



Centre for Companion Animals in the Community

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Sale of Pets through Pet Shops

Executive Summary

1. There is a lack of existing data to determine the real percentage of animals bought from pet shops that are surrendered and euthanased
2. If legal pet shop sales of mammals are banned, pet sales may be driven underground making it much more difficult to regulate
3. The animal welfare concerns that are raised regarding pet shop sales similarly exist among many sources of pet purchase.
4. The future of cross bred dogs and cats is at risk if mammal sales are restricted to registered breeders only
5. The number of animals euthanased each year are only a tiny percentage of the dogs and cats living successfully in family homes

Introductory Comments

All who work with animals – veterinarians, veterinary nurses, dog and cat breeders, pound and shelter workers, and the pet shop industry wholeheartedly support the prevention of unnecessary euthanasia of companion animals.

Nevertheless, we believe that sales of animals through pet shops and other avenues is only one factor that impacts on the welfare and euthanasia of companion animals. The AVA supports the regulation of pet shops as opposed to supporting outright restrictions and bans.

In reality, the percentage of dogs and cats bought from pet shops is very low, less than 15%.

Existing data suggests that dogs and cats purchased through pet shops are less likely to be lost or surrendered than those bought via other avenues of sale, including shelters. There is, however, currently no data available to determine whether animals sourced from pet shops are more or less likely to be surrendered than animals purchased from other sources.

Facts

- Australia has amongst the highest levels of pet ownership per capita in the world
- Two thirds of Australian households own pets
- More than half of all Australian households own a dog and/or a cat
- 85% of Australians have owned a pet at some point in their lives
- Pet owners are healthier and happier than non-pet owners¹

¹ Australian Companion Animal Council (2006) *Contribution of the Pet Care Industry to the Australian Economy 6th Edition*

1. There is a lack of existing data to determine the real percentage of animals bought from pet shops that are surrendered and euthanased

- There is currently no evidence to suggest that companion animals purchased from pet shops are any more likely to be euthanased or are any less well cared for than animals purchased from other sources.
- The percentage of dogs and cats acquired through pet shops is actually very low. A Victorian study found that just 8% of cats and 11% of dogs were obtained from pet shops². A similar study found that pet shops supplied 9% of cats and 14% of dogs to pet owners³. By comparison, the same studies revealed that far more dogs were obtained from breeders (22% and 30%) and more cats obtained from welfare shelters (13% and 22%). (See Appendix 1 for data).
- Data provided by Central Animal Records (Victoria) detailing microchip registrations by source from 1989 to 2007 reveal that animals purchased from pet shops are less likely to be lost (7.64%) than animals microchipped at vets (9.74%), welfare shelters (15.25%) and other sources (15.25%)⁴. (See Appendix 2 for data).
- It is therefore necessary that before enforcing an outright ban on pet shop sales, hard data must be made available to correctly ascertain whether animals bought from pet shops are less well cared for and more frequently surrendered. If this data is not collected, the prevention of pets being sold via pet shops will have little impact on the numbers entering and being euthanased in pounds and shelters.

2. If legal pet shop sales of mammals are banned, pet sales may be driven underground making it much more difficult to regulate

- Preventing the sales of mammals through print and electronic media will be both impossible to enforce and extremely costly. In the majority of cases the vendor's contact details are via mobile phone making it very difficult to determine the municipality in which the vendor resides and almost impossible for local authorities to enforce. Enforcement would therefore need to be carried out at a state level and/or by a new authority at considerable expense. Such action is likely to drive sales of pets underground and create a situation worse than the existing one.
- "Back yard breeders" (whether accidental or deliberate) are much less visible and therefore very difficult to regulate. Questions arise as to who ensures that sale stock is vaccinated, wormed, identified, fed well, kept in hygienic surroundings and socialized. Questions continue to arise as to who will monitor puppy farms many of which are reported to breed large numbers of puppies (and kittens) with high levels of disease and genetic defect.

² Toukhatsi SR, Coleman GJ and Bennett PB (2005) "*Final Report for the project: Community attitudes and behaviours towards cats*". Animal Welfare Science Centre, Dept Psychology, Monash University, for the Bureau of Animal Welfare, Victoria.

