

## The Shelter/Rescue/Pound Pet Scam

This is a relatively common pet scam and relatively easy to avoid. Most cases aren't reported because the people who are scammed simply feel too stupid that they have been caught out. It goes like this..

### 1. You get an email or a Facebook message (unsolicited)

It says that XYZ shelter needs your help, they are overstocked and THIS puppy/kitten/dog will be euthanased on Friday if you don't rescue it.

Sometimes the shelter says to **CLICK HERE TO SEE THE ANIMAL** at which point you accidentally click on a virus or Trojan or worm or keylogger or ransomware or other nasty that infects your computer, OR

They insert a picture of a pet into the email or FB message – it's always a gorgeous animal that you can't believe would not be adopted – and sometimes it's even wearing a bandage.

The email or FB message often looks stunningly legitimate – and may even include a known logo from a well known rescue centre. On FB pages, some even start a "countdown to euthanasia" to really get your adrenaline going!



### 2. The email sometimes offers the pet at lower than the normal shelter rescue price you would expect to pay

That's the hook that gets you in, if the "heart tug" technique above hasn't already. Getting something for "less than usual cost" is attractive for many people and may offset transport costs.

### 3. The email invites you to call the "shelter" to inquire and may offer a website to check "legitimacy".

So you check the website, or call the shelter and they seem legitimate, but may be a mobile phone – it could be anyone, anywhere.

So you check the website and it looks legitimate, and may even look like it's a shelter that you can check in the Yellow Pages, BUT if you look carefully these websites:

- ✚ May have no physical address listed;
- ✚ Often have no local Australia PO Box address;
- ✚ May have ".com.ni" or ".com.cm" endings on the internet addresses – a sure sign they are from Nigeria or Cameroon, but they may not have either. BE CAREFUL! ".cm" (Cameroon) looks just like "com" if you are reading quickly.
- ✚ Often use the logos or photos of other businesses on the websites to make themselves look "official" (one recent case even used the WA Government logo!)
- ✚ May have odd grammar or spellings in the site
- ✚ Email addresses may not match the website address and may have different endings on the email address like the ones above.
- ✚



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4. So you want to see the animal, and you are told that the animal is sick/in quarantine and won't be available for adoption until Friday, but they can ship it to you if you just put down a deposit....

Snap – they have got you the minute you give them your credit card details for the deposit. Or they ask to you send money via Western Union...

Some even come back and ask for additional funds for medication/transport etc.

### **There is no pet and never was.**

All the paperwork, the documents you have are fraudulent, as was the website and email addresses.

The bad guys have your money, and you have a broken heart. We will never know if a pet was euthanased.

### **SO HOW DO YOU AVOID THE SCAM?**

**Rule 1: Pets are not an impulse buy.** If you are buying a pet “because it might be destroyed” you need to reconsider buying the pet at all. These emotional games can mean you end up with a disaster!

**Rule 2. Get your pets locally when possible.** There are thousands of wonderful pets within 1000km of where you live, why import one from Africa? Worse still, Australia has really strict quarantine laws, and most people trying to bring pets into Australia “from overseas” spend months getting the pet through quarantine.

**Rule 3: A deal that looks too good to be true usually is.** If the pet looks too cheap, there might not be a pet.

**Rule 4: Check that there is a real pet.** DO NOT ask for photos as these may be frauds. Physically go and check, or get a friend to check, or ask for the location and pay the local veterinarian to go and check. If you can't see a shelter pet, then it's not real.

**Rule 5: If you are buying over the web, always pay in a way that can be traced.** Use a credit card (which can be reversed, but DO NOT give the number to someone to process), OR a cheque (but NEVER a bank cheque or cash cheque), OR demand an account number for direct debit (and then check the location of the account!).

**Rule 6: Don't trust the paperwork.** Demand copies of paperwork prior to purchase, and phone the shipping company in advance.

**Rule 7. If you do get caught, report it!** Departments of Fair Trading collect important statistics on these scams, so report your story to them - or to us on [petsaustralia@petsaustralia.org](mailto:petsaustralia@petsaustralia.org)

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