

On Monday 10 March 2025, the Garden Route SPCA embarked on a week-long Outreach campaign which benefitted the community of Golden Valley. Over 150 animals were sterilised at no charge and returned to their owners.

On Thursday 14 March, Ms Van Wyk, a resident of the Golden valley community, took advantage of our mission to assist those in need, and she requested the sterilisation of all four of her female pitbulls. Because two of the dogs were so aggressive, Inspectors were unable to handle them, and Ms Van Wyk loaded the dogs into the SPCA vehicle herself.

The dogs were sedated prior to undergoing surgery and were sterilised among the other 35 animals that were operated on that day. Whilst under anaesthetic, our veterinary assistant immediately summoned our veterinarian to assess the condition of the two adult dogs. In both dogs, multiple single entry puncture wounds and lacerations were evident, with swelling and infection, as well as older bite wounds and scar tissue – indicative of dogs fighting. Early stages of hip dysplasia was suspected in one dog, the other had conjunctivitis in both eyes. It was indisputable that both dogs had clearly suffered for an extended period. Ms Van Wyk had failed to provide her dogs with basic veterinary care. In addition, chaffing mark around the circumference of one of the dog's neck was indicative of chaining.

The SPCA would have been totally irresponsible to send the dogs back to the same property where they had suffered abuse. Rehoming every abused animal that comes through our doors is a fundamental consideration, which is why the initial decision was made to sterilise them in the hope that they could be rehomed.

The Inspector who collected the dogs from Ms Van Wyk, failed to fill in the necessary documentation correctly, and the clinic team did not have a contact number for Ms Van Wyk. Attempts were made to contact the Inspector, however as time progressed and the dogs were becoming more alert as they recovered from anaesthetic, they were becoming increasingly aggressive towards our staff and other animals. Re-homing these dogs would have been irresponsible and neglectful.

Based on their condition, it was clear that these were not 'beloved pets' and together with our veterinarian, a decision was made to put them to sleep whilst we could still safely handle them, without having to use unnecessary restraint which would cause them more distress.

The George by-laws state that residents are only allowed to keep two sterilised dogs on one property. We therefore had no legal ground to confiscate the two

younger pitbulls, as they were in fair condition so they were returned to the owner. An in-depth conversation was subsequently had with Ms Van Wyk where she showed remorse at how she had failed to properly care for the other two dogs and expressed a genuine desire to do better with these two. We believe in educating and assisting owners wherever possible so our Inspectors have been tasked to do regular inspections to determine whether Ms Van Wyk is heeding our instructions on care for these dogs going forward.

An internal investigation was conducted by the SPCA into the conduct of the inspector involved. Cooke says procedures were not followed.

"The owner's ability to care for these animals, as well as consideration of the by-laws, should have been evaluated before the dogs were admitted for sterilisation."

We work at the SPCA because of our passion for animals. As a team of Veterinarians, Inspectors and Nurses, our mission is to rescue, and heal all of the creatures we serve. However, every day we are faced with making heart wrenching decisions to end the lives of animals. We did not create the problem. We do our best to rehome and make a difference for them. But ultimately there are just not enough homes for all the creatures that come through our doors. If we close the doors and say "sorry we are full" - those who we turn away will be drowned, chained and persecuted. So, we do the most difficult thing imaginable. We hold them in their last minutes, we tell them everything is going to be okay, and we give them the essence that lets them rest forever. The ones who are sick and injured - those ones can be justified. But the healthy, happy ones who walk towards you with a wagging tail, the one you've gotten to know so well, because she's been waiting in our overflowing kennels for someone to adopt her for so long- those are the hardest. So, we have sleepless nights, and eventually our families no longer want to hear about how difficult it is anymore. We check social media and see the way in which we are slandered and torn to shreds for not caring and cannot help but feel utterly disheartened. But we will continue to do what is in the best interest of every animal, especially where abuse is unmistakeable!