³ Pawsey C, "Where do pets come from? Victorian Pet Acquisition Survey". *Urban Animal Management Conference, Canberra, 2005*

⁴ R Walduck *Per comm.* October 2007 See appendix 2 for data

- It seems counter intuitive to prohibit people from purchasing animals from a source that can be readily managed and regulated. Codes of practice can be enforced in pet shops.
- An alternative would be to get the RSPCA (or similar) to audit pet shops against a mandated NSW Gov Code of Practice.

CASE STUDY

Following extensive research, the Victorian Government has introduced sound measures to manage the sale of animals in that state. Victorian legislation now requires all pet shops to be registered with the Bureau of Animal Welfare and audited annually. Compliance with a pet shop code of practice⁵ is mandatory.

Pet shops are also audited against the Pet Industry Association of Australia's Code of Practice and QA programme. Amongst other things, the Victorian BAW Code requires that all dogs and cats be microchipped and include a "guarantee period". Pets can be returned for any reason for a full refund up to three days after purchase, up to eight days after purchase for a 75% refund, and anytime for a proven predisposed health issue or genetic defect.

These laws can be readily enforced and are largely self-funded through pet shop registration charges. If a pet shop breaches the code, then their registration can be revoked and they may be banned from the ongoing sale of pets.

The sale of pets through markets has also been banned (unless the market is open continuously for five days or more).

The Victorian legislation provides an excellent model for sensible management of sales of pets.

3. The animal welfare concerns that are raised regarding pet shop sales similarly exist among many sources of pet purchase.

- There is significant community concern that pet shops achieve sales through encouraging "impulse purchasing". The high cost required to purchase puppies and kittens from pet shops (\$500 + for puppies and \$180 + for kittens) however, suggests instead that buyers are already prepared to purchase.
- Pounds and especially welfare shelters similarly encourage purchase by tugging on people's heart strings with the "hard luck" stories of animals and the "threat" that the animal may be euthanased if not purchased.

⁵ Victorian Pet shop Code of Practice

<http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au/dpi/nreninf.nsf/LinkView/FA312704A6A69311CA256C16002202D54E532A5FF42FDB794A256DEA0027A696>

- The reality is that animals are available from a number of sources who all market their animals to achieve sales.
- If the primary issue is “impulse purchasing”, then a cooling off period could be mandated, similar to gun purchases. The prospective owners could pay a deposit with the outlet then being required to provide the purchaser with information on caring for their pet. The prospective owners could collect the animal after (say) five days which would then be followed by a guaranteed return period.
- It has been suggested that pet shops do not match buyers with suitable animals, yet many pounds run by the local authorities offer animals for sale without consultation as to suitability. These same facilities further provide little or no information on correct care or special requirements that dogs and cats in need of re-homing may need.
- Concern has also been voiced from various sectors of the community regarding animals being kept overnight in pet shops. The stress that would result from animals being moved to and from shops to shelters each night however, would severely compromise the welfare of the animals.

4. The future of cross bred dogs and cats is at risk if mammal sales are restricted to registered breeders only

- It is estimated that there are some 30,000 working cattle and sheep dogs in NSW⁶. Preventing the sale and breeding of working dogs by non-registered farmers and breeders would have severe ramifications on the rural sector. If such restrictions were to extend further into working dogs sales only being permitted via vets or shelters, the result would be an effective ban on farm-bred working dogs.
- If the propagating of dogs for sale were limited to those who were members of Royal NSW Canine Council (Dogs NSW and similarly propagating of cats for sale limited to only those who were members of the NSW Cat Fanciers Association Inc. or Waratah State Cat Alliance, there would be cause for concern. Such concerns would include;
 1. Creating a situation where effectively only pure bred cats and dogs would be available in NSW. Such a specification for registered breeds will limit access to crossbred dogs and the benefits associated with hybrid vigour. Most pure breeds of dogs and cats have inherited genetic disorders predisposing them to health problems. It is unfair and unrealistic to force pet owners to own only purebred animals.
 2. It would appear to be an unlawful restriction of trade. Consumers should not be forced to purchase dogs and cats only from breeders registered with a particular breed association. If such a limitation were to be introduced, then breeders should be required to be registered with the

⁶ Australian Companion Animal Council (2006) *Contribution of the Pet Care Industry to the Australian Economy 6th Edition*

government rather than with breed organizations. This would allow for the registration of cross bred dog and cat breeders.

