



Mandatory reporting of animal fate data by shelters and pounds

Animal Liberation submission



We acknowledge the
Traditional Owners of
country throughout
Australia and recognise
their continuing
connection to land, waters
and culture.

We acknowledge that this
document was written on
land stolen from and
never ceded by the
Gadigal People.

We pay our respects to
their Elders past, present
and emerging.





We don't have a duty to **speak** for the animals;
we have an obligation to be **heard** for the animals.

Matt Ball (2006)

DOCUMENT DETAILS

Animal Liberation. 2021. A submission by Animal Liberation in response to the Victorian Government's review of Mandatory reporting of animal fate data by shelters and pounds. Sydney: Animal Liberation.

ABOUT ANIMAL LIBERATION

Animal Liberation has worked to permanently improve the lives of all animals for over four decades. We are proud to be Australia's longest serving animal rights organisation. During this time, we have accumulated considerable experience and knowledge relating to issues of animal welfare and animal protection in this country. We have witnessed the growing popular sentiment towards the welfare of animals, combined with a diminishing level of public confidence in current attempts, legislative or otherwise, to protect animals from egregious, undue, or unnecessary harm. Our mission is to permanently improve the lives of all animals through education, action, and outreach.

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WHAT HAPPENS TO THEM MATTERS TO THEM

REGAN 1983



ATT:
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3 September 2021

Animal Liberation is pleased to lodge a submission in response to the Victorian Government's review of Mandatory reporting of animal fate data by shelters and pounds.

We request that it be noted from the outset that the following submission is not intended to provide an exhaustive commentary or assessment in response to the review. Rather, our submission is intended to provide a general examination and responses to select areas of key concern.

As such, the absence of discussion, consideration or analyses of any particular aspect or component must not be read as or considered to be indicative of consent or acceptance. For the purposes of this submission, Animal Liberation's focus covers aspects that we believe warrant critical attention and response.

We have reviewed the Consultation Factsheet, public survey questionnaire and relevant legislation including the Code of Practice for the management of dogs and cats in shelters and pounds, and the Domestic Animals Act 1994. Our submission in response to the review, and specific survey questions also includes additional commentary we believe is relevant and warranted, and is outlined as follows.

On written request, Animal Liberation is happy to clarify any information included in our submission and provide any further input or advice which may be of use or value to this current and important review.

Sincerely,

Lisa J Ryan

Regional campaigns manager

Alex Vince

Campaign director

A white dog is visible through the metal bars of a wire cage. The dog's head and front paws are pressed against the bars, looking towards the camera. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

DISCLOSURE & CONSENT

Animal Liberation acknowledges and confirms our understanding of Victorian Privacy laws, (i.e., the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014), and that our submission will be used to inform the development of amendments to the Code of Practice for the Management of Dogs and Cats in Shelters and Pounds ('the Code'). We acknowledge and understand that our responses may also be selected for inclusion, quoted and attributed to Animal Liberation as part of this report.

1. PREAMBLE

- 1.1 The Victorian Government maintains it is committed to improving transparency in the management of dogs and cats in shelters and pounds. In line with this commitment and community expectations, the Victorian Government intends to introduce mandatory reporting requirements under the Code. This data will allow the Victorian Government to compile and publish a report on the fate of animals admitted to and cared for within Victoria's shelter and pound system.
 - 1.1.1 Some record-keeping on dogs and cats cared for in Victorian pounds and shelters is already a Code requirement. As part of these records, shelters and pounds must include data relating to the date, reason and method of any animal euthanised. These records must be maintained for a minimum of 5 years.
- 1.2 In preparing to amend the Code, the Victorian Government is seeking feedback from stakeholders interested, involved or experienced in dog and cat rescue, rehabilitation and rehoming.



