



VILLAGE ROADSHOW
THEME PARKS

21 September, 2020

Hon Mark Banasiak MLC
Committee Chair
Inquiry into the use of exotic animals in circuses
and the exhibition of cetaceans in New South Wales
PortfolioCommittee4@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mr Banasiak,

Thank you for the invitation to Sea World to provide information to your inquiry about our rescue and rehabilitation of cetaceans.

Sea World is a world leading zoological facility and is continuing to evolve the way we care for and present our animals. Sea World applies the highest professional standards to the conservation, management and breeding of animals in human care, to environmental education, research, rescue and global conservation.

Sea World has a long-term and ongoing commitment to assisting marine animals. This means undertaking hundreds of marine rescues a year – not just dolphins but also sea birds, dugongs, turtles, whales, sharks and sea snakes– for no benefit except animal welfare. Not all survive, but the vast majority are rehabilitated and released.

This response seeks to provide the information you have requested and takes the opportunity to make some further comments.

RESCUE AND REHABILITATION WORK

The Sea World Rescue Team is on call 24 hours every day, 365 days a year should a marine animal need rescuing. Injured animals are brought to Sea World and given veterinary care with the ultimate aim of returning these animals back to the wild. Every time Sea World is involved in a rescue, a significant contribution is made to public awareness and scientific knowledge.

In the past five years, the Rescue Team has assisted in more than 600 rescues of marine animals including strandings and entanglements of dolphins, whales, birds and sea snakes, pioneering new rescue techniques and equipment.

Throughout our history, we have conducted rescue operations on animals in need all over Australia and have even ventured to Vanuatu to rescue a pod of dolphins. While the goal with every rescue is to rehabilitate and release, this is not always the case and Sea World is a sanctuary for rescued animals.

Once a rescue occurs, often there is longer term rehabilitation required for injured animals. Many of the animals brought in for treatment and potential rehabilitation are extremely compromised and require 24 hour care initially.

This care includes supporting the animal in the enclosure, as many of these animals are so compromised they cannot swim or even support their own body weight in water. They may also need tube feeding, force feeding, fluid therapy, antibiotics and other ancillary supportive care. Milk feeding will be necessary for animals less than four months of age. These activities may need to occur as frequently as hourly and as such facilities are required to enable this.

The requirements of such rehabilitation facilities include:

- Ability to drop and refill water in rehabilitation pools
- Heating and/or cooling of pool water
- Ability to disinfect pool water or change water over frequently

- Ability to isolate animal from other animals to prevent the spread of disease
- Shade over the pool
- Easy access into and out of the pool for both workers and animal.
- Access to a building with power and storage facilities – food, medications etc.

Animals sometimes require several months in a rehabilitation facility before their eventual release. It should also be noted that many of the animals brought in are newborns and juveniles and will not possess the necessary skills to find food and evade predators if released, necessitating ongoing human care and therefore non-release.

There are also some rescued animals whose injuries are such that they cannot be sufficiently rehabilitated and released but have a long-life expectancy in human care, with some dolphins living to be beyond 50 years of age.

FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS IN RELATION TO RESCUE AND REHABILITATION

Sea World's rescue and rehabilitation team is funded out of general park operational and capital expenditure and is not constrained by a specific budget.

It has access to over 100 professional staff, almost all of them tertiary qualified (see below), and the facilities that are used for general operations (eg pools, food storage and preparation areas, veterinarian facilities) are also used for animal rehabilitation.

Sea World continues to invest heavily in designing specialist rescue equipment, internal and external training and the purchase of state-of-the-art veterinary equipment as part of its rescue and rehabilitation operations.

However it is reasonable to report that Sea World contributes millions of dollars to rescue and rehabilitation each year - when an animal is in need, we do everything we can to assist

NUMBER OF SCIENTISTS AND OTHER EXPERTS

Sea World is one of the only operators in Australia that has the facilities, expertise and resources to undertake marine rescues and rehabilitation.

Sea World has a dedicated Animal Care team with over 100 professional staff, consisting of veterinarians, veterinary technicians and science graduates. About two-thirds (65%) of our team have university degrees, 25% have TAFE qualifications and the remaining 10% are experienced team members. Collectively the team have over 1,000 years' experience working with animals.

