

## Working with councils to reduce the number of dogs euthanased in pounds

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### Executive Summary

Council pounds are constantly under pressure to house dogs impounded for one reason or another and pressure is put on staff and management to reduce the number of dogs euthanased. Whilst trying to accommodate vast numbers of animals and in many cases finding that some are unidentifiable or owners cannot be traced, the Re-homing Program ensures that all puppies/dogs sold by one of its member retail stores can be tracked from breeder to pet store to owner by a link to the animal's microchip. The Program will assist Councils in recognising these animals quickly and if no owner is found, the Pet Industry Association will arrange for the animal to be collected, vet checked and if deemed suitable to re-home, the Association will guarantee that the animal will not be euthanased.

The Program has been designed to track dogs sold from Pet Industry Association member stores at the point of sale to a new owner. Members will enter a member number into a nominated location on the microchip register 'Change of Details' form which will be permanently attached to the dog through its microchip number. This will allow the dog to be tracked back to the retail store and the Association, should it for some reason be impounded or surrendered. Verification will be completed by Council contacting the Pet Industry Association who will verify the dog has come from one of its members. The Association will arrange and pay for the RSPCA or Animal Welfare League to collect the dog.

The Pet Industry Association is progressively working with Councils across Australia to activate the Program. The Program will give credibility to Councils showing them to be responsible managers and working actively towards reducing euthanasia in their pounds. By undertaking the Program, Councils will have the ability to move these dogs through their facilities quickly and efficiently reducing the time a dog is held, relieving space limitations and stress both the animal and the Council staff.

Council pounds are filled with animals daily adding to the ongoing problem of space and even more so the issues surrounding the identification of these animals, their welfare and return to their owners.

### Microchipping

Microchipping is the key for this Program to work however this in itself leads to the problem of

legislation being inconsistent across Australia. The table below gives details of the different legislation for tracing companion animals in Australia.

#### Relevant state and territory legislation with respect to traceability of companion animals (as at January 2012)

Legislation	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA
Registered Breeders	Yes – Cats over 3mths not de-sexed must have a permit	No	No	Not currently Pilot study Gold Coast City Council	No	No	Yes Breeder Registration	WA Cats only
Compulsory Microchipping	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes Only dogs	Yes	Yes Cats only
Disclosure of breeder ID or microchip nos	No	No	No	Not currently	No	No	Yes Microchip no to be displayed in any ad for the animal but not at the point of sale	
Compulsory Registration	Only for dogs	Yes	No	Yes	Only for dogs	Only for dogs	Yes	Yes

This shows the difficulty in tracing companion animals due to the variance in legislation, in many cases there is nothing to ensure that animals can be identified.

Microchipping is the key to identifying companion animals no matter which state the animal lives in. All Pet Industry Association member stores who sell puppies and dogs MUST sell their animals microchipped. Details of change of ownership from retail store to new owner are entered onto an animal register. There are 6 registered microchip agencies in Australia:

- The Companion Animal Register, NSW Department of Local Government
- HomesafeID
- Central Animal Records
- Australasian Animal Register
- PetSafe
- National Pet Register

The Pet Industry Association has formed a Microchip Registries Group which includes all of the above agencies and the Gold Coast City Council. Each registry has agreed to include a Pet Industry Association member identification area on their data base which will allow tracking of the animal for its

lifetime. In forming this working group the Pet Industry Association aims to develop a more collaborative and easily accessible system of communication for tracking companion animals throughout Australia and between States ensuring they are returned to their owners quickly with the least amount of stress caused to the animal, to the owner and to council staff.

### **Research and Statistics Used to Develop the Re-homing Program**

To respond to the claims of animal activists about the number of dogs from puppy farms sold through pet shops and later abandoned, the Pet Industry Association funded research in early 2012 to address the issues associated with puppy farms. Research showed that -

Almost 450,000 dogs are sold in Australia each year, with pet retail stores the channel for less than one fifth of sales in total. (Australian Companion Animal Council 2010)

Of these 450,000 dogs sold in Australia each year:

- Pet stores account for less than 15% of total dog sales - about 67,000 dogs (Australian Veterinary Association 2007)
- Breeders, through newspaper, internet and word of mouth sales are responsible for the remaining 85% of sales – about 382,500 dogs

The Pet Industry Association analysed available information and by applying a series of assumptions to known data, developed a statistical overview of the scale of the problem.

The research concluded that the proportion of animals euthanased is much less than the figures claimed by some activists. The Pet Industry Association raised serious questions about the validity of figures claimed by some activists. Dogs Across Australia claim 200,000 dogs are euthanased in Australia each year and Death Row Pets claim 250,000 dogs and cats are euthanased each year. The Association's research showed a best estimate of 45,000 dogs euthanased because of no room for adoption (Australian Companion Animal Council 2010) but noted that this figure was too high and needed to be addressed.

