Australian Veterinary Association
South Australia Division

Submission to the
Parliament of South Australia
Select Committee
on
Dogs and Cats as Companion Animals

2013

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Contents
Executive Summary ........................................................................................................ 3
Summary of Recommendations ..................................................................................... 4
About the AVA .................................................................................................................. 5
Background...................................................................................................................... 5
   Select Committee Terms of Reference ...................................................................... 5
Value of pets in the community ...................................................................................... 6
   Health Benefits ........................................................................................................... 6
   Economic Benefits ..................................................................................................... 6
Pet Ownership in South Australia ................................................................................... 6
Animal welfare ................................................................................................................ 7
AVA Unwanted Companion Animal Task Force .......................................................... 8
   Understand the root causes of the problem ............................................................. 8
   Education in responsible pet ownership / guardianship .......................................... 9
   Identification ............................................................................................................. 10
   Strategically target programs ................................................................................. 10
   Balance population to demand .............................................................................. 11
Breeding of companion dogs and cats .......................................................................... 11
   Registration and licensing ....................................................................................... 12
   Code of practice ....................................................................................................... 13
   Breeding stock ......................................................................................................... 13
Regulation of the source of companion dogs and cats for sale ..................................... 15
   Dogs and cats in pet shops ....................................................................................... 16
   Feasibility of a mandatory cooling off period ......................................................... 19
   Regulation of non-retail-shop trade in companion dogs and cats ............................ 19
Registration and identification ..................................................................................... 20
Desexing of companion dogs and cats ......................................................................... 21
References ..................................................................................................................... 22
Executive Summary

Companion dogs and cats play an enormous role in the wellbeing of our community. The bond that is created between humans and animals has well established benefits in relation to better human health and greater connectedness within the community.

Part of our responsibility in this partnership is to ensure that the welfare of our companion animals is maintained and enhanced. This requires us to create the circumstances for positive welfare outcomes throughout the life of the animals and to minimise the number of unwanted and uncared for animals within the community.

The Five Freedoms should be used to guide the care of all animals in human care.

This must begin at the very start of an animal’s life and carry on throughout it. Responsible pet ownership underpins much of this.

The first stages of life are crucial and will have a considerable impact on the entire life of the animal. It is important that regulation of this stage, both breeding and sale, supports the welfare of the animals involved.

To achieve this, the AVA South Australia Division recommends that all breeders of companion dogs and cats be subject to registration and licensing. Enforceable codes of practice for breeding and sale should be coupled with this.

The issue of reducing unwanted companion animals is more complicated. The AVA identified five key principles in solving the problem of unwanted companion animals:

- Understand the root causes of the problem
- Education in responsible pet ownership/guardianship
- Identification
- Strategically target programs
- Balance population demands

To understand the factors leading to unwanted companion animals it is essential that policymakers have access to good quality research. Regionally specific data will also allow effective programs to be developed to target problem areas.

Universal identification and registration of companion animals is an essential component of effective urban animal management. It provides a legal link between the animal and an owner, provides a mechanism for lifelong traceability (in the longer term assisting with valuable data) and can underpin the effectiveness of other elements of the urban animal management system (like breeder registration).

Finally, education is a powerful adjunct to most other programs. The AVA asserts that companion animal owners must accept responsibility for their companion animals, including all aspects of their welfare. Education programs need to be in place that encourages informer and responsible decisions in choosing and caring for companion animals.
Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1: that the South Australian Government support the reinstatement of pet-specific questions to the national census.

Recommendation 2: that companion dog and cat breeders be subject to registration and licensing.

Recommendation 3: that an enforceable Code of Practice for Companion Animal Breeding be established in South Australia.

Recommendation 4: that any public education campaign on choosing a pet include awareness of genetic factors.

Recommendation 5: that the Government commission research to better understand the nature of the companion animal trade.

Recommendation 6: that the Review of the South Australian Code of Practice for the Care and Management of Animals in the Pet Trade be progressed.

Recommendation 7: That a mandatory cooling off period be put in place in the sale of companion dogs and cats.

Recommendation 8: that the practice of selling companion animals at markets be prohibited, or failing this that they be subject to a Code of Practice.

Recommendation 9: that all companion dogs and cats be required to be registered and microchipped.

Recommendation 10: that breeder information be added to the microchip database records of all companion dogs and cats.
About the AVA
The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the national organisation representing veterinarians in Australia. Its 7000 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. Government veterinarians work with our animal health, public health and quarantine systems while other members work in industry for pharmaceutical and other commercial enterprises. We have members who work in research and teaching in a range of scientific disciplines. Veterinary students are also members of the Association.

