

Pro forma E – 146 responses received

Merrin Thompson,

Dear Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to lodge a submission to the Inquiry into the use of exotic animals in circuses and the exhibition of cetaceans in New South Wales.

I strongly oppose the use and exploitation of all non-human animals for human entertainment, and I fully support a complete ban on the NSW exhibition of exotic animals and cetaceans, and an end to their breeding for the purposes of exhibition.

The exploitation of non-human animals forced to 'perform' can lead to suffering and pain, and 'normalises' the objectification, ridicule and lack of respect shown towards sentient and highly intelligent and complex beings.

I welcome the Inquiry's Terms of Reference relating to exotic animals and cetaceans. I also acknowledge and support the evidence and science, which confirms that all non-human animals are sentient beings, possessing individual capacities to feel and suffer, and a desire and need to express their uniqueness and natural behaviours.

All non-human animals are equally deserving and entitled to rights, respect and specifically tailored welfare protections enshrined under strictly monitored and enforced legislation. No sentient being should be born into captivity or taken from the wild to be held captive or forced to perform for human entertainment.

My key concerns in response to the committee's Terms of Reference are outlined below.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Due to their uniqueness and intelligence, it is simply not possible to meet the physical, mental and behavioural needs of any wild (non-domesticated) animal, or marine mammal held in captive, unnatural and artificial environments, including those who have been bred into captivity.

Exotic animals in circuses

The welfare needs of exotic animals cannot be met because:

- They are wild, non-domesticated animals, held captive in a constantly travelling circus for prolonged periods where natural surroundings, environment, enrichment and stimulation is denied. This leads to boredom, frustration, stress, and stereotypes such as repetitive pacing or swaying.

- They are forcibly confined in small and inadequate enclosures whilst travelling for lengthy periods. This restricts free exercise and the ability to express instinctive and normal behaviours such as hunting and foraging.

- They have limited social interaction with other animals of the same species denying them the ability to engage in important social behaviours, which would normally include complex group social dynamics to meet their unique behavioural and physiological needs.

Captive cetaceans

The welfare needs of captive cetaceans cannot be met because:

- They are confined in severely restricted spaces, which prevents the expression of normal behaviours including the freedom to travel long distances, or to engage in hunting and foraging as experienced naturally in the wild.

- Their housing includes barren and unnatural artificial pools or tanks which limits their ability to explore or enjoy mental stimulation, leading to boredom and frustration as demonstrated by captive cetaceans who display abnormal behaviours including circular swimming, tooth rubbing and repeated intentional collisions with enclosure structures resulting in injury and pain.

- They are confined in small group numbers and therefore are restricted from expressing normal complex social behaviours and interactions.

- Captive dolphins expose their heads above water to a greater degree than wild dolphins because of human activity and therefore suffer increased risks of sunburn and eye problems caused by excessive UV exposure.

Ongoing breeding

Even when wild animals have been captive bred for many generations, they should not be considered domesticated as they retain their 'wildness'. Exotic animals and cetaceans often have long lifespans and ongoing breeding of non-human animal species for human entertainment cannot be justified. Allowing ongoing breeding will merely result in future generations of animals being subjected to conditions which cannot and do not meet their unique needs and will cause ongoing evidenced and inherent welfare risks and suffering for decades.

Adequacy of current legislation

Any exploitation of animals is cruel and the current legislation designed to regulate the exhibition of animals, is inadequate in that it is either out-dated or does not address all the inherent welfare risks relating to captivity.

Any improvements to welfare standards including the adoption of national standards, would only reflect 'minimum' requirements and would not adequately address or resolve the inherent issues associated with captive wild animals being forced to perform including any captured in the wild and those bred in captivity and trained to perform.

Phasing out of exotic animals in circuses and cetaceans in marine parks

It is unethical and unnecessary to use wild animals for human entertainment, exhibition and performance. Many circuses and marine sanctuaries enjoy significant public support and success without the use of and exploitation of captive and exploited animals.

A phasing out of these abhorrent human entertainment activities will allow both types of businesses the time to adapt and prepare in a responsible and ethical manner to cater to the needs and welfare of the captive animals. Given both types of businesses include other current attractions and performances, they can continue to operate as other operators have already done by transitioning from using these animals, or they can independently choose to cease operation.

Other

The captive imprisonment of wild animals forced to perform unnatural, degrading and humiliating tricks for a reward or out of conditioning or fear, results in a cruel life sentence for these animals and mammals for all of their performing lives. This sets a poor example for children regarding dominance and a 'normalised' lack of respect towards non-human animals. Further, the animals are unable to withdraw or rest from frequent human handling and exposure to human crowds and noise where they are forced to perform in a captive environment.

Australia prides itself in strong animal welfare standards and community expectations regarding the housing, use and protection of all non-human animals has evolved significantly around the world and across Australia. Community support for these types of human entertainment has continued to fall and globally, there has been a strong response by legislators to meeting public expectations in how we regard and treat all animals by banning practices, which include captive animals being exploited for human entertainment.

Many local government councils have banned circuses with captive and performing animals on council land in response to increased community demands, however, this is open to loopholes. It is time to legislate a state-wide ban. Responsible decision-makers are increasingly recognising that society no longer considers it acceptable to exploit exotic animals in circuses or the keeping of captive cetaceans for human entertainment.

SUMMARY and CONCLUSION

Current scientific evidence clearly demonstrates significant risks and impacts to the overall well being of these intelligent and complex beings when confined against their will and used for entertainment. They are denied personal choice and neither their environments nor current legislation can meet their physical, psychological and behavioural needs.

Thank you for considering my submission points during the committee's deliberations.