Furthermore the research showed that in terms of animal supply, those purchased in pet stores are less likely to be lost or abandoned, further eroding the claims of activists that pet retailers contribute to the problem of unwanted pets and euthanasia of pets in pounds and shelters.

The key outcomes of the research and modelling were:

- The true numbers of dogs euthanased in Australia each year is a fraction (16%) of that estimated by activists.

- As a sales channel, pet retail stores account for only 15% of animal sales each year
- Animals that are purchased (and microchipped) from pet retail stores are 50% less likely to be lost or abandoned as pets microchipped at welfare centres and other centres.

The Pet Industry Association believes that while pet stores are a minor part of the cause, they are a major potential player in the solution.

### **The Re-homing Program:**

#### ***The PIAA Dogs Lifetime Guarantee on Traceability & Re-homing***

As the peak body for the pet industry in Australia, the Pet Industry Association believes that the welfare of animals is paramount. The Association supports responsible breeders who provide high standards of care and prioritise animal health and welfare.

The Pet Industry Association does not condone puppy farms, and supports the RSPCA's definition: a puppy farm is "an intensive dog breeding facility that is operated under inadequate conditions that fail to meet the dogs' behavioural, social and/or physiological needs." (RSPCA End Puppy Farming – The Way Forward 2010)

The Association demands exacting standards from members in the care, management and trade in companion animals. All members must comply with the Pet Industry Association's National Code of Practice that defines quality standards for the operation of businesses beyond current regulatory requirements.

As a sales channel, pet retail stores account for only 15% of animal sales each year. However, the Association believes the pet retail industry can be an agent for positive change.

The Dogs Lifetime Guarantee Policy on Dog Traceability & Re Homing guarantees that:

- Dogs purchased from Pet Industry Association member retail stores are sourced from responsible breeders whose operations are subject to an independent veterinary report each year.
- Any dog purchased from an Association member that becomes unwanted or abandoned at any age is re-homed.

The Dogs Lifetime Guarantee Policy on Dog Traceability & Re Homing means consumers can purchase with confidence from an Association member retail store, knowing that their dog is not the product of a puppy farm and that should the dog become unwanted at any point in its lifetime, the Association will ensure the dog is re-homed.

### **The Issue**

Councils are under constant pressure from activists and the community for euthanasing too many animals in their pounds each year.

Pet retailers are under pressure from campaigns to ban the sale of dogs from pet stores and argue that pet stores:

- Profit from the impulse purchase of pets;
- Are outlets for puppy farms and;
- Contribute to the problem of unwanted pets and euthanasia of pets in pounds and shelters.

The policy environment is muddled by different activist groups and political figures arguing for different outcomes.

The RSPCA Australia continues to run a strong campaign against puppy farms (also known as puppy mills and puppy factories). More radical groups believe pet stores directly provide an avenue for puppy farms to sell pets and are arguing for retail bans.

The Australian Veterinary Association supports regulation for pet stores but does not wish to ban pet sales in retail stores.

Pet Industry Association supports responsible breeders who provide high standards of care and prioritise animal health and welfare.

## **The Pet Industry Association's Policy Response:**

### ***The Dogs Lifetime Guarantee***

The Association has developed this policy response to address community concerns about unwanted pets and puppy farms and to re-establish the legitimacy of pet retail stores as a vital link in responsible pet ownership.

The Dogs Lifetime Guarantee has three components:

1. The Approved Dog Breeders Scheme – All breeders supplying puppies to Association retail stores must have an annual veterinary report undertaken of their premises.
2. The Dog Traceability System from breeder to pet shop to owner, enabling trace-back for any dogs that end up in an animal shelter, pound, veterinary clinic or other rescue group.
3. The Re-Homing Strategy that ensures any dog purchased from an Association member that is subsequently unwanted, is re-homed. This policy will be for the dog's lifetime and will ensure it is not euthanased unless in the opinion of a veterinarian the dog suffers from health and behavioural problems that cannot be otherwise managed and the veterinarian deems euthanasia necessary and in the best interests of the dog.

### ***Approved Dog Breeders Scheme***

The bulk of dogs sold in pet retail stores are non-pedigree and come from commercial breeders.

To create a clear distinction between a puppy farm and a responsible breeder who provides high

standards of care and prioritises animal health and welfare, the Association has created a Pet Industry Association Approved Breeders Scheme.

This scheme applies to breeders who wish to supply dogs to Association member pet retail stores, and operates in conjunction with the Association's National Code of Practice for the Sale of Animals, including Animals in Pet Shops 2010.

The Pet Industry Association Approved Dog Breeders Scheme allows the Association to discriminate between what is a responsible breeder compared to a puppy farm and other irresponsible breeders.