Background
This submission has been prepared by the AVA South Australia Division in response to the South Australian Parliamentary Select Committee on Dogs and Cats as Companion Animals. It opens with a discussion of the value of companion animals to the community and highlights key data on companion animals in the state.

The submission then discusses animal welfare and the results of the AVA Unwanted Companion Animal Taskforce.

This all provides a background to the subsequent sections where the issues raised in the Select Committee’s Terms of Reference are dealt with in greater detail.

Select Committee Terms of Reference
On the 28 November 2012 the South Australian Parliament House of Assembly passed the following motion:

That this House establish a Select Committee to investigate and report on the legislative and regulatory management of the trade in companion dogs and cats, with the goals of the elimination of cruelty and the reduction of the numbers of unwanted animals being euthanized, and in particular consider –

- options for the regulation of welfare standards for breeding companion dogs and cats;
- the adequacy of regulation of the source of companion dogs and cats for sale;
- the feasibility of a mandatory cooling off period between registering intent to purchase a companion dog or cat and taking possession of the animal;
- the adequacy of the regulation of non-retail-shop trade in companion dogs and cats;
- how the registration, micro chipping and desexing of companion dogs and cats might address these goals; and
- any other relevant matters.

1 Parliament of South Australia Hansard – House of Assembly 28 November 2012
**Value of pets in the community**

The community as a whole benefits from the ownership of companion animals. The human–animal bond has well established benefits in relation to better human health and greater connectedness within the community. (Headley et al 2004, Wood et al 2005, Messent 1983).

The Australian Companion Animal Council, of which the AVA is a member, publication 'The Power of Pets' highlights the various ways in which pets are of substantial value to the community. The publication highlights three areas of value:

- Pets as companions
- Pets as helpers
- Pets as social enablers (ACAC 2010)

**Health Benefits**

The health benefits, both physical and mental, of pet ownership cannot be overstated. People who own pets generally have better cardiovascular health, they visit the doctor less for minor illnesses and complaints, and they are more active in later years. Owning a pet has been linked to a reduction in mental stress and pets provide a powerful buffering effect against grief. A 1995 study estimated that dogs and cats saved up to $2.227 billion in health expenditure (Headey 1999).

Pets are also a great addition to a child's life with a range of benefits that support the development of the child and additional health benefits.

**Economic Benefits**

Further to this, the pet industry is a significant contributor to the Australian economy - contributing approximately $4.74 billion in 2007. This includes the trade in companion animals as well as pet food and other associated goods and services.

Consumer expenditure on dogs and cats in South Australia was estimated to be over half a billion dollars in 2009. (ACAC 2010)

**Pet Ownership in South Australia**

With approximately 36% of households owning a dog and 23% owning a cat, Australia has one of the highest levels of pet ownership in the world (Euromonitor International, 2009).

In 2009 there were 3.41 million dogs and 2.35 million cats as pets in Australia. While pet ownership has declined marginally over recent years, the rate of ownership remains high. South Australia has a higher rate of pet ownership that the Australian average. In SA for every 100 people, 18 own a dog and 14 own a cat. This is in contrast with the national averages of 16 and 11 respectively. (ACAC 2010)

These estimates calculate the 2009 population of pet dogs in South Australia as being 327,600 and 254,800 pet cats.

Since 2009 dog numbers can be drawn from the Dog and Cat Management Board (DCMB) annual reports on numbers of registrations. These will underestimate the total dog population as not all dogs are registered, it does however give an approximate level.
Cat numbers are more difficult to estimate as there is no registration of cats in South Australia (with exception of Mitcham Council) and there is a significant homeless cat population that are not tied to any particular owner.

In the past the Australian Bureau of Statistics included basic pet details on the census, however this has not been included in recent surveys. The re-instatement of this question to the census would provide useful information in monitoring pet ownership as well as assist in national, state, and local government planning relating to companion animals. The information would be of particular value for the management of zoonoses or exotic disease emergencies.

Recommendation 1: that the South Australian Government support the reinstatement of pet-specific questions to the national census.

Animal welfare

Veterinarians by virtue of their training, skill and knowledge promote animal welfare at all levels of their activity and interactions with humans or animals.

When humans make use of animals, or alter in any way their natural environment, a level of care should be established that befits human dignity as rational and compassionate beings. Such care should be humane, which implies empathy with the animal, an avoidance of unnecessary stress, and the demonstration of compassion towards a fellow creature.

The Five Freedoms\(^2\) should be used to guide the care of all animals in human care. These are well understood and used by governments and animal welfare organisations worldwide.

