

## **Pet store blocks Christmas impulse buys**

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**By Jack Hawke**

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A pet store has made the unprecedented decision to stop selling cats and dogs before what is traditionally the busiest time of the year.

The Melbourne store, Pets at Home, has decided to remove all puppies and kittens in an effort to prevent impulse buying of pets and will instead work with the Lord Smith Animal Hospital to encourage people to adopt and "re-home" animals.

"This is a first," Lord Smith head Ric Holland said, adding that an animal shelter teaming up with a pet store was an unusual occurrence.

"It's a unique partnership, one that is ultimately for the benefit of the animals.

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"It shows they're serious about being an ethical pet store."

Customers will no longer be able to purchase cats, kittens, puppies or dogs and will instead have to apply to adopt at a in-store adoption centre.

Applicants will then undergo a suitability interview to make sure the pet will fit in well with its new environment.

People are also encouraged to bring down their existing pets to find if they will get on with the new additions.

"A lot of pets are not sold in good condition: they're not de-sexed, not vaccinated and not vet-checked," Mr Holland said.

All animals adopted and re-homed will be de-sexed, vet-checked, wormed and microchipped — all for an adoption fee that is heavily subsidised by Lord Smith.

"If pet stores are going to survive they need to change," Pets At Home director David Herman said.

"This is an absolute non-for-profit venture... it's not a gimmick.

"Some people may think we're crazy but this is the way we are going to do it."

Pet stores have long irked animal rights groups, with several under the spotlight just last weekend for selling "iPonds" — a tiny fish tank that doubles as a speaker — but this new move had the support of at least one major animal welfare agency.

"It sounds very good," RSPCA spokesman Hugh Wirth said.

"The RSPCA has always had a policy that cats and dogs should not be sold."

Dr Wirth said it would be a tremendous thing if other pet stores were to follow the example.