Under the Pet Industry Association Approved Dog Breeders Scheme:

- It is a requirement that the Breeder/Owner complies with all relevant State Legislation and Codes of Practice in their State/Territory for the breeding of dogs. In the absence of legislation or a Code of Practice it is a requirement that the Breeder/Owner complies with the NSW Code of Practice for Breeding Dogs & Cats. This Code can be found on the NSW Government website at: [www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/livestock/animal-welfare/general#codes-of-practice](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/livestock/animal-welfare/general#codes-of-practice)
- Only breeders whose operations are subject to an annual veterinarian report and comply with the above regulations are eligible to supply Association retail stores. Administered by the Association, the annual reports are to be conducted by a registered veterinarian.
- Approved breeders will also include members of associations that are recognised by the Pet Industry Association as having a code of conduct for ethical operation, as well as independently audited inspection regimes as an annual condition of membership. The Australian Association of Pet Dog Breeders (AAPDB) is an Association recognised organisation.
- Association retail members can only purchase stock from breeders meeting the above conditions.
- A feedback loop will enable breeders to receive information about any health or behavioural problems seen in the dogs. This enables the breeder to remain informed and continually improve their breeding practices.

The scheme provides for a 'short term' registration for a "one-off" litter of puppies, allowing an Association member retail store to sell the progeny of an accidental mating once in the life of a bitch. This ensures the integrity of the system and of the supply of stock to Association member retail stores.

Association members will be given appropriate signage for their store to identify their participation in the scheme providing high standards of care and prioritising animal health and welfare.

### ***Dog Traceability System***

The Pet Industry Association's Dog Traceability System will enable 'identity preservation' for a dog: from breeder, to pet shop, to owner, and ensure if the animal is abandoned or sent to a shelter, pound, veterinary clinic or other rescue group, it can be traced back to the breeder as the original source of the animal.

To achieve this, the Association believes that breeders supplying Association member retail stores should microchip dogs before sale or transfer to an Association member retailer. While this is currently legislated in several states, actual practice varies.

Ensuring dogs are microchipped before they reach a pet retail store will assist the integrity of pet traceability and in tracking the supply of pets into retail stores. It will ensure that the breeder's details are permanently attached to each individual dog.

While the system is designed to assist local governments, veterinarians and pet shelters trace the origins and/or owners of a pet, industry commentary is that in practice not all animals are microchipped before leaving the breeder, and in some cases the breeder microchips the dog but does not register their details, impacting on traceability. The system also generally relies upon the owner of the dog to register the animal's paperwork after purchase.

Under the Pet Industry Association's Dog Traceability System, Association member pet retail stores nationally will:

- Accept only dogs from breeders registered under the Pet Industry Association Approved Dog Breeders Scheme.
- Accept only dogs where the breeder has supplied the pet store with appropriate paperwork identifying them as the original owner.
- Ensure store details are added to the dog's microchip.
- Provide consumers with a change of ownership form, transferring ownership from the store to the consumer.
- Request that the new owners register paperwork when they purchase a dog.

### ***Dog Re-Homing Strategy***

The Pet Industry Association Dog Re-Homing Strategy will ensure that any dog purchased from an Association member that becomes unwanted or abandoned at any age is re-homed.

No dog will be euthanased unless in the opinion of a veterinarian the animal suffers from health and/or behavioural problems that cannot be otherwise managed and the veterinarian deems euthanasia necessary and in the best interests of the dog.

The Association will either house the dog in a care facility or fund its care in an affiliated facility until it is re-homed.

The Dog Re-Homing Strategy will ensure the continued welfare of all dogs purchased from an Association member retail store.

The Dog Re-Homing Strategy will be written into the PIAA National Code of Practice 2008

### **Conclusion**

The Re-homing Program will assist councils in reducing the number of dogs held in pounds each year:

- All dogs sold from Pet Industry Association retail members will be microchipped regardless of the state of origin
- Statistics achieved through the development of an Association national data base will give meaningful numbers of dogs being surrendered and abandoned to pounds and shelters emanating from member retail stores
- By removing these dogs to an RSPCA or AWL Shelter the number of dogs held by council pounds will be reduced
- Working collaboratively together the Pet Industry Association and Councils throughout the country will take an active part in working towards a solution for reducing the number of animals euthanased each year.

### **The Good News**

Recently two dog's purchased from Association members in NSW and Queensland have been included in the Re-homing Program and in each case the dog has been rehomed successfully.

### **References**

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### **About the author**

Maryann Dalton is currently working for the Pet Industry Association of Australia. She has extensive business experience in the Pet Industry, having worked as CEO for the Animal Welfare League NSW for over 8 years. She has represented AWL on NSW AWAC, been Vice President of AWL Australia, a member of CAWG on AAWS, ethics committees and is currently a member of the AVA.

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