2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Animal Liberation acknowledges that some record keeping on dogs and cats in a Victorian pound or shelter is already a Code requirement under Section 4 (a, b, c, d) of the Code of Practice for the Management of Dogs and Cats in Shelters and Pounds 2011.
- 2.2 We support the Victorian Government's proposals to improve public transparency through the introduction of mandatory reporting requirements under the Code, to allow Government to compile and publish a report on the fate of animals impounded in Victoria's publicly funded pound and shelter system.
- 2.2.1 Animal Liberation strongly contends, however, that the proposed additional data collection and the publishing of this data will only result in minor reforms relating to: a) improving public transparency, b) the actual standards of care or animal welfare and c) the compliance or lack thereof with regard to impounding facilities. This includes the actual performance of publicly funded pounds and shelters, or in the identification of key areas in need of urgent reform.
- 2.3 While the State Government's mandatory reporting and publishing of data will certainly improve transparency, and allow some analysis, this small and long overdue step will not address other significant and entrenched issues which have been festering in the Victorian pound and shelter system for many decades. These other festering issues have caused immense animal suffering and death for tens of thousands of animals.
- 2.3.1 As such, we believe the proposed reforms are inadequate and will not meet either public expectations or achieve desired outcomes. In short, the proposals surrounding additional data do not go anywhere near far enough.
- 2.4 The public is increasingly losing confidence in publicly elected representatives at local, state and federal levels, and in the authorised animal welfare agencies responsible for monitoring and enforcing animal welfare and the protection of other-than-human animals. There is a noted and notable mistrust in government and agency rhetoric, the provision of information, and government's failure to monitor and enforce legislation designed specifically to protect animals. This includes vulnerable animals in our pound and shelter system.
- 2.4.1 The Government is failing vulnerable impounded animals and Victorian communities. Not only are Victorian pounds and shelters killing thousands of impounded animals, the level of non-compliance in some impounding facilities and management practices is also contributing to extensive

2.4.1 animal suffering and misery. Inadequate and antiquated animal welfare laws are not protecting these vulnerable impounded animals, and are in fact exacerbating these inherent and accumulating issues.

2.5 Being killed in a pound or shelter is still the leading cause of death for companion animals. What's more, if they're old, young, unweaned, unwell, suffer a disability, or are considered timid, their chances of being killed increase substantially. As a result, many do not make it out alive. The fate of cats and particular breeds of dogs is particularly distressing.

2.5.1 We are disappointed to note the government proposals appear to ignore other species of animals which are regularly impounded such as roosters, rabbits, sheep, goats, pigs.

2.6 The inevitable conclusion is that our pound and shelter system continues to actively support and enable the killing of impounded animals, with little or no public transparency and accountability, despite the availability of many evidence-based and life-saving programs designed to stop the killing and suffering, .

2.6.1 Pounds and shelters are like every other publicly funded community service. We don't excuse a poorly performing hospital or homeless refuge by saying people shouldn't get sick or become homeless. Neither should we justify the poor performance of Victorian pounds and shelters by saying pets shouldn't end up there or that it's the community's fault.

2.7 Animal Liberation contends full public transparency and effective monitoring and enforcement can only be achieved through the following combined initiatives:

2.7.1 Mandatory comprehensive data collection and reporting on a broad range animal fate outcomes;

2.7.2 Mandatory comprehensive data collection and reporting on compliance with legislation, policies, processes and practices, including meeting the expectations of the public;

2.7.3 Mandatory comprehensive data collection and reporting on facility compliance.



3. BACKGROUND AND BRIEF HISTORY

- 3.1 Many Victorian pounds and shelters have a checkered past littered with a lack of transparency. This is often characterised by strong, often aggressive, resistance to progressive reform and change. Similarly, the escalation of concerns and complaints to the relevant welfare agencies, state government departments and Victorian MP's have historically and invariably fallen on deaf and uninterested ears.
- 3.1.1 While this 'history' applies to numerous pounds and shelters, some notorious examples are worthy of brief mention. It should be noted that many of these festering issues continue today in 2021. It is also important to note that while the mandatory collection of data and publishing of data would have flagged some issues in these 'notorious' instances, it would not have identified serious breaches and non-compliance, animal suffering and cruelty.
- 3.1.2 Only a fully integrated, mandatory and consistent system of regular and independent monitoring and reporting, as already outlined, will achieve full transparency, reform and improved animal welfare outcomes. The publicly funded pound and shelter system should be tailored to saving lives, not a process of 'waste management' and killing. These impounded animals deserve nothing less and the same applies to the public who are paying for these facilities and vote in the responsible decision-makers.
- 3.1.3 In addition to a fully integrated, mandatory and consistent system of regular and independent monitoring and reporting, the full suite of No Kill initiatives and programs are essential to critical pound and shelter reforms.