- Freedom from hunger and thirst - by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.
- Freedom from pain, injury and disease - by disease prevention, rapid diagnosis and treatment.
- Freedom from discomfort - by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
- Freedom to express normal behaviour - by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal’s own kind.
- Freedom from fear and distress - by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

In Australia animal welfare is regulated through state and territory jurisdictions. In South Australia this is achieved through the *Animal Welfare Act 1985*. The Act both establishes a

\(^2\) [http://www.fawc.org.uk/freedoms.htm](http://www.fawc.org.uk/freedoms.htm)
general offence of ‘ill-treatment of an animal’ and adopts specific code of practice relating to
different circumstances.

The Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS) is aiming to establish national consistency
in regard to animal welfare codes of practice. The AVA supports this process and is actively
contributing to the AAWS sectorial working groups. However only a limited number of codes
have been developed and where there are gaps, the use of state or territory based codes is
encouraged. At this stage there are no national codes relating to companion animals.

There is a South Australian Code for the sale of animals through pet shops, however it does
not have application in other areas of the pet trade. Hence animal welfare enforcement
agencies need to rely on the general offence provisions under the Act.

AVA Unwanted Companion Animal Task Force
The AVA established an Unwanted Companion Animal Task Force to investigate the issue.
The taskforce came up with five key principles in solving the problem of unwanted
companion animals.

• Understand the root causes of the problem
• Education in responsible pet ownership/guardianship
• Identification
• Strategically target programs such as desexing
• Balance population demands

Dr Mark Lawrie presented this to the 2011 Australian Institute of Animal Management
(AIAM) conference. In his presentation Dr Lawrie emphasised that while there is a great deal
to continue to don in addressing the issue of unwanted companion animals, the community
has made considerable progress.

A marked decline can be seen in the RS PCA statistics for cat and dog intakes and
euthanasias at shelters in Australia since 2007. From the RSPCA National figures
published on the website (www.rspca.org.au) there can be seen approximate drops
of 15% in dog euthansias and 10% in cats.

Understand the root causes of the problem
To understand the factors leading to unwanted companion animals it is essential that
policymakers have access to good quality research and compile accurate meaningful
statistics that identifies where animals are coming from and why they have been surrendered
to a shelter or abandoned.

These factors will vary both within the state and across the country due to differences in
climate, location, human demographics, legislation, enforcement, education, surrender policy
of shelters, local veterinary capacity, along with other factors.

Strong consideration must be given to not just the quantity (numbers) of animals involved,
but an assessment and evaluation must be made about their suitability as a potential pet
animal through adoption program. Analysis of this “quality” measure enables a deeper
understanding of root cause.
There are multiple causes for animals being surrendered to shelters – they need to be identified for each shelter and region.

**Education in responsible pet ownership / guardianship**

Education is to be encouraged at all levels and through all channels. Education is a powerful adjunct to most other programs, the provision of which must have both short and long term objectives.

The education programs should be of high quality and be independently evaluated.

Companion animals are important in the life of Australian families and the community in general, providing companionship and health benefits, as well as working with humans. The AVA asserts that companion animal owners must accept responsibility for their companion animals, including all aspects of their welfare. They must also minimise nuisance and risks associated with the companion animal in relation to other animals and humans, including all their interactions. All veterinarians have a responsibility, together with government, breeders and other sources of animals, the animal welfare sector and the companion animal industry, to educate companion animal owners and the community about these responsibilities.

Responsible companion animal ownership means that the owner of the companion animal has responsibility toward not only the companion animal itself but also:

- other animals with which the animal interacts
- other humans in the owner’s household
- neighbours and the rest of the community.

Responsibility for the companion animal includes:

- Careful consideration of the long-term ability to care for an animal properly and to fulfil all other animal-related responsibilities (as discussed below) before acquisition of the animal. Advice should be sought from companion animal veterinarians, local government and the welfare and companion animal industry sectors.
- Selection of a companion animal suitable for the owner and the composition of the owner’s household, lifestyle and available time, space and finances.
- Provision of appropriate food, water, shelter and exercise.
- Provision of preventive health care including vaccinations, parasite control, suitable nutrition for age and life stage, and dental care.
- Provision and maintenance of an environment for the companion animal that is hygienic for the companion animal, the owner and other persons or animals.
- Identification (preferably by microchipping) to ensure identification and return of the animal if it is lost.
- Appropriate socialisation, habituation and training and the use of necessary restraint devices (e.g. collars, leads, head collars or muzzles) to optimise the likelihood of the companion animal being relaxed in a wide variety of circumstances and to reduce the risk of the companion animal being a nuisance (e.g. barking) or a danger (e.g. biting).
- Appropriate management and training to optimise the companion animal’s relationship with its owner and household and to ensure the owner has control when required.
• Provision of appropriate behavioural enrichment (sufficient interaction with humans and animals and a rich physical environment) to maintain optimum animal welfare and thereby enhance its quality of life.