5. The number of animals euthanased each year is only a tiny percentage of the dogs and cats living successfully in family homes

- Less than 5% of owned dogs and cats ever need the services of a welfare shelter or pound⁷. Limiting people's ability to purchase mammals from pet shops will also limit their ability to enjoy the companionship and other benefits provided by pets.
- The large number of dogs and cats euthanased in Australia each year is often highlighted. Whilst the euthanasia of any number of pets is undesirable, the numbers must nonetheless be compared to the overall population of dogs and cats to give a reasonable perspective. It has been estimated that there are 804,000 owned cats and 1,219,000 owned dogs in NSW. Without wishing to trivialise the situation, the thousands of animals euthanased each year which impact so heavily on pound and shelter staff and veterinarians are in fact only a tiny percentage of the dogs and cats living successfully in family homes.
- Pet owners are becoming more socially responsible. Regardless of where pets are purchased, the vast majority of owners consider their pets to be part of the family and care for them in a responsible manner.
- Quite simply, the majority of Australians want to own pets and they should be able to purchase a suitable pet freely and confidently from a well managed, ethically run pet shop.

⁷ Heady, B., (2007) "Socially responsible Pet ownership in Australia; A Decade of Progress", *National People and Pets Survey 2006*

Appendix 1 Pet acquisition by source

Victoria – 424 respondents to a voluntary survey

About 8% of cats and about 10% of dogs were obtained from pet shops

Figure 9 shows the means by which cats and dogs were acquired by their owners. In relation to cats, as can be seen, most were received as a gift (18%), adopted from a friend or family member (17%) or from an animal rescue centre (13%). In contrast, most dogs were acquired from licensed breeders (22%), adopted from a friend or family member (22%), or acquired as a gift (14%).

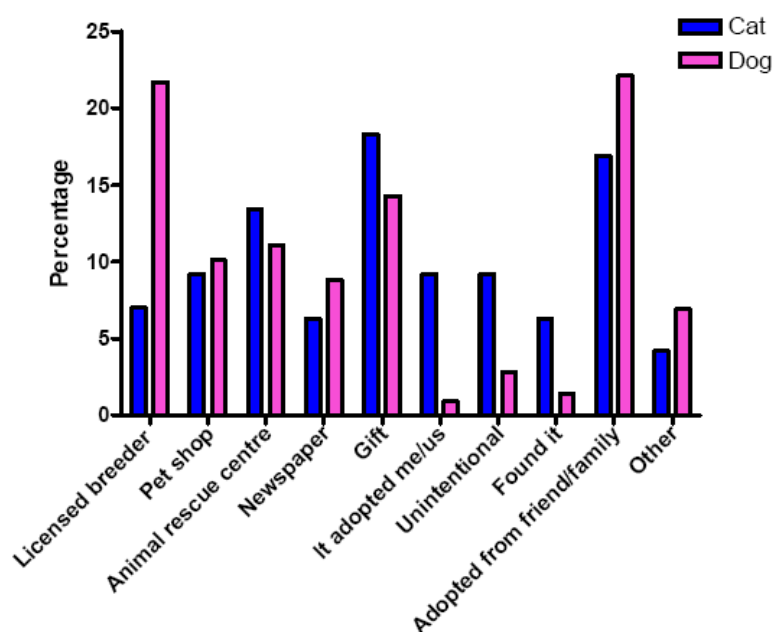


Figure 9. The means by which cats and dogs were acquired by their owners

From Toukhatsi SR, Coleman GJ and Bennett PB 2005 "Final Report for the project: Community attitudes and behaviours towards cats" Animal Welfare Science Centre, Dept Psychology, Monash University, for the Bureau of Animal Welfare, Victoria.

Victoria – voluntary survey of 1608 pet owners

About 9% of cats and 14% of dogs were obtained from pet shops.

