

Notes on the Code of Practice for pet shops

The Animal Welfare Code of Practice: Animals in Pet Shops was issued by the NSW Department of Primary Industries in late 2008. The Code “outlines the principles that everyone involved in the keeping and selling of animals through pet shops must use to protect the welfare of the animals in their care.”

The Code does not limit the application of other laws such as the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and it includes ‘standards’ which are legally enforceable and ‘guidelines’ which are not.

For example, “At the time of purchase of an animal, clients must be offered, at no charge, accurate written information on the care of the animal purchased” (10.1.4) is a standard which the pet shop is legally required to meet. However, “The active promotion of desexing for cats and dogs at the point of sale is strongly encouraged” (10.2.1) is a guideline and the pet shop is under no legal obligation to promote desexing.

Compliance with the Code can be enforced by persons authorised under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (RPSCA, Animal Welfare League, Police).

Members of the community cannot prosecute or investigate breaches of the Code, but they can report them and even more simply, bring them to the attention of the pet shop proprietor. If you’re concerned about the standards in a pet shop, there are some simple questions you can ask – the numbers in brackets are the reference numbers from the Code. All questions relate to the standards (the ‘must do’ parts of the Code), not guidelines. **To view the Code in full, go to the NSW Department of Primary Industries website.**

- Does the pet shop have a copy of the Code of Practice? (4.1.1.2)
- Does the animal enclosure include a “quiet, dark and well ventilated area” that allows the animal to take sleep breaks? (5.1.1.5)
- Is the enclosure out of draughts and does it have adequate shade when exposed to direct sunlight? (5.2.1.2)
- Is bedding provided for dogs and cats, and is it clean? (12.1.9)
- Does the animal receive ‘behavioural enrichment’? (eg do they have toys?) (7.1.1.7)
- Does the animal have a health record/chart? (8.1.1.1)
- Who is the vet for the animals in the pet shop? (“For the benefit of staff, the contact details for the veterinarian must be displayed in a prominent position within the pet shop” 8.2.1.2)
- “A program to control parasites must be in place” (8.2.1.5). What is the program?

- What are the animals fed? (9.1.1 says they 'must receive a balanced and complete diet' – for packaged pet foods, the label should specify whether or not the food provides a 'complete and balanced' diet)
- Are food and water containers clean? (9.1.4 "Food and water containers must be removed and cleaned immediately if noticed to be contaminated")
- Are the containers positioned to avoid spillage or contamination? (9.1.6)
- Age of dogs and cats for sale – they must be 8 weeks or older (10.1.9) and cannot be advertised or offered for sale until 8 weeks of age (12.1.1)
- At time of purchase clients must be offered, at no charge, accurate written information on the care of the animal purchased (10.1.4)
- Dogs and cats must not be sold to people under the age of 18 years (10.1.1)
- Are cats and dogs microchipped and vaccinated? Do they provide (can they show) a copy of the vaccination certificate? (12.1.2 & 12.1.3)