Responsibility toward other animals includes minimising risks to these animals, whether part of the household or outside the household by:

• Maintaining a high standard of preventive health care for the companion animal and a hygienic environment to minimise risk of infection or infestation of other animals.
• Socialisation, training and such restraint as necessary (including fences and enclosures, collars, leads, head collars or muzzles) to prevent fighting, harassment or attack.
• Recognition of inappropriate or problem behaviour and training, management and behaviour modification to minimise it (veterinary behaviour specialists, veterinary behaviourists, animal behaviourists and trainers).

Responsibility toward other humans in the owner’s household includes:

• Socialisation, training and management as necessary to protect humans from the animal.
• Teaching humans appropriate and safe behaviours around animals, including demonstrating respect for the animal.
• Never leaving children, the frail or infirm unsupervised with animals (particularly dogs) capable of causing them harm.
• Recognition and management of behavioural problems that might prove a risk or nuisance to humans.

Responsibility toward the rest of the community includes:

• Socialisation, training, restraint and appropriate containment to prevent risk or nuisance to others.
• Recognition and management of behavioural problems.
• Assessment of suitability (age, conformation, health and temperament) of the companion animal for breeding, and appropriate care of breeding stock.
• Appropriate rearing of the offspring, including hygiene, preventive health care, early positive experiences and socialisation.
• Identification (microchipping) and registration of the animal to optimise return of the animal if lost and identification of the owner if a penalty is due.
• Compliance with relevant local legislation (e.g. registration, leash and confinement laws, cat curfews, off-leash and on-leash areas, disposing of dog faeces etc.).
• Maintenance of preventive health care and hygiene to reduce the risks of zoonotic disease.

Identification
Identification is crucial. It links animals with owners and it provides a mechanism for lifelong traceability.

Strategically target programs
Accurate data enables identification of target animal populations (e.g. semi-owned cats); target demographic segments; or target geographic area. It further enables a decision as to whether a desexing program occurs in isolation, has adjuncts such as education, or is completely replaced by another initiative.
Balance population to demand
Supply and demand mismatches are known to occur. If a demand for pets by responsible pet owners is not filled by responsible sources, then irresponsible sources will fill this gap.

Improved adoption processes can dramatically increase the adoption rate and reduce the return rate.

Breeding of companion dogs and cats
One of the impetuses for this Select Committee has been community concern over the treatment of animals in puppy farms. The RSPCA defines a puppy farm as,

...an intensive dog breeding facility that is operated under inadequate conditions that fail to meet the dogs' behavioural, social and/or physiological needs. (RSPCA 2010)

A lack of regulation of this sector means that there is, as discussed above, very little reliable and publically available data on the sources of companion animals in our community.

The RSPCA has reported that,

Puppy farms are usually difficult to locate, with operators tending to hide their activities from the general public and the authorities in isolated or remote areas. They usually do not allow prospective puppy buyers on-site and this is reflected in the way they sell their animals. (RSPCA 2010)

Hence, by the very nature of their questionable activities, they are difficult to locate and as such the size of the problem is uncertain.

With a generally stable dog population of approximately 300,000 and an average lifespan of 10 years, we can estimate that there are approximately 30,000 newly acquired dogs in South Australia every year. Given the limited number of known breeding establishments in the state, this means that there is either a reasonable number of unknown facilities or a reasonable trade in importing animals from interstate.

It is clear from the cases that do come to the community’s attention that there is a problem. The Queensland Government ‘Regulation of dog breeders – Draft RAS’ notes that,

In 2008–09, 12 large-scale puppy farms were investigated by animal welfare inspectors in Queensland and more than 750 dogs were rescued. In some cases, puppy farms were identified by accident. These puppy farms had been operating for some time without attracting attention, which suggests that there may be other puppy farms operating in Queensland undetected. Consequently, the number of puppy farms in Queensland is unknown. (Queensland Government 2012)
In recent years high profile cases have been identified across the country. In 2012 sixty dogs were seized from a property in Gippsland, including more than 20 dogs inside confined to their cages.³

In November 2012 a Perth ‘puppy farmer’ who kept dogs in airline travel crates stacked on top of one another was fined $34,000 for animal cruelty charges.⁴

Addressing this issue requires two key components:

- Clear and enforceable rules on the operation of breeding facilities.
- A mechanism by which animal welfare enforcement agencies can identify and locate the relevant facilities.

The RSPCA highlighted this as a key challenge in their ‘End Puppy Farming – The Way Forward’ paper.

