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CAT HAVEN
every cat matters

Contribution of the Not for Profit Sector
Productivity Commission
GPO Box 1428
CANBERRA ACT 2601

25 May 2009

Dear Commissioner

Contribution of the not for profit sector

Cat Haven welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Productivity Commission's review into the contribution of the not for profit sector. Our submission focuses on the following terms of reference:

- Assess the extent to which the not-for-profit sector's contributions to Australian society are currently measured, the utility of such measurements and the possible uses of such measurements in helping shape government policy and programs.
- Identify unnecessary burdens or impediments to the efficient and effective operation of community organisations generally, including unnecessary or ineffective regulatory requirements and governance arrangements, while having regard to the need to maintain transparency and accountability.
- Examine the changing nature of relationships between government, business and community organisations in recent times, their general impacts, and opportunities to enhance such relationships to optimise outcomes by the sector and its contribution to society.

Firstly, it may be helpful to provide some context on our organization.

The Cat Welfare Society (WA) Inc., trading as Cat Haven, is the state's foremost cat welfare organization. Cat Haven was established in 1961 with the mission of 'enhancing cat welfare by caring for cats in need and assisting people to live in harmony with cats', and as such, its policy is to never say no to any cat in need. Cat Haven euthanizes almost 7000 of the approximately 9000 cats it takes in every year, and is the only animal shelter in WA to euthanize simply for lack of room.

Among other services, Cat Haven provides:

- 'no cost, no guilt' surrender of cats, 24 hours a day, every day of the year;
- an adoption service;
- a lost and found register;
- discount sterilization and veterinary services for low-income earners;
- the only ranger service exclusively for cats in Australia, providing seven-day service;

- o a service for boarding the pets of people escaping domestic violence; and
- o over-the-phone advice for people seeking help with any cat-related questions or problems.

These services have developed because of community demand for them, and many are provided free of charge. Cat Haven receives no government funding.

Assess the extent to which the not-for-profit sector's contributions to Australian society are currently measured, the utility of such measurements and the possible uses of such measurements in helping shape government policy and programs.

Our main purpose in making this submission is to ensure that the contribution of animal welfare organisations is not overlooked. We feel that its contribution is not measured in any meaningful way, if at all, and that being able to prove our value in hard terms would help us in seeking the grants and permanent funding arrangements that we need so much in order to operate, as well as other forms of support such as regulation.

Animal welfare organisations and volunteers perform a vital role in our community, often fulfilling essential functions in the community that government cannot or will not perform. Animal welfare is unquestionably a shared value of Australian society.

Cat Haven's work is essential in the field of animal control because we provide solutions when no-one else can or will, and we attribute this to our long history of doing just that - the gap we fill in 'official' services has become taken for granted by government and the community, so the gap is not visible. I believe that this part of our work must be recognised, measured and assured for the future because of the essential service to the community that it provides.

Members of the public wishing to responsibly relinquish cats come to Cat Haven because they know the cat will certainly be accepted and cared for; other shelters may be full and therefore unable to accept the cat. We ask for a donation towards the cat's upkeep, but this is not compulsory. This happens all too frequently as people escape domestic violence, are unable to secure housing, experience a dramatic change in their circumstances, and many other reasons. These people want to be responsible towards the cat, and would be committing an offence under the Animal Welfare Act and environmental laws to kill the cat or dispose of it in a public area.

Residential areas have nuisance and lost cats just as they do nuisance and lost dogs, but cats are not dealt with by rangers or by-laws as dogs are (although this is changing in some local government areas, the local laws tend to be flimsy and are not enforced, meaning the problems remain). Imagine the animal welfare and neighbourhood amenity and harmony crisis that would exist if Cat Haven were not able to assist hundreds of people each year with its ranger service, free advice, conditional and supported cat trap hire, and our willingness to accept lost, feral and trapped cats free of charge.

Similarly, we also operate a low-cost lost and found service that is well utilised by the community.

Cat Haven and, arguably, other welfare shelters operate a pet adoption services that we believe are superior to adopting a pet from a breeder or pet shop because we offer the service that commercial operations may not offer, because we put cat welfare first.

Cat Haven matches cats' known characteristics to the needs and situation of clients to ensure a harmonious match. The feedback we receive from adoptive families is overwhelmingly positive.

