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Working to stop unwanted-pet euthanasia in Australian Pounds & Shelters

Date: 21/04/11

**Ms K Seksel
President
ACAC**

Dear Ms Seksel

Re Questions for ACAC concerning companion animals

Deathrowpets represents a large number of members of the community concerned with the number of unwanted companion animals that end up in pounds and shelters and the very significant numbers of these animals that are needlessly killed each year. I understand that you share these concerns.

We note that your organisation professes to be the “peak body” concerning companion animals and the pet industry in Australia. Therefore I believe it appropriate to pass on to you some questions that our members are asking.

These members, all have family pets (ourselves included with 3 dogs!) and we all spend a significant amount of money each year on pet industry related products and services – pet food, vet bills, kennelling, behaviour training etc.

We consider ourselves to be firm supporters of the pet industry in this country. As such I would be confident that ACAC, as the self-proclaimed peak body for companion animals and the pet industry, would respond appropriately to the following questions.

1 on the ACAC website you state that one of your objectives is to “provide an effective voice against those who oppose socially responsible companion animal ownership.”

Question 1: Could you please advise who are these groups or people who oppose socially responsible companion animal ownership?

It's just that members of the pet industry keep going on about these groups, but no one knows who they are?

2 Collection and analysis of national pound statistics

In your presentation to the WA Cat Welfare & Management Symposium in September 2009 (1), we noted that you said “**we need data collection from Council pounds, nationally.**”

This echoes the views of the then CEO of the AVA, Mark Lawrie who wrote in 1996 : “**It is my belief that the most important strategy that we can implement is to gather comprehensive national statistics and conduct proper analysis and research using those statistics to measure the effect of work that is currently being done**”.(2)



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In the 15 years that have passed since Mr Lawrie wrote those lines, we are not aware of any efforts by the AVA, or other bodies, certainly not pet industry related bodies, to instigate such collection of national data.

How can that be if this is ***“The most important strategy?”***

As far as we are aware the only State in Australia to consistently collect council pound statistics is NSW. I have analysed and summarised these data now for the past 4 years and attach FYI the latest summary from the 09-10 year, together with the addition of data from the larger national charities for NSW.(3)

We know that Victoria collects statistics via its DAMPS program for Councils, but we were informed by the Vic DPI that these figures are confidential (why?) and I have yet to acquire them via FOI.

Thus I can comfortably say that the only publically available, detailed analysis of animals entering and leaving any State’s pound and shelter system is our own.

So, to summarise. The need is clearly established, confirmed by yourself in public, and so we would like to know what is being done about it?

Question 2: can you advise what steps you or ACAC have taken since your presentation in 2009 to influence State governments to collect these data? If no steps have been taken, can you advise what you will do in this matter. If this is underway, what is its status today?

Question 3: members of your organisation (eg Bob Croucher) are writing to people and saying:

“Whilst any euthanasia of animals for reasons of neglect or abandonment by owners is regrettable industry statistics suggest that the problem is not nearly as widespread as welfare groups and animal liberation supporters would have us believe”. (4)

Will you advise please, given the evidence of the NSW collected statistics I am providing, how can the problem not be “as widespread aswould have us believe”. Indeed, we would like to understand what is ACAC’s intent in messaging that the problem is “not as widespread” etc....

I can only imagine that if Bob Croucher spent his weeks trying to save the dozen or so dogs or cats slated for killing on Friday morning at his local pound, he might have a different take on it

So, exactly how bad does it have to be for you to consider it a “widespread” problem? I wonder what the ‘evidence-based’ reasoning is behind this? Is there a number?



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4. We note that ACAC is holding its first think tank: “ACAC Strategy 2011” later this year

‘The topic is Putting pets back into our lives - how declining pet ownership is impacting our society and economy.’

Question 3: can you advise please how you envisage that this conference will address or create solutions to address the issue of the large number of unwanted companion animals in Australia that end up in the pound and shelter system and subsequently killed?. Specifically, what agenda items do you have planned that will address this issue?

5 Submission by ACAC to Caroline Le Couteur MLA in regard of Greens proposed Bill Animal Welfare Legislation Amendment, 2010

You state in your submission that ACAC’s reputation has been built by its focus on “evidence-based decision making”.

Question 5: Could you explain please where exactly is the scientific evidence behind your statements:

“There is no evidence that there is overbreeding of companion animals by pet owners or breeders” in Australia”.