The AVA believes that there should be minimum standards in place for both the breeding and sale of companion animals. Further, these activities should be registered and subject to inspection.

**Registration and licensing**

Breeding licenses should be required for breeders of purebred and crossbred dogs and cats. They should be available only after breeders attend appropriate courses. Licensing would be conditional on adequate facilities, acceptable environmental impact and regular inspections.

This approach would provide a number of important benefits. Firstly it could be linked to mandatory adherence to a code of practice that could be audited and the subject of inspection. Secondly the licensing forms the first link in the chain of traceability throughout the animals' lives.

Options for regulating breeders are currently being considered by the Queensland Government and the NSW Companion Animal Taskforce. The Queensland discussion paper considers four options:

- Retaining their existing system
- Registration of breeders with 10 or more entire bitches or 20 or more entire dogs
- Registration of breeders with 10 or more entire dogs
- Registration of persons with 10 or more dogs (Queensland Government 2012)

Relevant options in the NSW Companion Animal Taskforce discussion paper, also released in 2012, considers the broader option of licensing for breeders with or without an associated code of practice. Other options in the paper also link the registration with a strong emphasis on breeder education. (NSW Companion Animal Taskforce 2012)

The issue of the threshold for registration and how any smaller or one-off breeders are dealt with is particularly important.

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³ http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-08-10/animals-seized-in-raid-on-puppy-farm/4190342
⁴ http://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/a/-/breaking/15496196/34-000-fine-for-perth-puppy-farm/
Marsden et al (2008) argues that, as relatively few puppies are relinquished to shelters, breeding by owned dogs is not a significant contributing factor in shelter admissions and euthanasia statistics. However a removal of requirements for these genuine small breeders could create a gap through which unscrupulous person may exploit.

This could be addressed by the issuing of temporary breeder registration in such cases.

To ensure that the system works well regardless of government budgetary pressures it is important that the licensing system operates on a cost recovery basis.

**Recommendation 2: that companion dog and cat breeders be subject to registration and licensing.**

**Code of practice**

Both NSW and Tasmania have codes of practice in place for the operation of breeding facilities. While there is a need to improve these to ensure that they are enforceable, they do provide a useful starting point for the development of effective standards.

The code will need to address:

- Responsibilities of staff
- Qualifications of staff
- Quality management systems
- Housing
- Environment
- Security
- Care
- Food and water
- Cleanliness
- Transportation
- Health
- Veterinary care
- Humane destruction
- Transfer of ownership
- Breeding and rearing
- Socialisation

**Recommendation 3: that an enforceable Code of Practice for Companion Animal Breeding be established in South Australia.**

**Breeding stock**

In addition to the treatment and care of animals in breeding facilities, the choice of breeding stock can have a significant impact on the long-term health and welfare of the resulting animals.

Animals with known genetic defects that have the potential to adversely affect their welfare or that of their progeny should not be used for breeding, other than in exceptional circumstances.
A genetic defect is a heritable trait that adversely affects an animal's appearance, physiology or function.

People have been actively involved in the selection of preferred traits that enhance the functional value or the aesthetic appeal of specific animal breeds, while at the same time working to preserve and improve animal health and well-being. The ability to select for a specific genetic trait through controlled breeding has resulted in a remarkable variety of animal breeds that are both physically and functionally unique.

Artificial breeding techniques, such as embryo transfer and artificial insemination, have the potential to inadvertently accelerate the dissemination of genetic defects. Care must be taken to minimise this risk.

The development of workable government legislation is encouraged to minimise promulgation and dissemination of genetic defects in domestic animals, with the onus of responsibility being placed on the breeder or vendor of animals displaying or carrying the genetic defect.

In companion animals, where performance and production are not factors in breeding selection, many genetic defects have become prevalent. In many cases, these defects are not incompatible with survival and reproduction and, although undesirable, a few have been included in breed standards. Brachycephaly (a short or flattened face) and chondrodystrophy (dwarfism) are examples in several breeds of dogs.

The following guidelines should be observed with regard to genetic defects in domestic animals.

- Animal breed societies and controlling bodies should be encouraged to instigate, support and recommend procedures to identify affected and carrier animals. Individual owners should not be targeted; instead, breed societies should be assisted to reduce the incidence of genetic defects.
- Breeders should be encouraged to adopt strategies for minimisation of the breeding and dissemination of animals displaying or carrying genetic defects.
- Individual animals affected by a genetic defect should be desexed to ensure that they cannot breed. Some controlled breeding of affected animals under a recognised breeding program may be necessary to ensure genetic diversity in that breed.
- Potential owners of animals should be advised of the problem and information provided to purchasers prior to sale.
- Where a genetic test is available for carriers of an inherited defect, two recognised carriers should not be bred.
- Breeding animals to be imported from other countries should be certified by the breed society as free from known genetic defects before they (or their genetic material) are imported.
- Veterinarians should play an active role in identifying and monitoring genetic diseases and assisting breed societies and breeders with advice. They should also assist in the education of owners managing animals displaying inherited defects.