The only animal welfare agency in WA to receive government funding is RSPCA (WA), and even then this funding can only be used for providing education on animal welfare. This is quite incredible given that the RSPCA is relied upon to enforce the state's Animal Welfare Act, yet receives no operational funding to do so. Again, this is a highly regarded and well-recognised organisation and its services are demanded by the community.

Identify unnecessary burdens or impediments to the efficient and effective operation of community organisations generally, including unnecessary or ineffective regulatory requirements and governance arrangements, while having regard to the need to maintain transparency and accountability.

Liz Plummer of Saving Animals From Euthanasia (SAFE) Karratha made the following points in regard to this part of your inquiry:

1. "Almost every grant we apply for wants to fund a 'project'. We battle every day just to carry out our core business and to keep volunteers to enable us to do this. Other Grants will not fund everyday running costs. We are getting better at creativity with respect to how our huge vet account can become a 'project'."
2. "The short time between announcing grants and the need for applications to be submitted is often a problem, and then we get bombarded with two or three grant possibilities all at once. A better spread would be welcome, as well as earlier notice."
3. "There have never been any grants specifically for Animal Welfare/Rescue. We always have to justify ourselves within the realms of 'Community/Environment'. The grant writer often has to think out of the square and be very inventive".
4. "Sometimes the amount on offer does not justify the work involved, yet we feel we should at least make the effort because every little bit counts".

Cat Haven concurs on all of these points.

Examine the changing nature of relationships between government, business and community organisations in recent times, their general impacts, and opportunities to enhance such relationships to optimise outcomes by the sector and its contribution to society.

Cat Haven has traditionally filled the gap in services left by government and the commercial sector. Recently, though, we have sought to partner with local government in particular to achieve the mutual aims of improved cat welfare and the provision of services demanded by the public. It should be noted that in all cases, Cat Haven has been the instigator of these fee-for-service relationships.

Relationships with government

Examples include providing a cat ranger service and ranger training for the City of Canning (see attachment), and offering to provide pound facilities for local governments enacting local laws for cat control, such as the City of Joondalup.

On several occasions, Cat Haven has also provided input to local governments drafting local cat regulations, in order to achieve the mutual benefit of humane, effective and workable local cat laws.

The welfare sector especially promotes sterilisation of domestic animals, as overpopulation and breeding behaviours are recognised as the main causes of nuisance cat behaviour and compromised welfare. Perth's Cat Sterilisation Society, for example, maintains a relationship with the State's Department of Housing and Works to assist public housing tenants with identified cat problems to access veterinary services and possibly relinquish some of their animals.

Relationships with the private sector

Cat Haven facilitates better animal welfare by providing low-cost veterinary services for members of the public who would not otherwise be able to afford such care for their pets (indeed, often prompting them to do so), and even pet transport if it is required. Commercial veterinarians simply could not afford to provide this on the scale demanded, so it is not a case of taking business from them, as these clients would not have been using their services anyway. It must be acknowledged that the pro-bono work of many veterinarians is vital in helping animal welfare organisations reduce their costs and provide services, although there is no requirement for them to do so, as is the case in some other professional industries.

If it were not for animal welfare organisations having the existing infrastructure and services ready to partner with, governments would need to establish these arrangements themselves at considerable cost and effort and would arguably be unable to run them as cheaply, efficiently or effectively as we do. We note that the situation may be different in other states of Australia, and this is another impediment to our work in Western Australia.

Conclusion

- Animal welfare organisations are universally run as not-for-profit operations.
- Animal welfare is a strongly-held value in the Australian community, so the contribution of the animal welfare sector in providing services demanded by the public is essential, and yet often taken for granted.
- Animal welfare organisations fill the gaps in government service provision.
- We are funded largely by public donations, membership dues and adoption services aimed at cost recovery; for some, fee-for-service operations are possible. There exists no government funding of our operations.
- Grant funding is difficult to obtain, as animal welfare is not recognised as a necessary community service, and granting purposes do not address our needs.

Cat Haven appreciates the opportunity to make comment and help address some of the problems faced by Australia's not for profit sector.

Yours sincerely,



Liddell Williams
on behalf of Committee of Management
Cat Welfare Society Inc. trading as Cat Haven

encl.: 'Cat trapping approved', *Canning Times*, Tuesday 29 July 2008, p. 1