2 Implementing the state cat management strategy

Why is this a priority?

Cats are present throughout Tasmania as domestic pets, free-living strays, and as feral animals. As pets, cats are wonderful companion animals and have a range of health benefits for their owners. However, cats are also a nuisance in our community and have serious impacts on our agriculture and wildlife.

As a result, in consultation with key stakeholder groups, the Tasmanian government developed the Tasmanian Cat Management Plan 2017-2022. Amendments have been made to the *Cat Management Act 2009* to reflect recommendations for regulatory change in the Plan.

As of 1 March 2021, cats may be trapped and taken to a cat management facility (or a nominee of a cat management facility). Cat management facilities may also receive surrendered cats from owners who can no longer care for their cat. This has been a very positive step for the management of the issue of stray and feral cats in Tasmania.

However, organisations nominated as cat management facilities have obligations under the Act which result in significant expectations from both the government and the wider community.

As yet, there has been no funding available to assist in delivery of the program or in meeting these obligations. This is placing a significant burden on nominated cat management facilities, including the RSPCA.

As the only state-wide organisation involved in the on-ground delivery of the cat management program, the RSPCA is ideally placed to coordinate the collection, receipt, and transport of surrendered and trapped cats to a cat management facility.

However, without appropriate resourcing, the RSPCA will be unable to continue to provide services to deliver on the government's commitments with respect to managing stray and feral cats.

Furthermore, without funding assistance, the RSPCA will have limited capacity to assist in implementation of the next tranche of changes to the Cat Management Act which are due to come into effect in March 2022. This includes the requirement for licencing where there are 4 cats in any household.

There is also little coordination or understanding by the public of any system for the management of trapped or unwanted cats. The RSPCA believes there is a need for a broader public awareness campaign, guided by good research, to improve awareness and understanding of new regulations for cat management under the Cat Management Act.

What investment is needed?

The RSPCA is seeking funding of \$220,000 to support its role in the implementation of the Cat Management Act.

The funding will be used to assist the RSPCA to:

- *develop a centralised state-wide Cat Management Facility which will provide improved infrastructure to house and manage cats brought and surrendered to the RSPCA under the Act;*
- *set up and maintain a system for the co-ordination of the management of trapped and surrendered cats across the state, including transport logistics; and*
- *undertake surveys and other research to guide a public awareness campaign aimed at improving understanding of the Cat Management Act and the role of Cat Management Facilities.*

4.3 Improving animal welfare awareness amongst young people

Why is this a priority?

Education is the key to lasting change. The RSPCA AWARE program aims to help young people develop responsible and caring behaviour towards animals, preventing cruelty and neglect in the long term.

RSPCA AWARE (*Animal Welfare: Awareness, Responsibility, Education*) provides paper-based and digital resources for educators, students, and parents to help young people develop knowledge, skills, and understandings around improving the welfare of all animals – companion animals, farmed animals, and wildlife.

The RSPCA AWARE Kids Education Portal is a unique online education resource. The portal has been designed to support children learning about animal welfare and responsibility towards animals, whilst developing respect, understanding and compassion for all living creatures

The RSPCA AWARE Teachers Portal is designed for primary school teachers. The portal provides innovative teaching and learning resources on animal welfare that are aligned with the Australian curriculum and fit easily into classroom programs.

Ongoing funding is needed to ensure that the program:

- is economically sustainable;
- has a long-term impact on the welfare of animals in Tasmania;
- has broad reach from cities into regional and remote parts of the state; and
- contains fresh resources promoting animal welfare to every child and educator in Tasmania.

What investment is needed?

The RSPCA is seeking funding of \$320,000 (\$120,000 in year 1 and then \$100,000 pa over 2 years) to support delivery of the RSPCA AWARE Program.

The funding will be used to assist the RSPCA to:

- *facilitate production of collateral and accessible website resources for students, educators, and parents;*
- *co-ordinate delivery of materials and resources free-of-charge to all primary schools across Tasmania; and*
- *promote the AWARE program to educators, and support integration of the program into existing curricula.*

4.4 Ensuring responsible dog breeding

Why is this a priority?

Pet shelters across Australia have been emptied after a huge surge in demand for pet companions during the Covid-19 pandemic. At the same time, there has also been a significant decrease in pets available for private sale.

This has forced prospective owners to desperate measures to find a furry friend. As a result, “puppy scams” have become a significant issue across Australia.