The AVA seeks to support this through programs like the Australian Canine Eye Scheme (ACES) and our Canine Hip and Elbow Dysplasia scheme (CHEDS).

**Recommendation 4: that any public education campaign on choosing a pet include awareness of genetic factors.**
Regulation of the source of companion dogs and cats for sale

There is limited data available on the sources of acquisition of pets in the community. Three pieces of research are highlighted here. While they each have their limitations, together they can provide some information on the source of companion animals.

A Victorian study found that 8% of cat and 11% of dogs were obtained from pet shops. A similar study that pet shops supplied 9% of cats and 14% of dogs.

This Victorian Pet Acquisition Survey results were presented to the 2005 Urban Animal Management Conference indicated that,

…the major sources for acquisition of dogs and cats vary considerably between the two species.

The most common source of dogs was through breeders (30%), while this was one of the smaller sources of cats with only 8% of cats acquired in this manner. Cats were most commonly acquired through three major sources, animal shelters, adoption of a stray cat (both 22%) or from friends (19%). Whilst in contrast only 11%, 4% and 13% respectively of dogs were acquired through these same sources.

Pet shops supplied 14% of dogs and 9% of cats to pet owners and along with newspapers (14%) and friends (13%) were the next major sources of dogs after breeders. Interestingly only a small number of cats (4%) are sourced through newspapers. (Pawsey 2005)

Data collected by the Dog and Cat Management Board in South Australia at the 2012 Royal Show loosely mirror the results of the Victorian survey. The DCMB survey was not a randomly sample, rather it was a self-selecting sample collected at the Royal Show. The report on this data acknowledges this and notes that the participants are more likely to be interested in and knowledgeable about companion animal ownership than the general population. (Hartnett and Page 2012)

**DCMB 2012 Royal Show Survey – How dogs and cats were acquired**

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(Hartnett and Page 2012)
A recent paper by Mornement, Coleman, Toukhsati and Bennett (2012) sheds some additional light on intentions of potential pet owners in regard to sourcing dogs. This study also used a self-selecting sample and had a high percentage (33.3%) of respondents that had worked or volunteered for a shelter, pound or rescue organisation. Nonetheless, the results are of interest.

What this does suggest is that the acquisition of pets through pet shops accounts for a small portion of the overall market. It should be noted that this does not suggest that the supply of companion animals from puppy farms is necessarily limited. It is possible that puppies acquired through other breeders, newspapers and pet shops could all be from puppy farms or similar, and this in total is almost 50% of the puppies acquired in the DCMB surveys. If this survey is skewed in favour of people that are more likely to care for their dogs as they responded to a survey at the show, there may be a lot of puppies purchased from these other sources in the general population. (Mornement et al 2012)

Dogs are likely to be acquired through breeders, shelters, or family and friends. Cats are likely to be acquired through shelters and friends, or found as strays.

**Recommendation 5: that the Government commission research to better understand the nature of the companion animal trade.**

**Dogs and cats in pet shops**

While pet shops cater to a small percentage of the companion animal market, they do play an important role in companion animal supply.

The welfare of pets in pet shops and their long-term health can be compromised if health, desexing and vaccination are not handled correctly.

In South Australia there is a Code of Practice for the Care and Management of Animals in the Pet Trade. In 2009 the then-Minister established a working group to review of this Code. The review identified a number of areas in which improvement of the Code was warranted. These included:

- The expansion of the Code to include the trade of animals in public places and shelters.
- That cages be sized in such a way as to allow animals to have room to exhibit natural behaviours such as play.
• Improvements to restrictions around the sale of animals in extreme heat or cold
• Prohibition of the sale of animals showing clinical signs of ill-health
• Require the vendor to provide advice on standard disease prevention techniques; and
• provide that no dog or cat may be sold unless accompanied by a vaccination veterinary certificate.
• That the minimum age of sale for dogs and cats be increased to 8 weeks.
• That the information to be provided by vendors to clients should be expanded.

The AVA was represented on the working group and strongly supports guidelines for housing and supply of pets by pet shops that will ensure optimal care and welfare of pets.

In the AVA submission to the Review, while supporting the recommendations of the working group, the organisation highlighted a number of additional issues:

• Sale of animals in high temperatures
• Feeding procedures
• Defining terms
• Sale of animals to minors

Sale of animals in high temperatures.
The recommendation made by the working group was that the sale of animals at outdoor venues such as markets if the temperature exceeds 35 degrees Celsius should be prohibited.