GEELONG ANIMAL WELFARE SOCIETY ('GAWS')

- 3.2 In 2011, following many months of repeatedly ignored reports lodged with the Geelong Animal Welfare Society ('GAWS'), the then-Victorian DPI and Geelong Council, relating to cruelty, high kill-rates and non-compliance, video footage was published. See 'GAWS Exposed - Time for Change' via <https://bit.ly/3BL8h14>.
- 3.2.1 The highly distressing footage depicted dogs to be killed being drugged overnight with sedatives in their food, left unattended and then hauled off to the killing room the next morning in a semi-comatose state. The footage also depicted cats and kittens being heart-sticked and animals being killed in front of each other. The activist campaign ensured a fierce public outcry, including a peaceful protest

- 3.2.1 on the steps of Geelong Council. While in 2012, eleven (11) board members received dismissal letters following an internal investigation into allegations of animal cruelty, neither Ian Walter, the GAWS President and a vet with business connections to Kardinia Vet Surgery (who provided vet services to GAWS), nor any participating staff were ever charged. The distressing GAW history is well captured in a 'Deathrow Pets' blog (available via <https://bit.ly/3tIPA0V>) and an Animals Australia blog (available via <https://bit.ly/3to829o>).

MELBOURNE LOST DOGS' HOME

- 3.3 The Melbourne Lost Dogs' Home has an appalling history over many decades. As a result, it has never been far from intense public scrutiny and negative media attention. The issues have always involved the 'welfare' of impounded animals, high kill-rates, lack of transparency and an aggressive approach to those seeking to ensure progressive reform and accountability.
- 3.3.1 In 2015, the Victorian Government was forced to investigate housing conditions and high kill-rates following ongoing and persistent complaints, including a 10,000 signature petition, as well as plans for a rally by animal rescue groups (Anon. 2015a).
- 3.3.2 In November 2018, ABC media reported on the Lost Dogs' Home "toxic culture" that had led to mass resignations and an "exodus of staff" (Tamacraft and Knight 2018).
- 3.3.3 In December 2020, media reported on the audit undertaken following allegations of disease management problems at Melbourne Lost Dogs' Home, while photos show dogs in pens smeared with faeces (Karp 2020).

MILDURA POUND

- 3.4 The Mildura pound has been of serious concern for decades. We recall the abhorrent shooting of kittens at this facility. In general, this facility has been the source of ongoing and persistent complaints. Notably, these very serious concerns have triggered complaints about the welfare of animals housed at the facility, and the many who have suffered extreme misery, neglect and death with an apparent complete disregard for even the minimal requirements of the Code. As such, the Mildura facility has a long and dark history of denying vet care to sick and injured animals, and much worse.

DAREBIN CITY COUNCIL POUND (RSPCA-CONTRACTED)

- 3.5 Darebin City Council ('DCC') has failed ongoing to uphold its commitment to its community to embrace a No-Kill principle. The percentage of cats being killed entering this RSPCA-managed facility has in fact increased, with very few being made available to rescue and rehoming organisations. Further, the council provision of cat traps (a common issue with many councils) is driving up the number of cats who enter the pound, many of whom are subsequently killed.

MORNINGTON PENINSULA COUNCIL POUND

- 3.6 We have continued to monitor with significant concern the festering issues at the Mornington Peninsula Community Animal Shelter and the strong resistance to progressive change and meeting community expectations.

COMMENT

- 3.7 It is important to note that while the publishing of mandatory animal fate data would likely have flagged some issues in all of the examples cited above, it would not have exposed other inherent and systemic issues that involve the welfare of animals, breaches of legislation and the complete and utter betrayal of public expectations.



PHOTO: UNKNOWN

4. SUBMISSION SURVEY RESPONSES

4.1 The following section will provide answers and comments in response to the survey questions provided.

1) DO YOU SUPPORT THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT RUNNING A PROCESS TO COLLECT AND REPORT SHELTER AND POUND ANIMAL FATE DATA?

YES

NO

COMMENT

4.2 Animal Liberation supports the mandatory collection and public reporting of data for all Victorian council pounds and shelters. We have an expectation that shelters who may already be providing some level of reporting through Annual Reports, including RSPCA, AWL and the Lost Dogs Home, will also be required to comply with the collection of data.

