



# NSW Companion Animals Act 1998 Review

Submission of the  
Australian Veterinary Association Ltd

May 2025

## About the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA)

*The AVA is the peak professional body representing veterinary professionals and students across Australia. For more than 100 years we have been the united voice of the veterinary profession.*

*Veterinarians are among Australia's most trusted and respected professionals, dedicated to safeguarding animal health and welfare and supporting the communities they live in.*

*Our vision and purpose*

**Vision** *A thriving veterinary profession*

**Purpose** *Building a vibrant future for veterinary professionals.*

*At the AVA we champion the veterinary community, advance professional excellence, foster connectivity, and deliver exceptional member experiences to achieve our vision of a thriving profession.*

*Essential role of the veterinary profession*

*Veterinary services are essential to Australia's animal health, food security, and economy. They help secure Australia's animal health and livestock supply chain, protecting hundreds of thousands of jobs and easing cost of living pressures through a safe and reliable food supply.*

*Beyond agriculture, veterinarians support companion animals and their owners, strengthening the human-animal bond and promoting the associated mental and physical health benefits of pet ownership. Animals are not just a part of the Australian way of life; they are deeply embedded in it - socially, culturally, environmentally, and economically, and veterinarians are an essential part of every vibrant Australian community.*

*Veterinarians play a pivotal role in maintaining the social licence of animal industries, ensuring animal health and welfare meets community expectations. Like human healthcare and education, veterinary services provide both private benefits to individuals and critical public benefits to society, in areas like biosecurity surveillance, wildlife treatment and health and emergency animal disease management.*

*Recognised among Australia's most ethical and trusted professionals, veterinarians are highly respected and trusted members of their communities. The Governance Institute of Australia's 2023 Ethics Index ranked veterinarians among the nation's top 10 ethical occupations*



# Submission by the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA)

## NSW Companion Animals Act 1998 Review (2025)

### Introduction

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the 2025 review of the NSW Companion Animals Act 1998. The AVA is the national organisation representing veterinarians across Australia. Our members are deeply involved in companion animal care – as clinicians, educators, and advisers – and we have a strong professional interest in laws that promote responsible pet ownership, animal welfare, and community safety. We support the NSW Government’s objective of enhancing responsible pet ownership and ensuring the wellbeing of pets and safety of the community.

This submission is structured to align with the sections and questions of the NSW Government’s Discussion Paper (2025) for the Companion Animals Act review. In particular, we provide detailed input on the AVA’s key policy areas and established positions, including puppy farming, stray animal management, microchipping (electronic identification), and dangerous dogs.

In summary, the AVA strongly supports a modernised Companion Animals Act that moves beyond a narrow punitive approach and instead emphasises proactive, outcomes-focused measures to promote animal welfare and responsible ownership. Our recommendations draw on the AVA’s extensive policy research, survey data, and prior submissions to NSW inquiries, and are intended to assist the NSW Office of Local Government in developing practical, effective reforms to the Act.

### Part 1: Strategic Framework for Responsible Pet Ownership

#### 1.1 Encouraging Outcomes-Focused Legislation

The AVA supports amending the Companion Animals Act to place a greater focus on encouraging responsible pet ownership outcomes rather than relying solely on strict compliance processes. We agree with the Discussion Paper’s observation that the Act should transition from being predominantly rules-based to an approach centred on principles and positive outcomes. In practice, this means the law should not only set minimum requirements and penalties, but also actively promote education, incentives, and community programs that foster responsible ownership of companion animals.

We support the AVA member feedback that strict rules mean people often only engage with the Act when they are in trouble - for example, receiving a complaint or facing penalties. This creates a fear-driven relationship with the law, discouraging early intervention. Compliance alone is too blunt a tool. For example, clients sometimes avoid seeking veterinary advice for a barking dog for fear they’ll be



reported, leading instead to inappropriate training tools (e.g. shock collars) and worse animal welfare outcomes.