More and more people have been defrauded by online scammers preying on the increasing demand for pet companionship during COVID-19. Predatory people are offering dogs (and, in some cases, other animals) for sale that do not exist. People end up falling in love with photos of pets on the internet and eventually paying large amounts of money for animals that do not exist.

These offenders target the emotions of victims in much the same way as romance scams, and so it is often vulnerable people who least can afford the financial losses and emotional stresses that are targeted.

According to the Tasmanian police, 11 Tasmanians lost over \$35,000 to puppy scams just in the first 9 months of 2020. Yet what we have seen publicly so far is only the tip of the iceberg.

The RSPCA takes at least one a call a day from members of the public concerned about a possible puppy scam. Many of the people have been scammed – often for many thousands of dollars. As dogs become harder and harder to obtain, this problem is worsening.

Other jurisdictions have recognised the seriousness of this issue and are taking steps to deal with it. As regulations elsewhere are tightened up, scammers are now focussing on Tasmania.

Coupled with the issue of scammers is the problem of puppy farming, which is also seen as a major animal welfare issue across Australia.

The main welfare problems associated with puppy farms include the impacts of extreme confinement – in some cases breeding animals may never be allowed out of their cage to exercise, play, socialise, have companionship, or even to go to the toilet.

The health of the breeding animals is also a major concern in that they may be forced into having many litters in a very short time.

Managing these operations is challenging – not least because there is no agreed definition of what puppy farming actually is. While the standards of welfare of dogs on puppy farms may be illegal under animal cruelty standards set out in legislation, puppy farming itself has not been considered illegal as a practice in the past.

There are major impediments to investigating and prosecuting puppy farming including:

- An inability to locate puppy farm facilities. The lack of legislation requiring breeder identification means that locating puppy farms is difficult.
- In order to remain inconspicuous, puppy farmers use many avenues of sale including the internet, newspapers, markets, and direct delivery to buyers. To locate these facilities, animal welfare inspectorates such as the RSPCA must often rely on complaints from the public who have seen them first-hand. However, puppies are often delivered directly to prospective buyers so that the locations of breeding facilities remain hidden.
- Legislation although requiring registration and microchipping of dogs and cats, does not specifically regulate their breeding,

Some jurisdictions are leading the way in addressing the problem of puppy farming.

The Queensland Government has introduced new laws that will promote the responsible breeding of dogs including a requirement that all dog breeders be registered on the Queensland Dog Breeder Register.

The Victorian Government has introduced the Domestic Animals Amendment (Puppy Farms and Pet Shops) Act 2017 aimed at reforming the dog breeding and pet shop industries in Victoria and better regulate the sale of cats and dogs.

The Tasmanian public is no less concerned. It is time for the Tasmanian Government to show the same leadership on this issue as its interstate counterparts.

RSPCA is seeking the development of a Tasmanian Dog Breeder Register for the buying and selling of all dogs and puppies, similar to the system developed in Queensland. Such a system would aid in the prevention of the establishment and operation of puppy farms, help stop puppy scammers, and discourage “backyard breeders” with low animal welfare standards who consider profit over welfare.

The Register would provide a tool for the monitoring and enforcement of the Animal Welfare (Dogs) Regulations 2016, a resource to monitor online platforms for instances of puppy scamming, illegal transfer of animals etc. It would also provide a trusted source of information for people looking to buy a dog. RSPCA is ideally placed, in collaboration with the Tasmanian government, to develop and manage this register.

What investment is needed?

The RSPCA is seeking funding of \$450,000 (\$150,000 over 3 years) to support the establishment and management of a Tasmanian dog breeder register.

The funding will be used to assist the RSPCA to:

- develop and establish the Tasmanian Dog Breeder Register;*
- establish an on-line 'inspectorate' team to monitor and police advertisements, and ensure all standards and requirements are met with respect to on-line selling of dogs and other pets; and*
- work co-operatively with other Tasmanian agencies and other state jurisdictions to prevent puppy farming operations and cross-border scams.*

4.5 Safe Beds Program

Why is this a priority?

A woman's decision to leave a violent and abusive relationship is a complex process. She first needs to consider the risks to her and her children. Paradoxically, taking that step towards safety is also the time of greatest danger of homicide, sexual assault, and increased violence.

Pets and service animals are also a part of the lives of many families. This means they are an important part of the decision-making process when women consider leaving a violent situation.

