

The Australian Veterinary Association Limited

ABN 63 008 522 852



New South Wales Division

Unit 40/6 Herbert Street, St Leonards, NSW, 2065

Telephone: (02) 9431 5010 Facsimile: (02) 9437 9068

Email: avansw@ava.com.au Website: www.ava.com.au/nsw

Wednesday, 1 July 2015

The Hon Paul Toole MP
Minister for Local Government
Level 17, 52 Martin Place,
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Minister,

Companion animal management policy issues

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the national organisation representing veterinarians in Australia. Our 8500 members come from all fields within the veterinary profession. Clinical practitioners work with companion animals, horses, farm animals, such as cattle and sheep, and wildlife. Veterinary students are also members of the Association.

We met with your Deputy Chief of Staff, Justin Mulder on Tuesday 30 June, as we have done in the past to discuss issues of mutual concern. We look forward to continuing a close working relationship with your office for the benefit of companion animals in NSW.

The Responsible Pet Ownership Advisory Committee (formed after the Companion Animal Taskforce review) has not met since the election. The AVA is an active contributor to this group and we consider that recommencing meetings of this committee would be beneficial to you and your department. There are a number of current issues regarding companion animal management that are under review or in need of review and the input from this diverse group will lead to better policy outcomes for companion animals.

We understand the government is committed to upgrading the companion animal microchip database and that work is already underway. Veterinarians are very closely involved with the microchipping process. We have regular contact with animals and their owners and should be an asset to the register in regards to updating details of change of details and assisting owners in notifying the database when pets pass away. At this stage the AVA has not been consulted on the database review, but would be grateful for the opportunity to comment.

AVA has made a submission to the NSW Parliamentary Enquiry into Companion Animal Breeding Practices in NSW. We have attached a copy for your reference. The need for breeder registration was identified in the Taskforce review and this recommendation gained in-principle support from your government.

A universal breeder identification system linked to puppy identification will go a long way to aiding enforcement of the excellent breeder code of practice that we have under POCTA legislation in NSW. Regular inspections, based on animal welfare risk assessments performed by local councils will ensure compliance or identify problems for referral to the appropriate animal welfare regulators (RSPCA, AVL, and Police). The costs associated with this can be linked to breeder licensing.

Many of our members provide an invaluable network of practices that regularly assist local councils in reuniting lost pets with their owners. Veterinarians can become authorised persons, and their practices authorised centres enabling us direct access to the microchip database to reunite lost pets.

Unfortunately in some areas this generous pro bono service to councils is being abused and veterinarians are being used as a convenient dumping ground for lost pets by councils when they are not willing or unable to meet their obligations.

The AVA would like to work with the Office of Local Government to update the 2001 circular to councils "Companion Animals – Stray and injured animals frequently asked questions" to clarify obligations of councils. Veterinarians should also have the opportunity to gain direct access to the database without any obligation to hold uninjured stray animals.

There is currently cause for concern in regards to the management of stray, lost and abandoned kittens and cats that do not strictly fall under the legal definition of "seized". The Guidelines to Authorised Persons clearly states animals can be delivered to approved premises if seized or found by a person and where the owner cannot be identified the animal becomes the responsibility of the council. Some council pounds will only accept seized cats. This problem needs urgent attention. We have discussed this in more detail with Justin and look forward to working out a solution.

A number of local councils have very successful local Animal Advisory Committees that typically comprise councillors, rangers, local veterinarians and other members of the public. These committees are a great resource to communities and their animals. It is an excellent way for local problems to be dealt with by local solutions and the whole community benefits from councils working more closely with their veterinarians. We encourage you to develop a template model animal advisory committee framework and implement these committees in every local government area.

We look forward to continuing our work with your office on these issues.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Scarlett', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr Geoff Scarlett
President, NSW Division

Dr Steve Ferguson
Policy Council representative, NSW Division