The Act should support earlier, positive engagement that promotes good outcomes such as increased desexing rates, improved socialisation, reduced wandering/straying, and fewer dog bite incidents - all of which directly contribute to community safety and animal welfare.

## **1.2 Role of Education and Awareness**

Education is one of the most powerful tools for achieving better pet owner behaviour and long-term compliance. The AVA believes the Act should explicitly recognise and facilitate public education on responsible pet ownership as a core strategy - not as a secondary measure.

This includes supporting school-based programs (such as expanding the existing NSW Responsible Pet Ownership Education Program), public awareness campaigns, and community outreach on key issues like:

- Dog bite prevention
- Animal socialisation
- Basic care and behavioural needs
- Appropriate housing and enrichment
- Lifetime costs and planning for pet ownership

Community education is also critical to reducing dog aggression. Many incidents stem from lack of owner awareness or poor management. The AVA recommends a wide suite of educational tools be used - including short online videos, multilingual resources, and access to expert-led training and behaviour advice. Existing resources like Dr Sophia Yin's dog safety posters (available via CattleDog Publishing) and community-led initiatives such as the "Muzzle Up, Pup!" Facebook group (which promotes safe, positive muzzle use) may also offer useful reference points for public education, though we note they are not AVA-endorsed programs.

We also recommend better public education around choosing appropriate dog trainers, understanding the difference between accredited behavioural vets and general practitioners, and demystifying behavioural medicine for pets. Additional links to organisations like the Positive Pet Guild of Australia may also assist owners in identifying appropriate behaviour support.

Finally, the AVA supports the creation of simple, engaging public campaigns that can shift culture - e.g. around picking up dog waste or using leads responsibly - similar to past road safety campaigns ("Speeding: No one thinks big of you" or the "Do The Right Thing").



## 1.3 Responsible Dog Ownership - Duties and Expectations

Responsible ownership should involve both clarity around expectations and mechanisms to support good behaviour.

The AVA recommends:

- Clear articulation in the Act or supporting guidelines of what responsible dog control in public looks like (e.g. on-lead requirements, effective voice control, socialisation, waste disposal).
- Incentive-based mechanisms to reward responsible behaviour (e.g. discounted registration for desexed or trained dogs, or those passing temperament assessments).
- Support for positive training methods and prohibition of aversive devices (e.g. electric or prong collars), which are shown to increase aggression and fear in dogs (see Ziv, 2017).

We note strong member feedback that enforcement in public spaces is inconsistent and unclear - which leads to conflict and discourages public use of shared spaces. The AVA supports councils being resourced to visibly enforce rules, while also providing education and low-cost support for minor breaches (e.g. free tags or collars for first-time wandering incidents, support with fencing improvements, etc.).

## 1.4 Responsible Cat Ownership and Containment

The AVA supports updating the legislative framework to ensure that cat ownership is managed as responsibly as dog ownership. We recognise the current imbalance and the confusion it creates in communities, particularly around expectations for containment and responsibility.

Key recommendations:

- Introduce provisions enabling councils to mandate cat containment through local orders or policies, including night curfews, provided that these are introduced alongside appropriate education and welfare safeguards.
- Require public education campaigns on the benefits of containment (e.g. reduced injury, disease, wildlife predation), with clear differentiation between owned, semi-owned and unowned cats.
- Promote desexing as a central tool in reducing stray cat populations, and support mandatory desexing before four months of age, with veterinary exemptions permitted.
- Ensure consistent enforcement of identification requirements for cats, matching the standards already applied to dogs.

Importantly, the AVA supports a whole-of-government approach to cat containment, including urban planning (e.g. inclusion of cat enclosures in low-income housing), and subsidised desexing and





microchipping schemes for vulnerable households. Where veterinary practices provide desexing under these schemes, they should be paid at market rates to avoid shifting costs to small businesses.

We also reiterate the AVA's position that veterinarians should not be used as enforcement touchpoints for compliance with registration or microchipping. These functions should be administered by local government through digital reminders, council interactions or other non-clinical channels.

