

## **Animal Welfare in Shelters Bill 2023**

A Bill for an Act to improve legislation on the adoption process and welfare of animals in shelters. In concordance with the ongoing reform of Victoria's *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986*, this Bill specifically targets domestic animal shelters. The Bill's objective is to ensure proper animal care within and away from animal shelters by reforming staff management, animal training and shelter standards, as well as creating a more informed space for individuals looking to become foster parents.

The Bill aims to directly improve shelter animals' welfare; welfare referring to the quality of life experienced by an animal. In recent years, the number of shelter animals reclaimed, returned or rehoused has decreased, contributing to the overcrowding of Victorian animal shelters. Consequently, this has had adverse effects on animal welfare. The Bill addresses this by implementing strategies to facilitate a rehoming process that is better for animals, and their owners.

A Bill for an Act relating to Animal Welfare in Shelters.

To be enacted by the Y's Victorian Youth Parliament.

## **PART I—Preliminary**

### **Clause 1 Purpose**

The main purposes of this Act are;

- (a) To implement reforms to improve the welfare standards of shelters and animal foster homes;
- (b) To reduce shelter overcrowding by incentivising and improving the rehousing process;
- (c) To establish a board that oversees the continued protection of shelter animal welfare.

### **Clause 2 Commencement**

This Bill shall commence upon receiving assent from the Youth Governor of Victoria.

### **Clause 3 Definitions**

In this Bill;

- (a) **AWMB** means the Animal Welfare Monitoring Board;
- (b) **Foster carer** means a person who takes care of an animal outside a pound or shelter until the animal is fit for sale and returned to the pound or shelter for rehoming;
- (c) **Fostering agreement** means a written agreement that identifies the contractual obligations and expectations between the foster carer and the fostering provider or organisation;
- (d) **Large sized animal** means an animal which, when measured to their shoulder, is at a height above 70 centimetres;
- (e) **Medium sized animal** means an animal which, when measured to their shoulder, is at a height of between 40 and 70 centimetres;
- (f) **Senior animals** means those seven years and older;

- (g) **Shelter** means a place where stray, lost, abandoned or surrendered domestic animals, mostly dogs and cats, are housed;
- (h) **Small sized animal** refers to an animal which, when measured to their shoulder, is at a height of below 40 centimetres;
- (i) **Standard pen** refers to a pen that houses an animal within a shelter that doesn't require quarantine;
- (j) **Time test** refers to the basic formula by which a fostering or shelter organisation creates relevant time allocated to each staff member to care for assigned animals; *number of animals x 15 minutes = minutes of staff time*. 15 minutes symbolises the approximation of 9 minutes cleaning time per animal and 6 minutes feeding time per animal;
- (k) **Quarantine pen** refers to a pen that houses an animal within a shelter that requires to be separated from other animals due to illness or disease.

## **PART II—Establishment**

### **Clause 4 Establishment of the Animal Welfare Monitoring Board (AWMB)**

- 4.1 An Animal Welfare Monitoring Board (AWMB) shall be established;
- (a) AWMB shall ensure animal welfare standards in shelters are being adequately met.
- 4.2 AWMB shall work in conjunction with Animal Welfare Victoria.
- 4.3 AWMB shall consist of but not be limited to;
- (a) Certified veterinarians;
- (b) Trained animal behaviour therapists;
- (c) Professional animal trainers.
- 4.4 AWMB shall meet every two months.
- 4.5 The role of AWMB shall be;
- (a) To ensure all commercial shelters where animals are kept for business purposes are inspected at least once per year;
- (i) This shall be in compliance with animal welfare legislation.
- (b) To conduct research into animal shelter environments and alter their standards in accordance / as necessary;
- (c) To advertise and campaign for shelter animal adoption;
- (i) Advertisements shall be online;
- (ii) AWMB shall create a new website for all online advertisements.

### **Clause 5 Rehousing Strategies**

- 5.1 Rehousing foster agreements shall include a minimum 2-page document outlining the following;
- (a) How to clean and groom the animals;
- (b) How and what to feed them for their optimal health;
- (c) What quantity of food the animal needs based on size, including;
- (i) Frequency of feeding;

- (ii) What type of food is needed.
  - (d) What medication an animal should receive and how to administer it to them.
- 5.2 There shall be increased resources and access to information provided to foster carers regarding the following;
  - (a) Appropriate foods for the fostered animals within the foster system;
  - (b) Medical needs for animals and access to good animal health care.
- 5.3 Foster carers shall be educated on how to take adequate care of their fostered animals.
- 5.4 There shall be increased online advertisement regarding the animal foster and adoption system, including;
  - (a) Fostering and animal shelter sites advertised on different social media platforms;
    - (i) Sites shall only display reputable foster carers as determined by the AWMB.
- 5.5 A digital copy of the foster agreement shall be included on the AWMB website.