4.3 To ensure full public transparency and analysis, the public needs to be able to compare apples with apples, not apples with oranges.

2) CURRENTLY, THE CODE REQUIRES SHELTERS AND POUNDS TO COLLECT ANIMAL FATE DATA RELATING TO ADMISSIONS, SPECIALISED CARE, REHOMING, RECLAIMS AND EUTHANASIA. DO YOU SUPPORT THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT COLLECTING AND REPORTING THIS DATA?

YES

NO

PTO

COMMENT

4.4 Animal Liberation supports the collection of current data and the publishing of this data. We however contend that the current data, and proposed additional data remains inadequate and have provided related additional comment and recommendations in our submission.

3) THREE ADDITIONAL DATA CATEGORIES ARE PROPOSED FOR COLLECTION AND REPORTING BY SHELTERS AND POUNDS UNDER THE CODE. PLEASE INDICATE ALL THE CATEGORIES YOU SUPPORT DATA BEING COLLECTED AND REPORTED ON:



FOSTER CARE WAIT TIMES



ANIMALS RETURNED TO FACILITY AFTER BEING REHOMED



ANIMALS PRESENTED

COMMENT

4.5 Animal Liberation supports the collection of current data and the proposed additional data (Foster care wait times, Animals returned to a facility after being rehomed, Animals presented), and the publishing of this data. We however contend that the current data, and proposed additional data remains inadequate and have provided related additional comment and recommendations further in our submission.

4) SHOULD THE PROPOSED CODE AMENDMENTS REQUEST ANY OTHER DATA FROM SHELTERS AND POUNDS?



YES



NO

PTO

COMMENT

4.6 Animal Liberation supports the collection of current data and the proposed additional data and the publishing of this data. We however contend that the current data, and proposed additional data remains inadequate and have provided additional comment and recommendations below.

4.6.1 Under the NSW Integrated Planning and Reporting framework, NSW councils are required to report annually back to the community about the progress being made on the implementation of the Delivery Program, progress towards achievement of Community Strategic Plan outcomes, and financial performance against the annual and longer-term budgets are all part of the way a council is accountable to its community.

4.6.2 Under the NSW Calendar of Compliance and Reporting Requirements, all NSW councils must lodge an annual Survey of seizures of cats and dogs which includes key, standardized statistical monthly data. The NSW Office of Local Government ('NSW OLG') then combines the data into a statewide spreadsheet.

4.6.3 After many years of lobbying by animal advocates and activists, the NSW OLG now publishes this data on its website. Attached as [Appendix 1](#) is an example of the current mandatory collection of NSW council pound data for the 2019/2020 period, noting one spreadsheet is for dogs and the second spreadsheet is for cats.

4.6.4 While the current NSW council annual data collection and now public reporting is a progression initiative, it too needs further modernisation and expansion. Currently, under Section 4 of the Victorian Code, shelters and pounds are required to maintain records on the fate of every animal (dog or cat) that they care for, including details relating to:



admission: any dog or cat admitted into the care of the facility;



foster care*: the provision of temporary care to a dog or cat for the purpose of rehoming;

* "foster care" includes: a) behavioural rehabilitation foster care (i.e., to rectify a behavioural problem), b) short-term relief foster care (i.e., to allow a healthy animal respite from a pound or shelter environment, c) veterinary rehabilitation foster care (i.e., while an animal recovers from a medical condition such as illness, injury, surgery or disease)

- rehoming: the process of locating and providing a dog or cat with a suitable, permanent new home;
- euthanasia (including the reason why euthanasia was the appropriate outcome): the humane killing of a dog or cat in the interests of its own welfare

4.6 It is proposed chapter 4 of the Code be amended to require the proprietor of a pound or shelter to submit data to Government on the animals that were:

- presented for admission during the reporting period;
- accepted for admission during the reporting period;
- admitted to short-term foster care during the reporting period, including for rehabilitation purposes;
- permanently transferred to other facilities or groups for rehoming;
- reclaimed by their owner during the reporting period;
- rehomed during the reporting period;
- returned (i.e., surrendered) back to the facility during the reporting period;
- euthanised during the reporting period, including the reason why euthanasia was the appropriate and necessary outcome and the method of euthanasia used.