## **1.5 Microchipping and Lifetime Identification**

Permanent identification is foundational to responsible pet ownership. The AVA strongly supports:

- Mandatory microchipping of all dogs and cats, with ownership details registered in a national (or interoperable) database.
- Clear obligations on owners to keep contact details current, with reminders integrated into existing council communications (e.g. rate notices)
- Enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance at key moments - e.g. proof of microchipping required at sale or transfer.

We particularly advocate for:

- Continued improvement and accessibility of the NSW Pet Registry.
- Harmonisation of databases nationally to ensure seamless reunification of pets across borders.
- Use of registration revenue to fund community education and support programs that facilitate compliance.

The AVA notes that enforcement alone is not enough. Councils and authorities must also help the public navigate microchip updates and support responsible acquisition - including discouraging pet purchases from sources that do not provide full traceability.

## **1.6 Additional Matters - Embedding Outcome-Based Thinking in Law**

The AVA supports incorporating a general duty of care into the Act, similar to that in animal welfare legislation, to reflect that responsible ownership is both a legal and moral obligation.

We also reiterate that:

- Laws must be designed with real-world enforcement in mind.
- The current registration and transfer system is confusing and may unintentionally discourage compliance.



- Inconsistent enforcement and fees (e.g. penalising someone who desexes and registers a stray cat they've recently adopted) create perverse incentives and undermine public trust.

A modern Act must work with, not against, the realities of pet ownership and public behaviour.

## Part 2: Compliance and Enforcement Role of Councils

### 2.1 Supporting Councils to Encourage Responsible Ownership

The AVA recognises the vital role that councils play in administering the Companion Animals Act - including pet registration, managing stray animals, enforcing regulations around dog behaviour and dangerous animals, and ensuring community safety. We strongly support additional investment and clearer guidance to help councils move from a purely compliance-driven model to one that encourages responsible pet ownership through education, community programs, and early intervention.

We support the development of a consistent, evidence-based **Model Companion Animal Management Policy** to guide local governments across NSW. This could outline best practice approaches for community engagement, stray animal management, support for desexing and rehoming, and processes for working effectively with veterinary partners and rescue groups.

We also recommend:

- Ringfencing revenue from registration and fines for use in companion animal management, education, desexing and welfare initiatives.
- A state-wide consistent policy guiding council-veterinary clinic interactions, including reimbursement frameworks for housing and treating stray animals.
- Public reporting on how councils are using their Companion Animals Fund allocations.

### 2.2 Training and Workforce Support

Council animal management officers (rangers) are often the public face of enforcement, and their actions significantly influence public trust in the system. We recommend:

- A standardised training framework for rangers - including low-stress animal handling, behaviour assessment, and public education.
- Ongoing professional development opportunities and access to expert advice (e.g. from behavioural vets or trainers).
- Accreditation or certification of training for rangers involved in behavioural assessments or seizure decisions.



These measures ensure officers are equipped to make informed, compassionate decisions and can engage constructively with the public.

## 2.3 Survey Findings and Stray Management

The AVA's 2022 survey of NSW veterinarians found that:

- 96% of veterinary clinics reported receiving stray animals.
- 81% of these clinics received no payment for this service.
- 92% reported that when payment was provided, it did not cover their actual costs.

This places undue financial and emotional strain on veterinary clinics. Many councils have no formal arrangements in place, despite relying heavily on veterinarians as first responders. We reiterate our recommendation from the AVA NSW Pre-Budget Submission that the NSW Government investigate and implement a **state-wide consistent policy** governing council-veterinary relationships for stray management, including funding and logistics.

The Companion Animals Act should explicitly recognise councils' responsibilities to liaise with approved premises (including vet clinics), accept animals within mandated timeframes, and fund care delivered under these arrangements. This will relieve pressure on the veterinary sector and improve welfare outcomes.

## 2.4 NSW Pet Registry and Interoperability

We continue to support improvements to the NSW Pet Registry, including real-time access for rangers and vets, integration with microchip scanners, and annual reminders to owners to update their details.

