

Sale of companion animals from pet shops

(adopted 22/02/10)

1 Introduction

1.1 This position paper must be read in conjunction with the following RSPCA policies:

- Policy A1 Responsible companion animal ownership
- Policy A2 Acquiring a companion animal
- Policy E7 Keeping of wild animals as pets

1.2 RSPCA Australia policy (A2.5) advocates a compulsory registration and licensing system for all outlets selling companion animals (including shops, breeders, veterinary clinics and shelters). This policy also states that the conditions under which the animals are kept and presented for sale must be detailed in a code of practice with compliance with the code of practice made a condition of licensing.

1.3 For the purpose of this position paper, a pet shop is a shop or place used for the conduct of a business, including a market, in the course of which an animal is kept for the purposes of sale¹.

1.4 This position paper sets out what the RSPCA believes should be the minimum requirements of a licensing system and code of practice for the sale of companion animals from pet shops.

1.5 RSPCA Australia does not support the sale of animals from pet shops that do not meet the standards of welfare management and care outlined in this position paper.

2 Licensing system

2.1 All pet shops must be registered with the relevant local or state/territory government authority where the business is conducted. In addition, the shop must also be licensed to sell animals. All registration and licences must be renewed annually. These licences must be on public display on the premises.

2.2 Compliance with the Code of Practice must be a condition of registration and licensing. The licensing system must include processes for assessing compliance and dealing with non-compliance or breaches of the Code, with the provision to suspend or withdraw registration and licensing of a pet shop in cases of significant or repeated non-compliance.

3 Code of practice

3.1 General requirements

3.1.1 The code must contain clear, mandatory and enforceable animal welfare standards. It may also contain guidelines to provide additional detail.

¹ Definition of a pet shop taken from the NSW Animal Welfare Codes of Practice: Animals in Pet Shops (2008).

- 3.1.2 The code must apply to all animals, including fish, mammals, reptiles, birds and invertebrates, while recognising that invertebrate (and some other species) may not have equal status under animal protection legislation.
- 3.1.3 The code must be a comprehensive document which covers the acquisition, keeping and sale of animals in pet shops.
- 3.1.4 The code must require that all animals held for sale are only obtained from government registered or licensed breeders or suppliers (including shelters) who themselves comply with similar welfare-focused Codes for the particular sector (See also Position Paper A5 Responsible companion animal breeding)

3.2 Specific requirements

The code must include specific standards to ensure that:

- 3.2.1 All people involved with the care of animals are trained and competent to carry out their duties. Competency should include the health, welfare and management of all species kept in the pet shop and the ability to assess animal-to-owner matches, and can be demonstrated by accreditation, certification and continuing education.
- 3.2.2 All animal housing facilities are designed and maintained to provide a clean, comfortable and safe environment and to meet the behavioural and physiological needs of the particular animal (see policies A9.1 and 9.4).
- 3.2.3 Animals are housed in compatible groups and protected from injury or distress caused by people or other animals. This should take into account visual, olfactory, vocal as well as physical contact.
- 3.2.4 The general environment, enclosures, feeding and watering equipment as well as bedding, environmental enrichment and other equipment, are maintained in a clean, hygienic and functional state and measures are in place to minimise the risks of transfer of infectious diseases.
- 3.2.5 Where animals are confined in a restricted environment (such as in display enclosures) they are given regular opportunities for exercise and socialisation, as appropriate for the species (see policies A9.2 and 9.3). Minimum exercise requirements for different species must be set out in the code.
- 3.2.6 All animals receive appropriate and sufficient feed, water, attention and health checks to ensure a high standard of welfare. Procedures are in place to ensure that all animals are appropriately cared for during both business and non-business hours.
- 3.2.7 A contractual arrangement is in place with a veterinary surgeon to provide veterinary services as required, including emergency treatments and euthanasia.
- 3.2.8 All animals receive vaccinations, treatments for parasites and other preventative health care appropriate for their age and species. (See Position paper A2 Adoption guidelines for minimum requirements for vaccination.)
- 3.2.9 All dogs and cats (and other species where appropriate) are desexed, and identified by microchip before sale (see Position Paper A2 Adoption guidelines for minimum requirements for desexing and microchipping). For species other than cats and dogs where desexing is appropriate but has not been carried out prior to sale, a pre-paid desexing voucher is provided.

- 3.2.10 Animals offered for sale are of an appropriate age (taking into account their physical, social and behavioural development and ability to feed independently) and are in good health. Minimum age requirements for different species must be set out in the code.
- 3.2.11 A genuine attempt is made to assess the needs of the purchaser and their capacity to meet the requirements of responsible companion animal ownership (see policy A1) and match these with the most appropriate animal.
- 3.2.12 Purchasers are provided with:
- A veterinary certificate recording all vaccinations and any other treatments administered to the animal (including desexing and microchipping).
 - The name and contact details of the registered breeder or supplier of the animal (see 3.1.4).
 - Free information setting out the basic biology, care, housing, health and welfare requirements of the particular animal sold, as well as advice about where to seek further assistance or information (such as relevant websites or contact numbers).
- 3.2.13 Purchasers are able to return an animal, for whatever reason, within fourteen days of purchase. Where the animal is returned during this period because of a pre-existing condition (including illness or congenital disorders), the pet shop must provide veterinary treatment and reimburse the purchaser the cost of the animal and any veterinary treatment provided.
- 3.2.14 All animals sold are appropriately restrained or placed in a suitable container and transported in a way that minimises stress or discomfort (see policies A9.5 and F1).
- 3.2.15 Pet shops keep accurate records and provide regular reports to the licensing authority. This should include details of: the source of animals (including dates and place of birth of animals and contact details of the breeder or supplier), the sale of animals (including contact details of owner), any deaths, euthanasia, veterinary treatment, worming, vaccination, and other compliance records.
- 3.2.16 Animals are not supplied or sold for use as live food, e.g. feeding of live rodents to carnivorous reptiles or the supply of small 'feeder' fish to feed predatory fish species.
- 3.2.17 Animals that are not sold within a reasonable period of time (dependent on the species and any key socialisation periods for young animals) are returned to the breeder or supplier. Maximum time periods for different species must be set out in the code. Where return is not possible, they should be taken to a local government pound, the RSPCA or other reputable animal rescue organisation.