north. Under the Environment Protection Act 1970, the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) fined Willemedra Pty Ltd, trading as Pets at Peace, $5,671 for abandoning industrial waste, according to an EPA press release from September 2008.

"Our investigation was aided by the microchips located in some of the animals.

This identified the pet owners and the vet clinics where the animals were euthanised. After discussions with these parties we were led to Pets At Peace who were contracted to cremate the animals," EPA north west regional manager Jeff Cummins stated in the press release.

Mr Cummins said it was important for companies charged with the responsibility of correctly disposing of animals to do so in an environmentally sound manner.

"The fact that this company on more than one occasion did not ensure these animals were transported securely shows gross negligence and scant regard for the environment and the pet owners who entrusted their pets to them," he said.

Staff miscommunication or poor animal tracking systems can also get companies into trouble. A case reported in 2013 by the *Newcastle Herald* involved a veterinary hospital in NSW that accidentally sent a beloved family dog to the dump instead of the crematorium. The single-parent owner had already paid for the cremation service and a lovely box to keep Henry's ashes in a special spot in their home.

"It might sound stupid, but I wanted him to stay with us, that's all I wanted," the owner reportedly said.

The newspaper reported that the vet hospital arranged to have a separate storage unit for animals to be cremated to avoid a repeat in the future.

Pet aftercare industry lacks regulation

Over the past decade, more stringent environmental laws, increasing pet owner expectations for quality service and online/social media customer feedback have helped to greatly improve industry standards.

The pet aftercare industry in Australia is mostly self-regulated and most businesses are doing a "hand on the heart' honest job," as Janine Phillips from leading urn supplier Furry Souls described it.

Some Australian businesses have gained accreditation through the USA-based International Association of Pet Cemeteries and Crematories (IAOPCC) — "the recognised leader in the pet aftercare profession"[3].

The IAOPCC is the only organisation with published recommended procedures for every step of the pet cremation process, including transportation, each type of pet cremation, readily retrievable records, facility standards and continuing education for pet crematorium staff members.

"Currently, there is not a mandated regulatory system governing pet cemeteries/ crematories in the U.S. so there is no concrete data regarding the number of pet cremations and/or burials that take place each year. This tends to be the case in most countries," explained Donna Shugart Bethune, Executive Director of the IAOPCC. The Australian pet industry also lacks data around the number of pet cremations and/or burials, as Mr Fraser from the PIAA confirmed.

In 2009, the Yellow Pages listed 138 cemeteries and crematoriums for pets in Australia — an increase of 27 businesses in just two years[4]! These companies provide a range of services, from pickup of deceased pets to burial, cremations and cemetery services, such as headstones and other burial requirements.

In 2013, 164 pet cemeteries, crematoriums and supplies businesses were listed in the Yellow Pages, with Queensland having the highest at 51 followed by New South Wales (44), Victoria (41), Western Australia (9), South Australia (8), Tasmania (7), Australian Capital Territory (2) and Northern Territory (2) .

According to the *Contribution of the Pet Care Industry to the Australian Economy (7th Edition, 2010)* report, based on the assumption that an average pet burial/cremation costs $200 and that 5% of the estimated 515,000 dogs that passed away

in 2009 were buried/cremated, the total value of this market segment is $5.2 million.

According to a 2013 press release by Australia's largest veterinary group Greencross Limited announcing the purchase of its first crematorium in Queensland, the pet cremation services industry in Australia is worth about $20 million.

This figure only covers pet cremation —so many other services and products support the aftercare industry! How can Australian companies grow and remain competitive in a multi-million dollar, fast-changing market without aftercare industry standards and guidelines, and industry-run professional development opportunities to pave the way?

How will a lack of regulatory guidance impact on the future of the aftercare market and even pet ownership? After all, the grief that comes with losing a pet — not to mention the traumatic experience from a botched-up cremation — can be the difference between people getting another companion animal or not.

Mr Fraser said the PIAA is "considering looking at developing industry guidelines at some stage". Many industry professionals welcome this decision, including Dr Johnson from the AVA.

"Like all industries, the pet funeral industry should be well-regulated and would be to a certain extent by the Fair Trading act(s). Similar guidelines to the human industry would be appropriate; ensuring the security, identification and proper care of the beloved pet prior to burial or cremation, dignity and value for service."

Dr Johnson also questioned the ethical succession plan of pet cemeteries if the properties or businesses were to be sold. That's a good point! Take a look at what happened with Atkinson's Pet Cemetery, South Australia's first pet graveyard established at Roseworthy in 1972, and sold to the Hickinbotham Group in 2011 to be part of a new housing estate.

A South Australia's Sunday Mail article (14 April 2012) reported some pet owners had paid up to $400 for a plot, coffin and burial service, and now had to collect their pet's tombstones and remains before the development began (scheduled to begin for at least a decade).

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