We also support national harmonisation of pet registration systems to ensure pets can be reunited across state borders and to simplify compliance for owners who move interstate.

## 2.5 Managing Dangerous and Restricted Dogs - An Evidence-Based Approach

The AVA supports strong laws to manage dogs that pose a risk to public safety. However, we do not support breed-specific legislation. Scientific evidence and experience show that any dog can be dangerous given the wrong circumstances, and aggression is more reliably predicted by owner behaviour, training history, and early life experiences than breed alone.

We recommend phasing out breed-specific restrictions and instead adopting a behaviour-based model. The Act should:

- Empower councils to take early, proportionate action for dogs that show signs of aggression (e.g. mandatory training, containment, or muzzling orders).
- Retain strict penalties and controls for serious or repeated attacks.





- Clarify processes for behavioural assessments, including qualifications of assessors and opportunities for appeal.
- Ensure that truly dangerous dogs can be declared and managed appropriately, with euthanasia as a last resort when public safety cannot be assured.

We recommend public education as a key tool in preventing aggression and promoting safety. This includes campaigns about:

- Choosing the right breed for a household's experience, time and lifestyle.
- The importance of early socialisation and training.
- Recognising warning signs of stress or fear in dogs.
- Seeking behavioural advice early.
- Understanding the legal responsibilities of dog owners.

We also recommend better regulation of the dog training industry - including clearer standards, public education about choosing qualified trainers, and discouragement of aversive or punishment-based methods that are linked to increased aggression.

We support the NSW Government's previous decision to remove the blanket muzzling requirement for pet greyhounds, and recommend that any future changes to the Act avoid assumptions based solely on breed.

## **2.6 Enforcement Provisions and Penalties**

The AVA supports a fair and proportionate penalty framework. While serious breaches - such as failure to control a declared dangerous dog - should attract significant penalties, the use of fines for minor or first-time issues may be counterproductive.

Many pet owners facing compliance challenges are also experiencing financial distress. For example, they may be unable to afford fencing improvements, desexing, or pet registration. In these cases, fines may exacerbate the problem or discourage people from seeking help. Instead, councils should be supported to:

- Offer compliance support for first-time breaches (e.g. provide collars, tags, or subsidised training).
- Use warnings and education as the first step in minor cases.
- Reserve fines for repeated or serious breaches.
- Explore options such as payment plans, fee waivers, or alternative penalties (e.g. attendance at responsible pet ownership sessions).



The AVA strongly opposes linking enforcement to clinical veterinary moments such as vaccinations. Using vets to enforce microchipping or registration obligations may deter some owners - particularly those on low incomes - from seeking preventive care. It may also expose veterinary staff to conflict and abuse. We recommend all enforcement remain the responsibility of local government, with education and digital reminders used to prompt compliance.

## 2.7 Other Compliance and Enforcement Matters

A key issue raised by the AVA, and echoed in the recent Inquiry into Pounds, is the inconsistent management of stray cats across NSW. Some councils decline to collect healthy stray cats, advise members of the public or vets to release unowned cats where they were found, or refuse to accept animals into council pounds. These practices are unacceptable.

We support amendments to the Act and/or clear guidance to ensure that councils:

- Accept stray animals, including cats, delivered to pounds or approved premises.
- Respond to reports of injured or unowned animals in a timely manner.
- Cooperate with veterinary practices, rescue groups and the community.
- Reimburse non-government clinics for care provided to strays where required.
- Fulfil their legal responsibilities under the Companion Animals Act.

The AVA also recommends recognition of the mental health toll that stray animal issues place on veterinarians and their teams. Being placed in ethical and emotional dilemmas around treatment and euthanasia - while absorbing costs and coping public frustration - contributes to stress and burnout.

Finally, the Act must ensure that enforcement supports rather than undermines animal welfare and veterinary wellbeing. Councils must be given the tools, funding and guidance to play their enforcement role effectively - but this must be matched by education, prevention and collaboration with animal health professionals.