4.7 Animal Liberation recommends the Victorian Government proceed with the capture and publishing of all current data, proposed new data and additional data as is undertaken in NSW. In addition, we also consider data capture that captures the large volume of animals being referred to volunteer and self-funded rescue and rehoming organisations as critical to document the extensive and important role these organisations play in saving lives.

4.7.1 In addition, we recommend that breed types killed should be included to flag any disproportionate number of certain breed types being killed – possibly as a legacy of Victoria’s past appalling Breed Specific legislation which is no doubt continuing in some areas.

4.9 Animal Liberation contends that in many instances only intense public and government scrutiny will change abhorrent cultures in some pounds and shelters. Accordingly, we believe further data collection, publishing of data and scrutiny should include:

- establishing enforceable targets for direct and successful pound and shelter animal adoptions;

- requiring pound, shelters and pound contractors to make any animal that they do not intend to rehome themselves, available to rescue groups;
- ceasing the practice of lending out or hiring out cat traps, which continue to drive up the number of kittens and cats impounded and subsequently killed;
- ceasing relationships between pounds and contractors (i.e., the RSPCA) where there has been a refusal to make all animals available to rescue groups.

5) THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT PROPOSES PUBLISHING A REPORT ON ANIMAL FATE DATA ONCE A YEAR (ANNUALLY). DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS PROPOSED FREQUENCY?

- YES, THIS IS THE RIGHT FREQUENCY
- NO, IT SHOULD BE MORE FREQUENT THAN ONCE A YEAR
- I DON'T KNOW

COMMENT

4.10 Animal Liberation contends that regular reporting 1) identifies and flags issues early and 2) enables efficient and effective resolution of issues. We believe pounds and shelters should be publishing such data on a monthly basis and that the Victorian Government should publish all such data on a six-monthly basis.

6) HOW SHOULD THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT PRESENT THE REPORT ON SHELTER AND POUND ANIMAL FATE DATA?

- A DATA SET PRESENTED BY INDIVIDUAL SHELTER AND POUND
- A DATA SET PRESENTED BY LOCAL COUNCIL GROUPINGS
- A DATA SET PRESENTED BY ECONOMIC REGIONS
- DATA SHOULD NOT BE PUBLICLY BE REPORTED
- SINGLE COMBINED STATEWIDE DATA SET

COMMENT

4.11 Animal Liberation contends each and every community is entitled to review and assess the performance of their local pound or shelter and accordingly, a data set depicting the results of every pound and shelter is important. We also contend that the Victorian Government should not be limited or restrictive in an either/or approach to data publication and that a statewide report, as is undertaken in NSW is valuable as is reports which depict local council groupings and economic regions. All these different reports will enable the identification of trends and issues and 'hotspots', and will accordingly help determine where public money should be invested.

4.11.1 We would strongly encourage the Victorian Government to publish all of the following reports:

- A data set presented by individual shelter and pound;
- Single combined statewide set;
- A data set presented by local council groupings (i.e., metropolitan, interface, regional city, large shire, small shire);
- A data set presented by economic regions (i.e., Greater Melbourne, Barwon South West, Gippsland, Grampians, Hume, Loddon Mallee).

7) HOW DO YOU THINK THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT COULD USE NEW DATA COLLECTION REQUIREMENTS TO IMPROVE ANIMAL WELFARE OUTCOMES?

- 3** HIGHLIGHT OPPORTUNITIES FOR INFORMATION SHARING AND COLLABORATION ACROSS SHELTERS AND POUNDS
- 1** ENABLE MEANINGFUL IMPROVEMENTS IN THE PUBLIC TRANSPARENCY OF DOG AND CAT MANAGEMENT IN SHELTERS AND POUNDS
- 2** IMPROVE UNDERSTANDING OF THE REASONS FOR EUTHANASIA, DISEASE AND OTHER EVENTS IN SHELTERS AND POUNDS TO DRIVE SECTOR IMPROVEMENTS
- 4** IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES FOR SECTOR EDUCATION AND FURTHER REFORM

5

INFORM ANALYSIS OF THE CHALLENGES FACED BY SHELTERS AND POUNDS, INCLUDING ACCESS TO OUTSIDE OF SHELTER AND POUND SERVICES