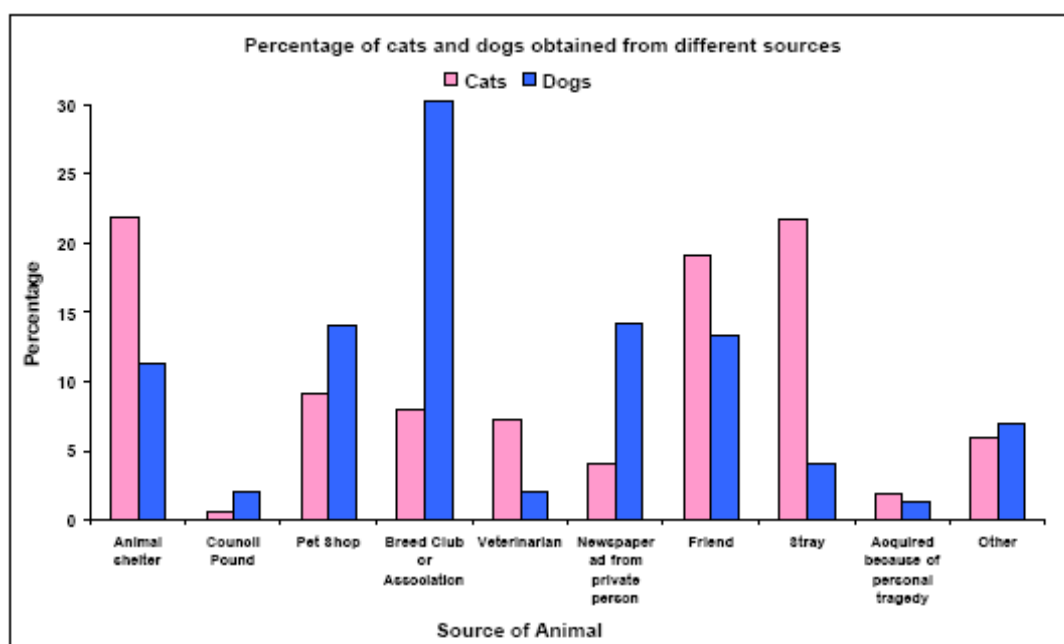


Chart 2. The percentage of cats and dogs that were acquired from breed club/associations, strays, friends, animal shelters, pet shops, newspaper ads from private person, veterinarians, council pounds, acquired because of personal tragedy and other sources.

The sources where pet owners acquire their cats and dogs are illustrated above, with cats denoted by pink and dogs by blue. The most common sources of acquisition for cats is from the stray population and animal shelters (22%), with the second most common source being friends, followed by pet shops (19% and 9% of cats respectively). On the other hand, the most common source of dog acquisition is from breed clubs or associations (30%), and then from newspaper ads and pet shops (14%), followed by friends and animal shelters (13% and 11% of dogs respectively).

From Pawsey C 2005 "Pet Acquisition Survey" Bureau of Animal Welfare, DPI Vic

Appendix 2

Central Animal Records Microchip Registrations by Source (1989-2007)

	Overseas	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA	TOTAL
Vet Registered	83	6340	20153	3492	41042	43376	7767	390782	24357	537392
Vet Recovered	5	763	1926	238	2732	2170	404	43102	1008	52348
	6.02%	12.03%	9.56%	6.82%	6.66%	5.00%	5.20%	11.03%	4.14%	9.74%
Pet Shop Registered			3434					2158		5592
Pet Shop Recovered			267					160		427
			7.78%					7.41%		7.64%
Welfare Registered		8168	62	366	21763	17117	8636	134783	6654	197549
Welfare Recovered		1205	35	46	1995	2215	1072	23809	858	31235
		14.75%	56.45%	12.57%	9.17%	12.94%	12.41%	17.66%	12.89%	15.81%
All Others Implanted	14822	94	208435	665	10310	2460	167	51850	1464	290267
All Others Recovered	2125	25	15594	32	867	222	4	25286	106	44261
	14.34%	26.60%	7.48%	4.81%	8.41%	9.02%	2.40%	48.77%	7.24%	15.25%
Total Registered	14905	14602	232084	4523	73115	62953	16570	579573	32475	1030800
Total Recovered	2130	1993	17822	316	5594	4607	1480	92357	1972	128271
	14.29%	13.65%	7.68%	6.99%	7.65%	7.32%	8.93%	15.94%	6.07%	12.44%
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% Registered in Pet Shops			1.480%					0.372%		0.542%

Only 0.54% of all animals whose microchips were registered with CAR were obtained from pet shops (1.48% for NSW)

The % Recovered rows show that animals purchased from pet shops were less likely (7.64%) to be lost than animals microchipped at vets (9.74%) or welfare centres(15.81%) or other centres (15.25%)

"Registered" = all microchips from all distributors registered with CAR via that source (eg vet, pet shop)

"Recovered" = that microchip number was recovered at any scanning centre at any time, from a (presumably lost) animal