## Part 3: Companion Animal Population Management and Rehoming

The AVA has long advocated for reforms to reduce the number of stray and homeless animals, ensure ethical breeding, support rehoming, and relieve pressure on under-resourced pounds and shelters. These goals are central to animal welfare and underpin a humane and effective legislative framework.



### 3.1 Reducing Stray and Homeless Cats and Dogs

The best way to reduce shelter intake is to prevent animals becoming homeless in the first place. The AVA supports a multi-pronged approach:

#### Promote and support desexing

- Early-age desexing (especially of cats before 4 months) to prevent first litters, in line with AVA's position in the Cat Population Inquiry.
- Continued use of differential registration fees to incentivise desexing.
- Targeted, subsidised desexing programs for low-income households, renters, or in high stray intake areas.
- Desexing support for semi-owned/community cats, particularly where feeding behaviour is observed.
- Ensure any veterinary clinic involvement in subsidised desexing is appropriately funded at market rates to avoid placing the burden on clinics.

Desexing can be highly effective when paired with affordability and flexibility, including exemptions for veterinary advice or approved breeders.

#### Improve public education

- Emphasise pet ownership as a long-term commitment.
- Provide clear information on common reasons for surrender (e.g. behavioural issues, housing limitations) and how to avoid them.
- Campaigns on the lifetime costs of pet ownership and the risks of abandonment.

#### Reduce abandonment and surrender

- Support housing reforms that allow pets in rentals and aged care.
- Increase pet-friendly public infrastructure (e.g. transport access, off-leash areas).
- Provide short-term crisis support for pet owners (e.g. fostering programs for people experiencing illness or domestic violence).

#### Strengthen stray animal policy

- Define responsibilities around semi-owned cats and educate the public on ownership obligations.



- Clarify that people who feed stray animals regularly are assuming care and should desex, microchip and register them.
- Formalise and support community cat programs with vet participation and funding (e.g. trap-desex-return models).

We also highlight the “Find My Owner” initiative ([www.findmyowner.com.au](http://www.findmyowner.com.au)), which enables the public to reunite found animals with owners before entering the pound system. This model shows strong early promise in reducing impoundments and should be supported by government.

All of the above measures require coordination across local government, housing, health, and animal welfare sectors.

### 3.2 Reducing Animals Entering Pounds - Upstream Solutions

One of the most effective upstream interventions is regulating breeding practices. The AVA supports many of the reforms under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment (Puppy Farming) Act 2024, and recommends close monitoring and continued improvement.

We commend the following reforms:

- Breeder Identification Number (BIN) linked to microchip data.
- Mandatory veterinary checks for breeding animals.
- Restrictions on pet shop sales (must be rehoming organisation animals).
- Enforcement of the Breeding Code of Practice by RSPCA/Police.

To strengthen these changes, the AVA recommends:

- Apply the same regulatory model to large-scale cat breeders.
- Improve public awareness about checking BINs and avoiding unverified online pet sales.
- Require microchipping before sale or transfer, and encourage prepubertal desexing of cats (before 16 weeks of age) where veterinary discretion supports it, consistent with AVA policy.

We do not support rigid mandates that override veterinary advice or limit owner choice on desexing timing. Such measures can drive clients toward low-cost, low-quality providers and damage the vet-client relationship. The Act should prioritise public education and incentivised, accessible desexing instead.



#### **Additional upstream measures:**

- **Fee reform:** Registration and reclaim fees should not discourage owners from reclaiming pets. Consider waivers or subsidies for first-time impoundments or low-income households.
- **Rental reform:** Pet-friendly housing access remains a top cause of surrender. Broader government action is essential.
- **Pet reunification efforts:** Encourage “return-to-owner” programs where rangers or rescue volunteers reunite animals before impounding.
- **Stray avoidance tech:** Invest in digital platforms (like Find My Owner) that match lost/found pets and reduce unnecessary pound admissions.