The AVA recommends that this temperature be set at 30 degrees Celsius.

The rationale for the lowering of a cut-off temperature is to ensure that the temperature is low enough to limit the heat stress on all species under varying circumstances. Above 30 degrees in some instances could endanger the health and wellbeing of an animal if there is an additional radiant heat load or high humidity. Colour and the type of animal will also lead to some animals suffering a greater degree of heat stress at a particular temperature.

Feeding procedures
All animals must be provided with freshly prepared food in sufficient quantity and frequency to ensure optimal health and growth of the individual. Puppies and kittens must be provided with fresh food at least three times daily.

Defining the terms puppy and kitten
The AVA recommends that the term puppy and kitten also be defined by the age six months.

Sale of animals to minors
The AVA recommend that code contains provisions that dogs and cats must not be sold to people less than 18 years of age or that animals may be sold only to people aged less than 18 years with the written consent or in the physical presence of their parent or guardian.

Other guidelines
The AVA developed the following guidelines for dogs and cats in pet shops:
- Every pet shop proprietor should have a formal agreement with veterinarians to be on call for the treatment of animals and for general advice.
- Puppies and dogs should not be sold unless vaccinated against canine distemper, infectious canine hepatitis and canine parvovirus and accompanied by a current vaccination certificate. Under current best practice, initial vaccination of puppies must be given at least 2 weeks before they arrive at the pet shop (puppies should normally receive their first vaccination between 6 and 8 weeks of age). The puppy should also be vaccinated against parvovirus on arrival and every 2 weeks for as long as the pup is in the pet shop. A second vaccination against at least distemper and hepatitis, and a further vaccination against parvovirus, should be given at about 12 weeks of age if the pup is still in the pet shop. The client should be advised that these vaccinations may be only part of the puppy’s initial vaccination program and that they should seek veterinary advice on completion of the vaccination program.
- Cats and kittens should not be sold unless vaccinated against feline enteritis and the feline respiratory diseases and accompanied by a current vaccination certificate. Under current best practice, initial vaccination of cats should be given at least 2 weeks before they arrive at the pet shop (kittens should normally receive their first vaccination between 6 and 8 weeks of age). The kitten should also be vaccinated on arrival and every 2 weeks for as long as the kitten is in the pet shop. The client should be advised that these vaccinations may be only part of the kitten’s initial vaccination program and that they should seek veterinary advice on completion of the vaccination program.
- All animals should be free of external parasites and treated for internal worms.
- All animals offered for sale must be weaned and fully self-sufficient. The minimum age for sale must be 8 weeks.
- While puppies are in the pet shop, particular attention must be paid to appropriate socialisation and training during the socialisation period of 6 to 16 weeks.
- No animal suspected of being sick, injured or diseased may be sold. Any sick animal should be isolated in an area away from public contact and quarantined from other animals until fully recovered. Treatment, including veterinary treatment, should be rendered where necessary.
- Dogs and cats should have suitable housing in the pet shop. Housing should be in accordance with state codes of practice, where applicable. Pet shops must be kept clean and hygienic at all times. All cages and pens holding animals must be cleaned out at least daily. Cats must be provided with clean litter trays every day.
- Adequate environmental conditions (temperature and ventilation) must be provided. Fresh, cool water should be available to animals at all times. All adult animals must be fed at least once per day. Puppies and kittens less than 4 months of age must be fed a minimum of 3 times daily, and those between 4 and 6 months must be fed twice daily. All diets must be nutritionally balanced and palatable.
- New owners should be advised to visit their veterinarian for advice concerning pet health, subsequent vaccinations and worming, and nutrition.
- Vaccination does not always provide protection from infection or clinical signs of disease. While vaccines are generally recognised as controlling disease, they do not always confer immunity.

Coupled with improved regulation, the pet shop industry should be encouraged in moves to improve practices. The PIAA Dogs Lifetime Guarantee Policy on Dog Traceability & Re-Homing guarantees that:

- **Dogs purchased from PIAA member retail stores are sourced from responsible breeders whose operations are subject to independent audit each year.**
- **Any dog purchased from a PIAA member that becomes unwanted or abandoned at any age is re-homed.** (PIAA 2012)
These efforts should be encouraged to extend this across the country, as should the actions of individual stores to stop selling puppies in the lead-up to Christmas⁵.