We can only assume that if there is no evidence of overbreeding, then you must have evidence to the contrary for your statement to be true. If you must have scientific evidence that the numbers bred across the country must be exactly appropriate for the level of demand. Could you cite that scientific evidence please.

6 You state in your submission to Caroline le Couteur MLC, that “ACAC believes that all suppliers of pets have a responsibility to do so in an ethical and responsible manner, regardless of whether they operate as a charitable organisation or a commercial entity.

Question 5: Could you please supply any data that you have regarding the numbers of animals entering the supply chain of pets that are bred by back yard breeders across the country and in what ways ACAC will seek to address this source of unregulated breeding and ensure that animals are supplied in an ethical and responsible manner?

7 You state in your submission to Caroline le Couteur MLC that “encouragement of responsible pet acquisition etc are key platforms that ACAC support”

Question 7: We can only imagine that “encouragement of responsible acquisition” must involve providing potential owners with full and complete information about lifetime responsibilities and care together with associated costs for the animal. Please could you supply us with any ACAC document you have published that deals with this matter.

We have read your document “the correct selection of dogs” and whilst this addresses to a degree the selection of the “right” type of dog via pointing to the pet selection website, it doesn’t specify



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anywhere at all the investments in time, money, care and responsibility that a guardian of an animal will need to invest in its lifetime. We are particularly interested in the advice you are giving potential owners on:

- Amount of exercise required daily
- Behaviour enrichment regime required
- Costs annually associated with all requirements: food, bedding, vet care, training, kennelling etc
- Integration into the family unit as a member of the family
- How to avoid the many pitfalls that arise in life whereby owners, despite initial good intentions, take the option of “surrendering” the animal to a pound or shelter

Finally can you advise please what scientific or statistical evidence you have that demonstrates that the strategy of encouraging responsible pet acquisition, appropriate health, socialisation and training needs, is having or will have a measurable impact on the number of unwanted companion animals that enter pounds and shelters across the country? (note: intuitively, we can believe that it must have some positive impact and that this education is essential, but we can only assume that as an “evidence-based decision making” organisation, that you will have scientific “evidence” to support that position.

As a general comment, it just seems to us that by reviewing the NSW published statistics over the past 4 years that there has not been any discernable difference.

8. ACAC responsibility for unwanted companion animals 1

You claim to be the peak body representing companion animals and the pet industry in Australia. As you are aware, there are massive numbers of unwanted companion animals and pets that enter the pound and shelter system each year and very many that are killed un-necessarily. By your claim we understand that you must obviously “represent” this constituency of companion animals as well

Question 8: can you advise what specific responsibility and actions you as head of, and your ACAC member groups are prepared to take, or have taken, for reducing the overall number of unwanted animals in the supply chain and for rehoming those that need new homes in pounds and shelters across the country?

Question 9 ACAC responsibility for unwanted companion animals 2

Would ACAC be prepared to consider a levy on all members as a percentage of their revenues to contribute towards efforts by rescue and rehoming groups to significantly increase the rehoming rate of healthy and rehoming animals that find themselves in pounds and shelters each year?

It would seem logical to many that with the volume of monies generated by your members in the pet industry, and as ACAC is the peak body representing companion animal ownership, it would be reasonable to expect ACAC members to contribute financially towards the efforts of rehoming the unwanted pets across the country. Currently the cost impost is generally borne by ratepayers in



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each Council, and charity donations, again from the public. It would seem reasonable to share that cost impost with those who profit from the pet trade, would you not agree?

I would welcome your views on this proposal and look forward to hearing how this can be progressed.

I look forward to hearing from you on these questions; I need to let you know that I will be sharing your information with our constituency.

Thank you

Paul Archer

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Please reply to info@deathrowpets.net

References:

1. Dr. Kersti Seksel from the Australian Companion Animal Council speaks at the Western Australian Cat Welfare & Management Symposium, September 2009.
2. The issue of unwanted animals: Adopting a strategic and practical approach; Mark Lawrie, Margaret Gaal, Ann Margret Withers, Isabelle Widdison and Magdoline Awad; Urban Animal Management Conference Proceedings 1996
3. Analysis of NSW council pound and charity statistics 2009-2010, February 2011; Deathrowpets; based on published annual NSW Council Statistics DLG and national charity shelters.
4. Bob Croucher: email message to newspaper editor, April 11