## **Clause 6 Management of Staff**

- 6.1 Hired staff and potential staff shall undergo a new management system, including;
  - (a) Increased staff member to animal ratio to 1 staff member for every 30 animals;
  - (b) Training classes or programs shall be offered to those who wish to be hired as staff;
    - (i) This shall be prior to potential staff working with or adopting animals.
- 6.2 Time tests undertaken by managers of foster shelters and organisations shall be reformed;
  - (a) Managers must attend their shelter/s or organisation/s at least once a month to undertake relevant time tests;

- (b) Free time and socialisation time shall be added to the time test;
  - (c) Time tests should be altered based on the breed, species and size of the animal;
  - (d) The basic time test formula shall be updated to the number of animals x 25 minutes; which shall include;
    - (i) 9 minutes cleaning time;
    - (ii) 6 minutes feeding time;
    - (iii) 10 minutes of staff to animal socialisation free time.
- 6.3 The mental health of staff at foster shelters shall be prioritised;
- (a) Shelters shall offer optional sessions run by trained therapists which may include;
    - (i) Weekly meditation sessions;
    - (ii) Weekly group therapy sessions.

## **Clause 7 Incentivising Adoption**

- 7.1 Local councils shall not set an application fee for enrolling foster carers to the Foster Care Registration Scheme.
- 7.2 There shall be a free first-year registration when an animal is adopted from a shelter;
- (a) This shall be applied to all local councils.
- 7.3 An incentivisation scheme shall be established for senior animals, which shall include;
- (a) Discounted annual registration fees;
  - (b) Discounted pet food for one year;
  - (c) Discounted veterinary appointments for one year.
- 7.4 Veterinary clinics shall be approved to sell registrations;
- (a) Local councils shall be responsible for approving eligible veterinary clinics.

## **Clause 8 Animal Health and Individual Care**

- 8.1 Daily enrichment activities and socialisation for animals shall occur in an open environment within the shelter.

- 8.2 Animals staying at pounds and shelters shall have a set number of hours of enrichment activity, to be determined by the AWMB.
- 8.3 Animals housed in isolation due to disease or infection shall have a set number of hours of enrichment activity, to be determined by the AWMB.
- 8.4 Weekly dog obedience classes shall be mandated for every shelter;
  - (a) These shall be facilitated by an external organisation;
    - (i) A qualified trainer shall be present at all times;
    - (ii) Obedience classes shall be hosted by the shelter.

## **Clause 9 Physical Environment Regulations**

- 9.1 Upon admittance to the shelter, animals shall be assessed to determine the appropriate enclosure. This shall include;
  - (a) Identification of size (large, medium, or small);
  - (b) Identification of breed;
  - (c) Identification of age;
  - (d) Evidence of injury or illness.
- 9.2 All standard animal pens in shelters shall include;
  - (a) Appropriately sized sleeping area;
  - (b) Positioning away from quarantine pens;
  - (c) Natural lighting or lighting that replicates this.
- 9.3 Pens shall be no smaller than the following;
  - (a) Large animals pens shall be 120 centimetres in width and 180 centimetres in height;
  - (b) Medium animals pens shall be 100 centimetres in width and 180 centimetres in height;
  - (c) Small animals pens shall be 90 centimetres in width and 180 centimetres in height.
- 9.4 Should multiple animals be housed together in the same pen, pens shall increase in size;
  - (a) Large animal pens shall increase 1.7 square metres per increase of one animal;

- (b) Medium animal pens shall increase 1.2 square metres per increase of one animal;
  - (c) Small animal pens shall increase 1 square metres per increase of one animal.
- 9.5 All quarantine animal pens in shelters shall be of the same standard as the standard animal pens.
  - (a) Pens shall be stored in a separate location to all other pens.
- 9.6 Pens shall be regularly maintained and cleaned on a daily basis.
- 9.7 Regular cleaning of shelters shall consist of;
  - (a) Wiping down areas and equipment such as;
    - (i) Areas regularly containing animals;
    - (ii) Animal housing areas;
    - (iii) Other indoor areas;
    - (iv) Equipment used by staff;
    - (v) Animal toys.
  - (b) Sanitising and disinfecting areas such as;
    - (i) Infectious animal areas;
    - (ii) Quarantine areas;
    - (iii) Equipment used on infectious or quarantined animals.
- 9.8 Extensive cleaning of pens and facilities shall occur every two months, and shall consist of;
  - (a) All cleaning that is not done on a regular basis.
- 9.9 All shelters shall have a shared outdoor area for animals, which shall be;
  - (a) Securely enclosed to ensure that no animal escapes;
  - (b) At least 95% covered in grass;
    - (i) The remaining space shall have water bowls for the animals.
  - (c) Inclusive of carrying types of toys for all animals shall be easily available in the area.