RSPCA (Vic) animal handling facilities

Peter Brown

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Vic) has, for 124 years, been responding to the full range of animal welfare problems. One of the Society's main aims is to continue the development of its state wide shelter system providing comprehensive care for all animals and the placement of suitable animals with responsible owners. Other objectives include enforcing existing laws and co-operating with relevant bodies, advocating improved legislation and community education.

DOMESTIC (FERAL & NUISANCE) ANIMALS ACT

The long awaited Domestic (Feral & Nuisance) Animals Act 1994 is welcome particularly for the recognition of responsibilities regarding cats, keeping and selling of pet animals and dangerous dogs. We anticipate its proclamation on April 9 in 1996.

COMPULSORY COMPETITIVE TENDERING

Following the recent amalgamation of municipalities from 210 to 78, the introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering means that any person or group may tender for segments of their animal control business. The RSPCA sees that it has an obligation to compete for tenders and to continue to develop its existing metropolitan and regional animal shelter system. The Society intends to consider tendering for all municipal stray animal contracts, although emphasis is on shelter services. Ranger duties may, reluctantly, be considered, however, there is no intention to have the laws changed to confer 'proper officer' enforcement responsibilities under the Domestic Animals Act to persons other than employees of councils.

The Society realises that because of the likely diversity of tenders and successful tenderers, it may be necessary for the RSPCA to co-operate with organisations previously thought to be unlikely participants. Providing those parties can work within Society guidelines, they may be appropriate and acceptable business partners.

RSPCA REGIONAL SHELTER SYSTEM

The RSPCA provides a developing state wide service for unwanted animals in metropolitan Melbourne and eight regions around Victoria. This system will be further developed using satellite (2-3 day) holding shelters in rural towns feeding into about thirty regional shelters. Responsible ratepayers and animal owners should not be forced to subsidise an abundance of large regional animal shelters for the convenience of the errant minority. Most Society shelters have existing contracts with local government.

SHELTER OPERATION

Every animal received at a shelter is allocated a case number. Full details of origin, description and fate are recorded on computer. Without exception, animals receive ongoing veterinary treatment. Receivals number in the tens of thousands annually. Shelters are open daily for extended periods.

Dogs and cats are held the prescribed time but, if unclaimed, are assessed for sale. All are vaccinated, desexed and de-wormed and in the vast majority of cases are identified through the Tailwagger Club ID tags. Registration will be undertaken on behalf of councils if desired. Native animals and birds are, as far as possible, delivered into the care of Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Shelter Permit holders for rehabilitation and release. The few farm animals from metropolitan areas are fostered by suitable property owners.

No animals or animal parts are provided for experimental use. Animals unable to be rehoused are humanely euthanased, then buried or cremated.

Municipalities are regularly advised of details of clients reclaiming stray animals or purchasing them. The computerised lost and found register has proven very successful in re-uniting owners and animals.

TWENTY FOUR HOUR EMERGENCY SERVICE

The Society provides an around the clock service for emergencies. Inspectors are available for all urgent animal welfare cases across the state. The East Burwood Rescue Centre services are available to the eastern and southern suburbs for sick or injured stray animals. It is hoped this will be developed to include council requirements for urgent and non-urgent cases. From November 1, 1995, the Society reintroduced its 24 hour emergency ambulance service.

Plans to expand the existing 24 hour telephone service, include road signs across the state, and advertising one '13' or '1800' number to call for all animal welfare problems. Response will be arranged through the nearest available qualified person.

SERVICE SUBSIDIES

Economical rates for desexing of immature animals are available from clinics at East Burwood and Peninsula Animal Aid, Pearcedale. Other shelters assist with the issue of Australian Veterinary Association vouchers. Other subsidised desexing can be supplied for those in necessitous circumstances via council and AVA systems.

ANIMAL HANDLING - TRAPPING

Ambulances are available for transport of sick or injured animals to shelters or veterinary clinics for treatment. Regular patrols of all roads and other public areas for stray animals can be arranged. Programmed trapping or catching of animals, particularly cats, can be organised, generally with citizen's assistance. We have found that the vast majority of callers are happy to bring stray animals to the shelter saving significant vehicle and staff costs.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Community education is seen as of pre-eminent importance. The Society's strategic use of the media and other publications is very effective and can be used for the benefit of the local community or distributed across the state and nationally. Your organisations can take advantage of this service.

IDENTIFICATION

Perhaps the current most important pet animal issue is a foolproof identification system, which, to be successful, must be sanctioned by legislation.

A microchip implant for all dogs and cats seems to be the best long term option so long as it is accompanied by a compatible scanning system and by a collar and tag . It is incumbent upon everyone interested in the welfare of pet animals to support this goal. Hopefully, we are now progressing quickly down this path. Such a system must, however, be used by all councils and supported by a central registry for it to provide the service so urgently needed by the community and so necessary for efficient pet animal management.

COMMUNITY TRUST

According to recent surveys, the community believes that the RSPCA does a 'good job' on its behalf and should readily accept a union of their council pet animal management and the Society as being reliable, efficient and a good thing for the region and the welfare of the animals.

ALL CREATURES GREAT AND SMALL

The RSPCA clearly has the capacity to care for animals in shelters in Victoria. The opportunity now presenting itself for council and RSPCA partnership is exciting and offers the community a better, well organised and efficient system of dog and cat management in which they may have confidence. It also removes the vexed issue of duplication of services. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals is a non government, independent, community based charity working for *All Creatures Great and Small.*

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