This team is on call 24 hours every day, 365 days per year should a marine animal need rescuing. All the animals at Sea World are cared for in a professional and respectful manner with their health and wellbeing the highest priority.

Sea World operates with exemplary workplace health and safety practices – our staff are our greatest asset and trained to provide expert care to the animals.

SEA WORLD POSITION

Use of cetaceans for exhibition

We note your committee is considering if the use of cetaceans for exhibition should be phased out. Sea World strongly recommends that exhibition of cetaceans is not phased out in New South Wales as long as the science continues to demonstrate conservation benefits without compromise to animal welfare.

Sea World is a world leading marine park and is continuing to advance the way we care for and engage with animals. The Queensland public supports Sea World activities.

Attendances rose by 7 per cent in 2019 and throughout Australia each year, 22 million visitors visit zoos and aquariums that are conserving wildlife.

Sea World's dolphin facilities are of the highest quality, and include some of the largest filtered natural sandy bottom lagoon systems in the world. We have a strong reputation for caring for marine animals, along with an exemplary record of animal care, research and rescue accomplishments.

Bottlenose Dolphins can live to 23 - 30 years in the wild dependent on their environmental threats, but at Sea World we have had some dolphins live to be beyond 50 years of age. This long life can be attributed to excellent husbandry, veterinary care, world class facilities and a lack of predators, all leading to longevity. The health and wellbeing of our animals is of the upmost priority.

Sea World understands the importance of education in building a community that is passionate about and dedicated to helping the environment. More than 10,000 students usually participate in educational programs at Sea World each year. In addition to this, our social media channels facilitate engagement with more than 200,000 people around the world.

Breeding of cetaceans

The inquiry committee is considering whether breeding practices of cetaceans should continue for use in exhibition. All of the dolphin breeding at Sea World is done naturally and is part of a carefully managed breeding program, which has been in place for many years.

The process of breeding - mating, gestation, calving and raising young - is very important to the enrichment of the lives of not only the mother and calf, but the whole pod. Reproduction is a natural process which enriches the lives of the animals and helps contribute to positive welfare of the animals, which is our utmost priority. With each birth of a dolphin, we gain invaluable information on the successful growth and development of calves, information that is almost impossible to achieve in the wild. This information assists in making conservation related decisions for their wild counterparts.

To this end, Sea World regularly partners with university researchers.

Sea World can credit part of our successful rehabilitation program for orphaned dolphin calves to our highly maternal female dolphins. Without their experience of being mothers themselves and raising their own calves, these females would be unlikely to become successful surrogates.

The population of dolphins at Sea World are ambassadors for their wild counterparts and by breeding, we are enabling future generations to connect, learn and feel empathy towards dolphins and encourage change in behaviour towards protection of these animals in the wild.

Use of sea pens

The inquiry committee has received submissions about the proposed use of sea pens. As a world leading aquarium, Sea World does not support the use of sea pens because they do not accommodate rehabilitation.

They do not allow control of the water temperature and quality that are essential to support rehabilitation. Importantly, staff cannot be exposed to the elements of the sea 24/7 to provide the rehabilitation required for injured animals that is offered by an aquarium such as Sea World.

Sea World does not believe sea pens or sanctuaries are a viable re-homing option for dolphins. Too many factors within the environment can be detrimental to animals' health and compromise

their welfare. These include tidal issues, weather impacts, pollution, predation and overall animal protection.

The dolphins at Sea World live in natural, world-class sand-bottom lagoon systems where our team control water quality, temperature and can adjust the lagoon environment due to severe weather impacts such as heavy rain. We also have a dedicated team who provide excellent husbandry and veterinary care.

CONCLUSION

On behalf of Sea World, I thank you for the opportunity to provide our position and outline the rescue and rehabilitation works that our organisation undertakes. We are proud of our record of safety and care for animals and do everything possible to ensure the welfare of our animals and staff. We strongly support the exhibiting of cetaceans while the science continues to demonstrate conservation benefits without compromise to animal welfare.

I trust the outlined information is of assistance to your inquiry.

Yours Sincerely

Wayne Phillips
Head of Marine Sciences
Village Roadshow Theme Parks

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