6

HIGHLIGHT THE CHALLENGES FACED BY SHELTERS AND POUNDS AND INCREASE PUBLIC AWARENESS OF THESE CHALLENGES

7

HIGHLIGHT THE POSITIVE ACHIEVEMENTS OF VICTORIA'S SHELTER AND POUND SECTOR

COMMENT

4.12

It is somewhat disappointing to note that the Victorian Government's emphasis appears to be on "information sharing" and "achievement of publicly funded essential services" rather than analysis of 'performance', compliance and the welfare of vulnerable impounded animals.

8) WHAT FURTHER MEASURES COULD THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT IMPLEMENT TO INCREASE TRANSPARENCY IN THE MANAGEMENT OF DOGS AND CATS IN SHELTERS AND POUNDS?

COMMENT

4.13

As outlined earlier, Animal Liberation contends that full public transparency and effective monitoring and enforcement can only be achieved through the following combined initiatives, which will also substantially improve animal welfare:



Mandatory comprehensive data collection and reporting on a broad range animal fate outcomes.



Mandatory comprehensive data collection and reporting on compliance with legislation, policies, processes and practices and meeting the expectations of the public;



Mandatory comprehensive data collection and reporting on facility compliance.

9) IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD ON THIS TOPIC?

COMMENT

4.14 Animal Liberation contends that all pounds and shelters should be adopting the suite of No Kill principles to save lives and end the culture of killing.



5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 Animal Liberation recommends that:
- 5.1.1 the Victorian Government proceeds with the proposed amendments to introduce mandatory reporting (animal fate data) under the Code of Practice for the Management of Dogs and Cats in Shelters and Pounds.
 - 5.1.2 the Victorian Government publishes the mandatory reporting (animal fate data) on a six-monthly basis.
 - 5.1.3 the nature and range of data be expanded considerably to include data as outlined in our submission.
 - 5.1.4 the Victorian Government publishes the mandatory reporting (animal fate data) in a wide variety of reporting formats, including:
 - Individual shelter and pound
 - Single combined statewide set
 - Local council groupings (i.e., metropolitan, interface, regional city, large shire, small shire)
 - Economic regions (i.e., Greater Melbourne, Barwon South West, Gippsland, Grampians, Hume, Loddon Mallee)
 - 5.1.5 the mandatory collection of data and publishing of data is consistently applied across all Victorian pounds and shelters, including RSPCA, AWL and the Lost Dogs Home.
 - 5.1.6 data collection for contracted council pounds, such as is undertaken by RSPCA, must enable a separation of data to identify the 'performance' of individual pound and shelter operations rather than merged into RSPCA general and combined data.
 - 5.1.7 all pounds and shelters are required to collect the mandatory data on a monthly basis and report such data on their own websites to ensure issues can be identified early.

- 5.1.8 on an annual basis, the Victorian Minister for Agriculture must report the data collection to the Victorian Parliament to allow political scrutiny and debate.
- 5.1.9 the Victorian Government will review its annual Animal Welfare Fund Grants Program, and options to increase grants opportunities, to reflect issues identified in the annual results commencing from the proposed 2022 publishing of mandatory data collection.
- 5.1.10 all Victorian Domestic Animal Management Plans, including for the period 2022 – 2026, are updated to include a clear reference to mandatory collection and reporting of a broad range of Victorian animal fate data by shelters and pounds.
- 5.1.11 at the conclusion of the inaugural publishing of the Victorian Government mandatory reporting (animal fate data), input is sought from the public and informed stakeholders, including rescue and rehoming organisations, to determine any further and/or new data requirements.



6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

- 6.1 We acknowledge the endeavours and initiatives undertaken by the Victorian Government to improve public transparency and animal welfare outcomes. We would however encourage the Victorian Government to maximise this current review opportunity and ensure public transparency and animal welfare is not limited to peripheral window dressing when so much more can and should be achieved.



APPENDIX

APPENDICES

See 'Pound and Shelter Report 2019-20' document attached.



SOURCES AND REFERENCE MATERIAL

- LEGISLATION AND CODES**
- Code of Practice for the management of dogs and cats in shelters and pounds
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