Seventy per cent of women fleeing domestic violence also report pet abuse, and it's another reason many victims delay leaving. They fear the animal who has provided love and support when they need it most will be neglected, or they won't be fed or cared for. Worse, they are worried their animals will be killed. And these fears are real.

Violent towards pets is a really strong indicator that people will also be violent towards the humans in their life. Animal abuse often is linked to the severity of domestic violence, and individuals who commit pet abuse are more likely to inflict physical and mental violence on other family members.

Many jurisdictions are recognising these facts and changing legislation to include animals in family violence laws. More than two-thirds of US states have already enacted legislation that includes provisions for pets in domestic violence protection orders.

Last year, NSW laws were amended to include harm, or threats of harm, to an animal in the definition of intimidation. This means perpetrators can also be charged with domestic violence offences when animals are used to coerce the victim. The changes mean that protection of animals will also be made standard in domestic violence orders.

The Victorian Parliament is currently considering a motion which proposes that animals should be recognised as victims of family violence, which would result in similar provisions to those now in place in NSW.

Sadly, despite all this evidence, Tasmania is falling behind. It is time for our government to follow step and adopt changes in legislation that recognise animal abuse as a form of family violence.

As well as these basic amendments, changes will also need to be made in other areas.

Pets need to be recognised as family members in the eyes of the law, because at the moment they are only considered as property. Often, women feel like they have to stay in violent relationships because their pet is registered to the male in the family. In these circumstances, ownership of the pet should automatically move to the person trying to flee that situation.

Abusers often use pets to manipulate and control their victims, but very few women's refuges allow animals. Changes will be needed to short stay and emergency accommodation regulations to allow people to escape fraught situations with their pets. This is a particular issue in rural communities where it is difficult for victims of domestic violence to move away from an abusive situation, and to become 'invisible' to their abuser. There also needs to be more support for safe haven refuges for women, their children, and their pets.

The Safe Beds for Pets program in New South Wales was established to provide temporary housing for pets of people who are seeking refuge from domestic violence and to address the link between animal and human abuse and child protection. It is common practice for the perpetrator of domestic violence to lure family members back home by threatening to harm the pet. With the Safe Beds for Pets Program families can now leave domestic violence situations and not fear for the safety of their pets. The program gives domestic violence victims peace of mind and allows them to secure their own safety and make arrangements for the future.

The approach to this issue to date in Tasmania has been very ad-hoc, with a very few programs largely funded and managed by charitable organisations and no co-ordination. There are several small programs available for people with dogs, but nothing publicly noted for cats or other companion animals.

These measures would be an important step towards improving support and so the safety of victim-survivors when animals are also caught up in family violence. When women know their pet will be safe, it allows them to take care of themselves and their children. And the safety of vulnerable Tasmanians should be of paramount importance to all of us.

What investment is needed?

The RSPCA is seeking funding of \$150,000 (\$50,000 pa over 3 years) to support the establishment and management of a Safe Beds Program.

The funding will be used to assist the RSPCA to:

- develop and establish a co-ordinated network of safe bed providers;*
- fund safe bed places for the pets of Tasmanians in at-risk situations including family violence and homelessness; and*
- promote awareness of the Safe Beds program amongst the public and agency support services.*

4.6 Informing public policy making

Why is this a priority?

RSPCA is planning a multi-organisation Animal Welfare Symposium focussed on improving the stewardship of animals in Tasmania. The symposium will be run in 2023 as a hybrid event with both in-person and online delegate options.

It will galvanize and bring together stakeholders from a wide range of organisations with varying expertise to share their experiences and knowledge, and to learn from each other.

The symposium will showcase thought-provoking leaders from various traditional and non-traditional fields that relate to animal welfare. It will canvass a broad suite of contemporary animal welfare considerations, with presentations by international, Australian, and Tasmanian speakers.

The outcomes of the symposium will inform development of evidence-based discussion papers that can inform consensus policy making. This will position Tasmania as a thought leader in animal welfare policy.

The key objectives of the symposium include:

- Raising awareness of the ethical, economic, and social importance of animal welfare;
- Highlighting strategies employed by industry and governments to improve the welfare of animals and also their owners;
- Facilitating discussion between organisations about issues best dealt with by a multi-agency approach eg animal hoarding; and
- Developing broad-based policy approaches to animal welfare issues to inform government decision-making.

This will be a significant community-building event for anyone who works with, cares for, or advocates for animals and their human companions.

The RSPCA will be seeking partnership funding from other organisations to deliver this symposium.

What investment is needed?

