

A GUIDE TO PURCHASING A PET

This guide outlines all the things you need to consider when purchasing a pet. Consumer agencies across Australia receive many complaints about businesses selling pets. This guide will help you understand your consumer rights.

Thinking of buying a pet?

Owning a pet can be a rewarding experience, with benefits for both your mental and physical well-being. But buying a pet is also a big decision with potentially many years of responsibility, which you need to consider and plan for before committing to your purchase.

Once you buy a pet, you will be responsible for its food, exercise, grooming, housing and veterinary care throughout its life. A pet needs to be selected with these considerations and budget in mind. Ideally, you should choose a pet that fits your lifestyle and current housing situation.

Consider the cost and benefits of veterinary insurance. Veterinary bills can be expensive, so you should also research any potential pet and the typical health risks associated with the breed. Usually, when a pet becomes ill, treatment will be required almost immediately and the bill paid up front.

Selecting a pet that is right for you can be daunting. An unplanned visit to a pet shop, breeder or online pet website is generally not recommended.

There is a good chance your purchase will be impulsive, and you may end up with a pet that is not right for you and your family. There are many resources available to help you select the right pet. So do your research and find out everything you need to know before committing to a purchase.



Your legal rights when buying a pet

Your legal rights for purchasing a product or service are detailed in the Australian Consumer Law (ACL). These rights are the same when you buy a pet. Pets are usually purchased from pet shops, professionally licensed breeders, private sellers, or adopted from your local animal shelter or rescue.

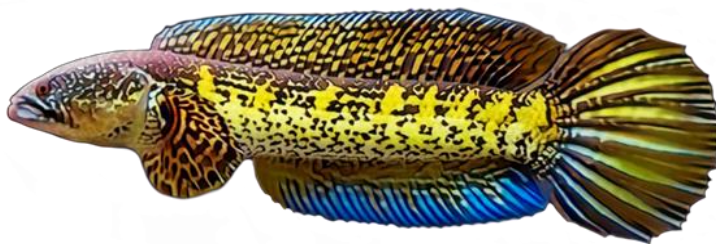
When purchasing from a business, you are protected by consumer guarantees that state a product must:

- match descriptions made by the seller and in advertising.
- do all the things you would typically expect them to do.
- look acceptable.
- be safe, lasting and have no defects.

When it comes to buying a pet, these guarantees mean that the pet should be free of any significant health problems and live for a reasonable time after purchase. When you buy a pet based on a description, the pet must match that description and be suitable for any purpose discussed with or by the seller. It is therefore recommended that you document any discussions in writing and retain any information relied upon when making the purchase.

Please note you do NOT have protections or consumer guarantees when purchasing a pet from a private seller. Some pet owners breed animals to show, and sell pets only occasionally; in this case, consumer protections would also not apply.

If you adopt from an animal shelter or rescue, some consumer guarantees apply; however these are limited because the history of the individual pet is often unknown.



Shopping for a pet

Each pet is an individual and may not have the general characteristics of their breed. Spend time with a prospective pet before purchasing to observe its behaviour and temperament. Make sure that the pet is suitable for your household, lifestyle and budget.

A reputable pet shop, rescue group or registered breeder should have no problems with requests for information and any questions you may have. They are commonly also interested in asking you questions to ensure the pet is a good fit for you and will be well cared for.

Investigate the reputation of the pet shop or breeder you are looking to buy from. Ensure that the business is licensed and is compliant with local laws and regulations. Ask for references from previous customers and read reviews online to see if there have been any past issues.

If possible, meeting the pet's parents is a good idea. This way, you can see how the animals have been looked after and also get an idea of how your pet will be once fully grown. A registered, professional breeder should have no issue with you visiting their breeding premises. If this is not possible, you should ask yourself why. It may be your only indication of future problems. Most pet breeders are highly professional, but some engage in cruel and unethical practices, or lack the requisite knowledge and experience to operate a responsible breeding facility.

Make sure you ask the seller to provide certificates of your pet's appropriate vaccinations and veterinary checks. If a seller can't provide these, you should shop elsewhere.

Buying from a pet shop

The welfare of pets in pet shops has been an ongoing issue in Australia. The pet's health can be compromised if it is not correctly cared for. When you visit a pet shop, watch out for the following:

- All animals should be suitably housed in clean and hygienic conditions. Any waste should be removed throughout the day and cages cleaned regularly.
- Fresh, cool water should always be available and accessible.
- Puppies and kittens should be fed two or three times per day.
- The animals should be held in a cool and ventilated area.
- Always check where the animals were sourced from and do a follow-up check to ensure this information is accurate.

Your rights if something goes wrong

If you change your mind or decide the pet you purchased doesn't suit you, you will not be entitled to a refund or exchange. However, if you purchased a pet and then it fails to meet any of your consumer guarantees, you may have rights to seek a remedy.

Consumer guarantees only apply when the seller is at fault. However, sometimes the seller may have provided warranties or made promises about the quality or performance of the pet, and they must uphold these guarantees. This is why it's essential to get everything in writing when you first purchase your pet. If it's only a conversation, you can follow up with an email asking the seller to confirm what was agreed.

If your consumer guarantees are not met, the remedy you are entitled to will depend on whether the problem is major or minor. A major problem is one that would have stopped you from purchasing the pet in the first place. In this case, you are entitled to choose which remedy the seller must provide. This can be one of the following:

- to have the problem fixed, such as medication or vet treatment.
- exchange your pet for another.
- return your pet for a full refund.

For any minor problems, the seller can choose which remedy they will provide. It is best to negotiate openly and respectfully with the seller until an agreement is reached that you are both happy with. NT Consumer Affairs Fair Trading Officers can advise you on how to negotiate and communicate when seeking a remedy from a business.

