



## **Top 10 misconceptions about pounds**

The purpose and contribution a pound makes to the community is quite often misunderstood and many people shy away from adopting animals from pounds because of these misconceptions. However there are many advantages to adopting an animal from a pound. Pounds offer a myriad of choices of breed, age, temperament, size and colour. Adopting one of the many adult pets available means potentially avoiding challenges such as toilet training you might have with a puppy. And most importantly you'd be giving a home to an animal that really needs one, and in doing so create space to shelter another homeless animal. As a veterinarian and manager of a pound facility, I'd like to debunk some of the many misconceptions we face.

### **1) All pounds are government run.**

In most circumstances' pounds are run by veterinary hospitals or veterinary trained staff as these are the only buildings equipped to deal with a large number of animals. Some of the larger pounds may employ a veterinary team purely for the pound whilst others may simply be run within a larger veterinary hospital such as ours. Local government contribute financially to the running of these facilities but otherwise have no involvement in the day-to-day running and do not dictate decisions beyond NSW legislation. If you have concerns regarding your local pound, speak to your local council representative about increasing pound budgets as a lack of funds can negatively impact a pound's capabilities such as employing enough staff or space allocation.

### **2) Pound animals available for adoption are imperfect or old.**

Animals enter the pound in one of three ways. Members of the public may hand in a lost pet, council rangers may admit a lost or stray pet or an animal may be surrendered to the

pound due to a change in the owner's circumstances. The vast majority of these animals are healthy and young to middle aged. Occasionally we do have older animals impounded or animals with health or behavioural issues however this does not automatically disqualify them as adoptable.

### 3) Pounds are dirty places

Our pound facility is run in conjunction with our vet hospital and as such adheres to strict hygiene and cleaning protocols. Considering most of the impounded animals have unknown vaccination statuses and could be potentially contagious, hygiene is particularly important to avoid spread of disease. Great care is taken to ensure each animal is screened for possible infectious disease and facilities are well kept.

### 4) Pound animals aren't looked after very well

All impounded animals are looked after by trained staff, usually in the veterinary industry. 100% of these staff are animal lovers, dedicated to ensuring each animal gets the very best care. All animals entering our pound facility are given a full health check by a vet and any preventative care or treatment required such as flea protection, wound care or skin treatment regardless of costs involved. So in fact these animals have the very best of care with constant veterinary supervision and a team of staff that are carefully selected to ensure they have the appropriate qualifications and compassion by the bucketful.

### 5) Pound animals are euthanased if not rehomed

Each pound has a different policy on this, however most will make every attempt to rehome animals before considering euthanasia. At our pound facility we are lucky enough to have the space and means to continue care of these animals for as long as required so do not euthanase animals based on time spent impounded. However, many pounds are overflowing and euthanasia is occasionally considered when more suitable animals require the space for adoption. This is an incredibly difficult decision for pound staff to make and is not taken lightly.

There is much controversy around the term "no kill" shelters. A good pound facility should have a "low kill" policy which essentially means that where possible animals are not euthanased. However, when an animal is being prepared for adoption they must undergo behavioural and physical assessments to ensure they are suitable for adoption. Occasionally euthanasia may be the only reasonable option for example in case of uncontrollable painful conditions or severe behavioural conditions that may put people or other pets at risk of injury. These decisions are carefully considered by multiple veterinary-trained staff and take into account the animal's welfare as well as public health concerns.

### 6) Purebred animals are never available at the pound

We frequently have purebred animals surrendered to us or brought in as strays. In fact a study in the U.S.A. showed 25% of pound animals are purebreds. Where possible, we

work with breed specific rescue groups to attempt to foster or rehome via these associations.

- 7) Pounds are sad and depressing places and animals may be “damaged” by their stay.

A pound may seem depressing as they showcase so many animals needing a home, but consider the alternative of these animals living on the streets or meeting an untimely cruel end due to their owners not wanting them. In a pound environment they are provided with food, shelter, protection and love from compassionate staff who are committed to finding them their new homes.

All animals can respond differently to a change in their circumstances but in many cases pound animals benefit from the structured care and supervision they receive during their impoundment, especially if they have been living on the streets or in an unstructured environment previously. Impoundment does not necessarily create behavioural issues and animals who are rescued from pounds have equal opportunity to become loyal and loving members of the family as those obtained from other sources.

- 8) Pound animals are likely to have health issues and cost more in vet bills

The overwhelming majority of pound animals are healthy and are available for adoption with no underlying concerns regarding disease. However, due to the lack of history available for most of these pets there is no guarantee they don't have genetic issues due to poor breeding or problems as a result of previous illness or disease. Each animal undergoes a veterinary assessment on arrival and any health concern that is noted is addressed and a management plan considered prior to adoption. For example we frequently perform dental work or treat skin disease prior to adoption. Sometimes animals with “special needs” are available for adoption and these are outlined during the adoption process so the new owner must be willing to commit financially and mentally to potential veterinary costs. Thankfully there are a lot of wonderful people out there willing to take on these special cases.

From a behavioural perspective, an animal's personality and rapport with a new family cannot be completely known until it is living in that situation so essentially adoption of an animal from any environment carries an equal risk.

- 9) Adoption fees are too high

If pounds were to charge out adoptions at the price the animal costs to the facility (which would include veterinary time, procedures, food, labour, utilities, preventative medicine) the adoption prices would be considerably higher. But pounds aren't about making profit or even covering costs, they are about keeping animals safe, reuniting pets with owners or finding them new homes. The goal for adoption prices is to make it extremely affordable to potential owners but not so low that owners impulse buy or don't consider the ramifications of adopting a new pet. New owners must be aware that pets cost money

and by adopting a shelter animal, you are taking on the financial responsibility of keeping the pet safe and free from preventable disease.

10) If I surrender my pet it will be euthanased.

As mentioned above euthanasia is the absolute last resort in the surrendering process. All surrenders are assessed as to whether they are suitable for rehoming and presuming they are, they are cleared for adoption no matter how long it takes to find them an appropriate new home. In saying that surrendering of a pet should not be taken lightly and once the paperwork is signed that pet is effectively owned by the pound and they can proceed as they deem appropriate so please speak to the pound staff about whether there are alternative options for your pet or the likelihood of them passing adoption assessments.

Dr Prue Honson

Hospital Director & Senior Veterinarian

Thornleigh Vet Hospital