The RSPCA is seeking funding of \$75,000 for the organisation and delivery of an Animal Welfare Symposium in 2023.

The funding will be used to assist the RSPCA to:

- *Organise and deliver an Animal Welfare Symposium in 2023;*
- *Prepare and publish the proceedings of the symposium; and*
- *Develop position papers on animal welfare policy issues for consideration by government based on the outcomes of the symposium.*

4.7 Strengthening our human connections

Why is this a priority?

Mahatma Ghandi understood the importance of the human animal bond. In his autobiography, he said “man’s supremacy over the lower animals meant not that the former should prey upon the latter, but that the higher should protect the lower, and that there should be mutual aid between the two.”

Recognising the ways that companion animals enrich human lives - and understanding the depth of the affection between many humans and animals - may be the key to not only better health, but to improving the welfare of society as a whole.

The tangible benefits to the physical and mental well-being of pet owners have been confirmed by scientific research. Pets provide companionship, encourage exercise, and increase social interaction.

They give pleasure, teach responsibility, they love and are loved in return. Their owners are healthier and happier than non-owners.

Australia has one of the highest rates of pet ownership in the world with over two thirds of households owning pets. Quite simply, pets are part of the Australian way of life. In fact, our pets are such positive influences on our lives that one study found that Australian ownership of cats and dogs saved approximately \$3.86 billion in health expenditure over one year.

There is clear evidence that social networks which are based on shared concern over the welfare of animals can lead to increased human-human interaction, as well as activities involving pets (eg dog-walking clubs). Walking a dog gets people out of private spaces, which can be isolating, and into public areas where interactions with neighbours and other walkers are possible.

Yet the pressures of modern day-to-day life are such that many established social networks are breaking down. This results in increased social isolation and loneliness, especially among older people and those with health or disability issues.

The RSPCA is increasingly faced with being a first responder in situations where marginalised people are reaching out for assistance and understanding through their companion animals.

This can be in a range of circumstances, including:

- People made homeless with no way of caring for their pets;
- People fleeing family violence situations with their pets;
- Hoarders where pets are the most obvious sign of increasingly serious mental health issues;
- People with mental or physical health issues who need respite care for their pets whilst they undergo treatment; and
- People taken into custody with no family network to look after their pets.

Obviously, we have extensive experience in dealing with the actual animal-related issues in these situations. However, these are often symptoms, rather than causes. Adding to the complication is the fact that these cases often involve a range of agencies that are providing some form of support services to the people involved – and where we are unfamiliar with the scope, processes, and personnel.

As a result, we are spending inordinate amounts of time navigating these networks – and we are simply not resourced to do this either effectively or efficiently.

This experience has made it increasingly clear that the development of strong and supportive networks that reach across agencies and include other first responder NGOs like the RSPCA will be a key factor in delivering improved community health outcomes.

Establishing and strengthening links and client referral pathways across service providers will enable people to better access secondary consultation, specialist advice and emergency services when needed. As well as developing the appropriate networks and communications links, there may also be a need to establish partnerships and agreements to facilitate cross-agency and NGO coordination and resource sharing arrangements.

The situation of hoarding is just one example of the need for integrated agency responses.

These situations require expertise from a range of specialist services including medical and mental health practitioners, case workers from Centrelink or the NDIS or other support agencies, the RSPCA, and potentially the police.

Working together, agency and NGO teams can in some cases identify at-risk members of the community and initiate preventative interventions.

Even if the engagement comes at a later stage, a strong working relationship between first responders and other service providers can minimise harm and stress - and hopefully deliver improved longer-term outcomes for people and their companion animals.

The RSPCA is keen to facilitate this process. However, in order to do this, we need to expand our skills base. Embedding a social worker or someone from a community service agency in our organisation on secondment would enable us to better understand and scope a sustainable program model going forward.

What investment is needed?

The RSPCA is seeking a one-year secondment of a social worker or similarly experienced person from within a community service agency environment.

The funding will be used to assist the RSPCA to:

- *Provide more informed and holistic services to those who seek our support; and*
- *Assist in developing a sustainable program model to deliver these services in the future.*



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Devonport Animal Care Centre: 108 Tarleton Road, Spreyton 7310

Latrobe Adoption & Retail Centre: 3/135 Gilbert Street, Latrobe 7307

Launceston Adoption & Retail Centre: 3/207 Invermay Road, Invermay 7248

Hobart Adoption & Retail Centre: 55-57 Albert Road, Moonah 7009

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