Purchasing a pet is quite different from purchasing other products, which can influence your desire to exercise your consumer rights. Once you become attached to the pet, you are less likely to want a refund or exchange. This is why it's so important to thoroughly research the type of pet that suits you best and to ensure you buy from a reputable business. Like buying any product or service, the more research you do at the early stages, the less likely you'll experience an issue later.

Transporting your new pet

Most of Australia's registered pet breeders are located interstate, so for many Territorians, this means you will need to make travel arrangements for the pet to be transported to the Territory. Ideally, it is best to travel interstate and inspect the breeders' property and the parents of the pet you have chosen to purchase. If this isn't possible, see if a family member or friend that lives nearby can do this on your behalf.

If the pet gets sick during transport, the liability sits with whoever arranged and paid for the transport, either the consumer or the breeder. The business that transported the pet will have terms and conditions, and it's essential to read and understand these before you choose a transport company.



Online pet scams

Consumer protection agencies across Australia receive many reports about online pet scams.

Websites are created with authentic-looking images and text. However these photos are usually stolen from other online businesses to create a website that looks genuine. Another method is to advertise or engage with potential buyers through social media platforms. The pricing is always incredibly low to entice interest from prospective purchasers. Once the scammer has your interest and contact details, they will work hard to draw you in to make a purchase, usually requesting a bank transfer. This contact can feel incredibly genuine. Scammers are experts at sounding like an authentic business and can be very convincing. Scammers have been known to provide certificates that look authentic, customer service emails and receipts from delivery companies. But once you have paid them, you won't hear from them again, and the pet will not arrive.

Pets can be bought safely online, but you must remain vigilant about potential scams. If you're considering purchasing a pet online, please follow these tips to avoid being scammed:

- Request to see the pet via a video call with the breeder, including ongoing videos if the pet remains in the breeder's care for a period of time prior to purchase.
- Check online reviews.
- Verify if the breeder's website or social media profile is legitimate by searching for independent reviews online.
- Search Google with the seller's name and the word 'scam'. If it is a scam, someone has probably already identified it as such.
- Perform a location search of the breeder's address and check it on Google street view.
- Check the Australian directory of approved and accredited breeders.
- Compare pricing and get a sense of the market value of the pet you want to purchase. Any site that offers the pet for a considerably lower price is suspect.
- Perform a search of the BSB provided by the seller to check the location of the bank.
- Be wary of bad grammar, spelling or sentence structure within the website or in written communication with the seller.
- Be aware of emotional manipulation and talk to friends and family if you suspect something is fishy.
- Do not rush into a purchase. Impulsive purchasing makes you very susceptible to scammers.

If you have any suspicions about the seller, please contact us for advice. Report all scams to NT Consumer Affairs and the Scamwatch website: <https://www.scamwatch.gov.au/>



Pet restrictions

The Northern Territory Government regulates the import, possession, and trade of certain animals to protect public health and safety, prevent the introduction and spread of diseases, and preserve biodiversity.

Some examples of animals that are prohibited or restricted in the Northern Territory include:

- Primates: It is illegal to import or possess any primate species, including monkeys, apes, and lemurs.
- Reptiles: Most species of reptiles are protected and require a permit to be kept as pets. Some species, such as venomous snakes and crocodiles, are prohibited.
- Birds: Many species of birds are protected and require a permit to be kept as pets. Some species, such as birds of prey and parrots, are prohibited.
- Feral animals: Certain feral animals, such as foxes, are considered pests and are prohibited as pets.
- Invasive species: Some non-native species, such as certain fish, amphibians, and plants, are considered invasive and are prohibited in the NT.

You can keep some native wildlife in the Northern Territory, however these animals cannot be taken directly from the bush. All native wildlife is protected, and you need a permit to keep either protected or prohibited wildlife in captivity in the Territory. Always buy the animal from a lawful source - this is a person, pet shop or breeder that has a current permit to keep and trade wildlife.



Keeping pets in rental properties in the NT

For most tenancy agreements entered into in the Northern Territory after 1 January 2021, there is a presumption that tenants may have a pet at their rental premises. However, before having a pet on the premises, the tenant must first notify the landlord in writing of their intention to welcome the proposed pet into their family. The landlord then has 14 days to object in writing and make an application to the [Northern Territory Civil and Administrative Tribunal \(NTCAT\) for a determination](#).

If a landlord does not object within the 14 day time frame, you may then bring your pet home. Previously, keeping a pet was at the landlord's discretion and was subject to the terms and conditions of the lease agreement.

A tenant may keep any type of pet at the premises as long as the pet is not considered restricted or prohibited and is reasonable, taking into account the character and nature of the premises, including the appliances, fixtures and fittings on the premises. Pet bonds are not permitted under the *Residential Tenancies Act 1999* in the Northern Territory.

Some exceptions apply. Learn more about your rights and responsibilities regarding pet ownership in rental properties [here](#).

Useful links

- What you need to know before you get a pet: [RSPCA](#)
- Learn about selecting and caring for pets: <https://www.rspca.org.au/>
- Learn about registered pet breeders: <https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/what-is-a-registered-breeder/>
- Contact your local council about pet regulations in your area: <https://www.lgant.asn.au/>
- Learn more about animal welfare in the NT and your responsibilities: <https://nt.gov.au/environment/animals/animal-welfare>
- Keeping protected and prohibited NT wildlife information: <https://nt.gov.au/environment/animals/wildlife-permits/keeping-protected-prohibited-wildlife>
- A Guide to Renting in the Northern Territory: https://consumeraffairs.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/668189/guide-to-renting-in-the-nt.pdf?v=0.4.0