**Recommendation 6: that the Review of the South Australian Code of Practice for the Care and Management of Animals in the Pet Trade be progressed.**

**Feasibility of a mandatory cooling off period**
Some jurisdictions in the USA have what are called lemon law for dogs that allows them to be returned if they get sick or have a congenital disease. Similar approaches in South Australia would give consumers greater power and encourage pet retailers to set a higher standard in customer service.

**Recommendation 7: That a mandatory cooling off period be put in place in the sale of companion dogs and cats.**

**Regulation of non-retail-shop trade in companion dogs and cats**

**Sale of companion animals at markets**
The sale of companion animals in markets encourages impulse buying and a ‘disposable pet’ mentality. The transient nature of some markets and vendors inhibits the trace back of disease outbreaks and relevant history of the animals sold.

The AVA opposes the sale of companion animals at markets, but recognises that such sale occurs. The AVA recommends that markets selling pets be registered for sale of animals and operate according to mandated codes of practice or guidelines. The guidelines below are the minimum requirements.

**Guidelines**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Requirements</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Welfare</strong></td>
<td>All animals offered for sale must be weaned and self-sufficient. Adequate food, water and shelter must be provided at the point of sale. Dogs and cats should be microchipped and desexed before sale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Health</strong></td>
<td>Animals should be vaccinated as applicable to the species and treated for internal and external parasites before sale. Documentation on vaccination and health records must be provided to the purchaser.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Veterinary care</strong></td>
<td>Every market organiser should have a formal agreement with veterinarians to be on call for the treatment of animals and general advice. No animal suspected of being sick, injured or diseased may be sold.</td>
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**Recommendation 8: that the practice of selling companion animals at markets be prohibited, or failing this that they be subject to a Code of Practice.**

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Registration and identification

Universal identification and registration of companion animals is an essential component of effective urban animal management.

Identification provides a legal link between the animal and an owner, and provides a mechanism for lifelong traceability. This allows for the reuniting of lost animals with owners and forces individuals to take responsibility for animals. It also gives animal management and animal welfare officers an effective method for determining whether an animal is unowned and identifies a responsible person where the animal is owned. (Marston et al 2008)

Control measures should be funded by realistic registration fees, with no exemptions, thus ensuring that the user pays for the program. Registration provides animal management authorities with an income stream and mechanism with which incentives schemes can be put in place.

In South Australia there is currently compulsory registration for dogs. This provides funds to councils for and to the Dog and Cat Management Board (DCMB) for animal management. It is also used to provide incentives for microchipping and desexing of dog.

At this stage only Mitcham Council has a cat registration scheme in place. While the Mitcham Council registration has only been in place a short time, so drawing conclusions from it is difficult, the registration and microchipping of cats would arguably be a very positive move.

There should be state-wide prescribed fees, with discounts for genuinely needy people and working dogs. Reduced fees should also apply to desexed animals, to encourage desexing. Other reasons for reducing fees may include successful obedience training and permanent identification.

Compulsory registration at the point of sale of animals is suggested. The new owner would pay a nominal amount which would be sent with details to a central databank and then duplicated to the relevant municipal authority.

Microchipping is the most effective method of permanent identification and should be mandatory for all dogs and cats. The information in the microchip databases should be available to pounds and shelters, veterinarians and welfare societies.

**Recommendation 9:** that all companion dogs and cats be required to be registered and microchipped.

**Recommendation 10:** that breeder information be added to the microchip database records of all companion dogs and cats.
Desexing of companion dogs and cats

Desexing is important in control of animal populations and has other behavioural and health benefits. It is currently the only widely available, effective and permanent method of preventing breeding.

As well as stopping unwanted breeding, desexing can reduce behavioural problems such as free-ranging oestrous females and fighting males, which can cause public nuisance. In cats, desexing stops calling behaviour in queens and reduces spraying behaviour in toms. Desexed females have a greatly reduced incidence of neoplasia and other diseases of the mammary glands and do not suffer from diseases of the ovaries and uterus, although some bitches may have an increased incidence of urinary incontinence. Desexed males cannot develop testicular tumours and have a reduced incidence of prostate disease, perianal tumours and perineal hernias.

Desexed cats are less likely to fight and to suffer from abscesses and infectious diseases.

Although pets benefit from being desexed, and initiatives to increase the numbers desexed should be encouraged, there are inherent deficiencies in the concept of compulsory desexing.

The success of sterilisation as a population control technique depends on the percentage of animals desexed and the freedom of those remaining intact. It is unlikely to succeed as a single measure.

In regard to dogs, there is insufficient evidence pointing to overpopulation.

In regard to cats, because of the homeless cat population, it is unlikely that the target needed to control population growth would be achieved by compulsory desexing. Up to 90% of breeding animals must be desexed to halt population increases (Nassar and Mosier 1908, 1984)
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