### **3.3 Increasing Rehoming of Impounded Animals**

Even with prevention, some animals will need to enter the pound system. The Act should aim to maximise positive outcomes through improved rehoming strategies and standards.

#### **Key recommendations:**

##### **Allow animals time to settle before assessment**

- Stress during intake can lead to misclassification as aggressive or unrehomable.
- Pounds should implement decompression periods before behavioural testing.
- Foster care can assist where in-shelter capacity is limited.

##### **Improve training for pound staff**

- Standard training in handling, enrichment, behaviour management, and welfare.
- Partnerships with vets and behavioural experts to inform assessment and care.

##### **Fund enrichment and rehabilitation programs**

- Daily exercise, play, and socialisation improve adoptability and reduce welfare harm.
- These should be core operations, not volunteer-dependent extras.

##### **Partner with rescue groups**

- Formal agreements to transfer unclaimed animals to rehoming groups when council resources are constrained.
- Regional shelter networks encouraged for flexibility.



### **Empower veterinary clinics to rehome strays**

- After due diligence, vet clinics should be able to legally rehome unclaimed strays directly.
- Clinics must be reimbursed by the relevant pound or council for any costs incurred (e.g. desexing, vaccination, microchipping).
- This reduces pressure on pounds and improves animal outcomes.

### **Set rehoming targets and care standards**

- Adopt a “euthanasia as last resort” principle.
- Reference the Association of Shelter Veterinarians' standards as minimum care expectations.

### **Transparency and public engagement**

- Require annual public reporting of pound outcomes (intake, reclaim, rehome, euthanasia).
- Fund adoption events, awareness days, and statewide online adoption listings (e.g. integrated with NSW Pet Registry).

### **Support post-adoption success**

- Offer vet check vouchers, behaviour advice, and support materials.
- Encourage veterinary clinics to support post-adoption care by offering free vet checks, behavioural advice, or subsidised services to adopters.

## **3.4 Other Matters and Interface with AVA Policy Scope**

The AVA supports continued consolidation of companion animal legislation, provided that it does not compromise species-specific management. NSW's unified Act is functional and allows for holistic review.

We also support alignment between the Companion Animals Act and broader reforms, including:

- The upcoming overhaul of NSW animal welfare legislation.
- Ongoing work on council capability and funding.
- Legislative harmonisation with other states where suitable.

We further recommend referencing the NSW Veterinary Workforce Shortage Inquiry, which acknowledged the financial and emotional burden on clinics delivering unfunded public good services, including stray animal management. These pressures must be recognised and addressed in the Act and associated implementation mechanisms.





Where the Discussion Paper raises matters outside AVA's direct scope (e.g. internal council administration), we have flagged them for internal review. However, issues of enforcement, identification, population management, and responsible ownership are all central to AVA policy and veterinary practice.

## Conclusion

The Australian Veterinary Association thanks the NSW Department of Planning and Environment (Office of Local Government) for the opportunity to contribute to the review of the Companion Animals Act 1998. We welcome the NSW Government's commitment to modernising the legislative framework and aligning it with contemporary community expectations, animal welfare science, and best practice enforcement models.

This submission integrates detailed input from the AVA's existing policies, survey data, and member feedback – including from frontline veterinarians – as well as insights from prior submissions to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Pounds in NSW, the Rehoming Practices Review, the Cat Population Management Inquiry, and the Veterinary Workforce Shortage Inquiry.

Our recommendations aim to:

- Strengthen responsible pet ownership through education, incentives, and a focus on positive outcomes.
- Improve enforcement outcomes by resourcing councils and providing consistent training and support.
- Establish a state-wide policy and funding mechanism for managing stray animals in partnership with veterinary clinics.
- Replace breed-specific restrictions with a behaviour- and risk-based framework.
- Expand and subsidise desexing and identification while protecting veterinary discretion and owner choice.
- Improve rehoming outcomes through decompression periods, rehabilitation programs, and rescue/veterinary partnerships.
- Recognise and address the mental health toll and financial pressure placed on veterinary professionals delivering unfunded public good services.



