

ANIMALS (REGULATION OF SALE) BILL 2008

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Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) [4.41 p.m.]: I speak in debate on the Animals (Regulation of Sale) Bill 2008.

I have previously spoken in this House on the concerns raised in the electorate of Lake Macquarie about the welfare of unwanted companion animals.

It is unacceptable that some 63,000 animals are euthanased each year in New South Wales and it is deeply concerning to many that the pet industry produces a supply that so greatly exceeds sustainable demand.

My office has received an ongoing stream of emails and letters supporting the legislation and/or a parliamentary inquiry into the pet industry. It is obvious that there is widespread and passionate concern for animal welfare and that that is reinforced by relevant facts. It is appropriate to recognise that those involved in the pet industry opposing the bill have made representations. I have no doubt that those who have made such representations are very genuine in their beliefs, and that the vast majority are responsible and respectable breeders and traders.

It is unacceptable that the community bears the cost of destroying unwanted animals.

Councils within my electorate have reported to me the enormous and costly burden of dealing with unwanted pets. Wyong Shire Council advises that it spends more than \$880,000 on its animal care facility and mandatory compliance responsibilities under the Companion Animals Act.

Lake Macquarie City Council does not operate an animal pound and relies on the RSPCA through an agreement—which was recently re-signed—costing \$170,000 annually and must also cover the significant cost of deploying its own staff in the collection and handling of unwanted animals.

Even with the best intentions of the Companion Animal Act, the way many in our community treat companion animals is not good enough. Too many people choose to buy animals without making, or perhaps even conceiving, a commitment to the responsibility of ongoing ownership. Too many animals are bred without good reason and are consequently killed, and the cost to the community is onerous and difficult to justify.

Local government in New South Wales pays a high price to support the status quo of the pet industry.

The bill introduced by the member for Sydney is a genuine attempt to address a significant problem in our society, where many companion animals are seen as consumer items and often dealt with as a disposable item.

Eliminating or greatly reducing impromptu decisions on pet ownership would reduce these outcomes. The bill would align the production of animals more closely with the actual demand rather than with the ability of the pet industry to sell. It would link the sale of animals to a preconceived intention, rather than a whim inspired by the sight of a cute puppy or kitten.

There are strong ethical arguments about the euthanasia of many thousands of animals and there are weighty questions about the cost of it. The Animals (Regulation of Sale) Bill is an attempt to deal with the issues surrounding the oversupply of companion animals. While the bill will clearly not be supported by the House, it and the sentiments expressed by other members—even those not supporting it—should serve as a wake-up call to the industry to further improve its policies and codes of practice, and to drive out the unscrupulous minority.

I have listened to the contributions of members from both sides of the House, including the members for East Hills and Terrigal. There is a common sentiment that we should support the animals that are cruelly treated, but there is a difference in approach. The member for East Hills said that it was unnecessary to establish a committee and the member for Terrigal disagreed.

Given the representations made to me, if this bill is not supported, it would be appropriate for this House to establish a select committee to examine the issues affecting companion animals and the pet industry.