## Summary of Recommendations

### Promote Responsible Ownership

- a. Embed education, early intervention, and practical support as the foundation for compliance.
- b. Expand community education across all demographics, including culturally and linguistically diverse communities.
- c. Define responsible ownership clearly in legislation and supporting guidance.
- d. Destigmatise the use of behavioural medicine, muzzle use, and training support.

### Modernise Cat Management

- a. Enable councils to issue mandatory containment orders or curfews via local policy.
- b. Support public education and subsidised infrastructure (e.g. cat enclosures in public housing).
- c. Clarify responsibilities for semi-owned cats and support community cat management programs.

### Improve Identification and Traceability

- a. Maintain mandatory microchipping and registration.
- b. Move towards a harmonised or nationally linked pet registry.
- c. Promote routine data verification through accessible reminders (e.g. rates notices).
- d. Ensure compliance enforcement is not delegated to veterinarians or tied to vaccination events.

### Implement a Statewide Policy for Strays

- a. Establish formal protocols between councils and veterinary clinics.
- b. Guarantee reimbursement at market rates for veterinary care, housing, and scanning of strays.
- c. Prevent councils from refusing to accept lawfully seized or surrendered animals.
- d. Recognise the role of veterinary clinics as public-facing community responders.

### Replace Breed-Specific Legislation

- a. Move towards a risk-based management framework for dangerous dogs, focusing on individual behaviour and owner responsibility, consistent with AVA policy.
- b. Retain powers for councils to declare and manage individual dangerous dogs based on behaviour.
- c. Fund early intervention and training programs for at-risk dogs.
- d. Ensure temperament testing is done by trained professionals, with appropriate animal acclimatisation periods.

### Strengthen Council Capacity

- a. Provide consistent enforcement guidelines across LGAs.



- b. Ensure councils are resourced and trained to support companion animal responsibilities.
- c. Foster collaborative partnerships between councils, veterinarians, and rehoming organisations.

## **Reform Penalties**

- a. Implement a graduated penalty model that supports education and behaviour change.
- b. Allow higher penalties for serious or repeated breaches, particularly those compromising public or animal safety.
- c. Avoid enforcement models that disproportionately penalise disadvantaged or low-income owners.

## **Improve Pound and Rehoming Outcomes**

- a. Require decompression time before behavioural assessment.
- b. Establish minimum care, enrichment, and housing standards in line with ASV guidelines.
- c. Fund rehabilitation programs and behavioural support.
- d. Promote partnerships with rescue groups and veterinary clinics.
- e. Create statewide adoption listings and support public adoption events.
- f. Provide post-adoption veterinary and training support to increase success.

## **Regulate Breeding Effectively**

- a. Monitor and strengthen reforms under the Puppy Farming Act.
- b. Apply similar regulation to large-scale cat breeders.
- c. Require BINs to be displayed in all advertisements.
- d. Maintain flexibility on desexing timelines for dogs to protect animal health.

## **Support Upstream Prevention**

- a. Reform housing policy to support pet ownership in rentals and aged care.
- b. Provide subsidised desexing and microchipping for low-income pet owners.
- c. Recognise and support the mental health needs of veterinary teams managing strays.
- d. Promote innovative programs like “Find My Owner” that reduce impoundments.

## **Next Steps and AVA Commitment**

The AVA is committed to working with the NSW Government, local councils, animal welfare groups, and the broader community to implement and improve these reforms. We offer:

- Veterinary expertise in animal health, behaviour, and welfare.
- Data and case studies from practices across NSW.
- Support for member education on legislative changes.
- Participation in future working groups or reference panels.
- Continued engagement with our members to refine and expand AVA policy as needed.



We will also review any remaining areas of the Discussion Paper that fall outside current AVA scope and contribute to future phases of consultation. The AVA stands ready to play an active, constructive role in delivering a modern, evidence-based Companion Animals Act that supports both public safety and animal wellbeing.

## Contact

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