

**INQUIRY INTO EXHIBITION OF EXOTIC ANIMALS IN
CIRCUSES AND EXHIBITION OF CETACEANS IN NEW
SOUTH WALES**

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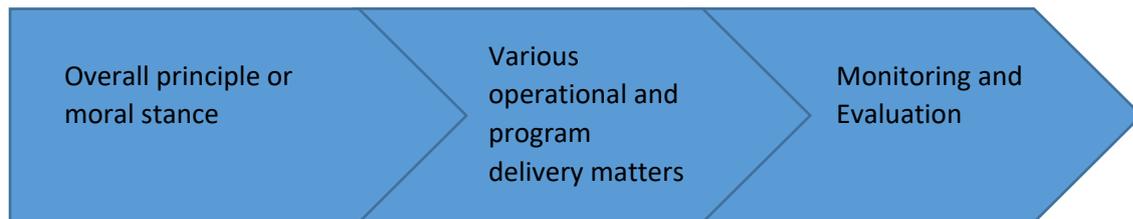
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1. Overview

The institutions that exhibit cetaceans and large exotic animal may very well have a troubled future unless we address current and predictable questions as societal values change and knowledge grows.

My overall message to the committee is that that this issue does not have a 'black or white' answer. It is actually about have some process in place which includes: 1. having a set of foundational principles or some overall particular moral stance; ii) ensuring the processes around such exhibit are consistent with the foundations; and then iii) have some ongoing monitoring or evaluation in place.

I draw the committee's attention to a similar process used by Detroit Zoo (below):



The question then becomes under what conditions would the use of exotic animals in circuses and the exhibition of cetaceans in New South Wales be acceptable. It also means the range of considerations including: about how the animal is housed and cared for, the wider social benefit we might anticipate from the interactions between people and wildlife, and where these animals are coming from in the first place, can be nuanced and account for the benefits and disbenefits of our actions

2. The Various Operational Matters

2.1 The welfare of the animals on exhibition

We know our approach to animals in circuses and aquariums is not the same as it once was, but we also have to realize that society wonders about our stated commitment to animals, including conservation, if their perceived notions of our actions appear to lack full concern for individual or species involved.

Many wild animal species and populations need our help, and exhibitions can contribute to helping species and populations through education of the wider public. Unfortunately our current concepts about use of exotic animals in circuses and the exhibition of cetaceans in New South Wales is really quiet primitive and needs to evolve to be more sophisticated.

There is no doubt the exhibitions of exotic animals and cetaceans, can be stressful for the animals and are, in most cases, misguided for while they might educate the public about the animals ecology, they encourage the idea that it is fine for wild animals to be manipulated (and thereby stressed) even though they are not domesticated, they also miss the opportunity to impart a message designed to conserve the wider population of the species as a whole. Quite simply, such exhibitions often have a disbenefit in that they are stressful on the animal involved, and unless they are designed to prevent negative welfare impacts and use the educational opportunity wider conservation purposes, they are ethically wrong.

If we are to rely on such indirect processes as 'exhibition' to achieve broader conservation, we must be also be committed to ensuring that these captive individuals thrive. To do this captive animals must to be able to react naturally to whatever confronts them in their various physical and social environments. And those that are required to 'perform' have to be able to initiate natural behaviours, not just react. Therefore we must create exhibitions that are optimal, not minimal, to an animal's physical and social environment. The problem is that current standards start from minimum baselines with no clear guidance about, or mandate for, optimal standards.

There are a few implications to this:

- Future exhibitions, and venues such as circuses and aquariums, will reflect on, and challenge, our current practices, knowing that good intentions do not always lead to good outcomes, especially in the realm of animal welfare.
- In terms of the human benefits, there needs to be consistency of message. Given we invest significant resources in conserving the natural environment, it is important we allow individual captive animals who live in our zoos and aquariums to have safe and fulfilling environments. The animals' quality of life should come first as we exemplify the underlying principle of what it means to be humane. Without that as a foundation, we have little wider moral standing.
- In terms of keep some overall moral stance. Approving the use of these animals for exhibitions and looking after their overall wellbeing requires more open and transparent processes and requires ongoing professional and independent evaluation.

2.2 Exhibit design

We have to confront whether it is ever going to be possible to adequately create captive conditions in which cetaceans and elephants (and in some cases, great apes and large carnivores) can thrive. A small enclosure or confined pool significantly, if not almost entirely, limits any large mammal's need and desire to roam. And the assertion that if there's ample food, water, and shelter, these cetaceans do not need or want to travel, and elephants do not need or want to roam is baseless and does not align with what we know about natural history. Future zoos and aquariums will resist speciesism and be viewed as guardians, not exhibitors or owners.

It is possible to make sure that all animal environments (physical, psychological, and social) are outstanding for the animals first and foremost. But we must help the public recalibrate their expectations of seeing animals: -help them recognize that animals are not always active (none are) and are not always viewable immediately and without effort.

Such new exhibitions and policies will all feature a lot of control and choice for each individual animal, with recognition that each one (just like humans) is different and each has a "personality" with all that accompanies that construct.

In terms of animals welfare it is clear that exhibitions now and in the future must return agency to captive animals. Many of the decisions we make for the animals in our care (although well intentioned) could be given back to them, so that choice, control, and preference are theirs to the fullest extent possible.

2.3 The educational experience: giving a greater message to the public

A close encounter with a wild animal can have a profound impact on a person's world view. This is one reason used to justify the keeping of animals for exhibition

I also acknowledge there have been big advances in animal care in zoos and circuses etc in recent decades. Even animal welfare campaigner and RSPCA Victorian president Dr Hugh Wirth applauds how zoos for dragging themselves out of a "Victorian-era" circus-like mentality. Yet, he also says, we have a long way to go.

The evolution is incomplete and institutions currently find themselves torn by competing forces. Animal rights lobbies pressure them to be more caring but economic rationalism demands they stand on their own feet financially. This means there is a tendency to talk conservation, but the turnstiles, rather than the ongoing health of the entire species, remain core business. Evidence for this can be found in what zoo staff calls the "Disney effect"; that is the creation of more, and ever more elaborate, "blockbuster" exhibits aimed at getting more paying customers through the gate.

The vision has to be about bringing people and wildlife together- not the whether an individual animal is agile enough to jump through a hoop.

3. 3. Consideration of the wider logistic chain

We need to consider the ethics and messaging behind the sourcing of these animals.

For example. Victoria's zoos stress that the Thai elephants have not come from Eden-like rainforest but from work camps where they were disciplined and worked in chains. The suggestion here is that they are actually better off in Parkville than Thailand. Critics respond that buying elephants from Thailand - even from work camps - only encourages a market in them, and poaching. Moreover the conditions and training given to elephants in Thailand have been widely discredited by ecotourism associations as being profoundly inconsistent within ecotourism principles. And elephant handlers in Thailand also says elephants have a much richer life working in Thailand than being cooped up in urban zoos in Australia.

The documentary 'Dolphin Cove' is a shocking example of how sourcing Dolphins for captive exhibition might be indirectly encouraging other behaviours most Australian fine morally repugnant.

3.4. The total visitor experience

I am an academic with many years' experience and research in ecotourism. Having conducted many visitor surveys, what might be surprising to the committee, is that many visitors can have an excellent experience without needing to see these large iconic animals. My research includes visitor to Mon Repos Turtle rookery in Bundaberg, whale watching experiences off Sydney Harbour, various Wildlife sanctuaries. Invariably these surveys show that have some form of unique encounter within some overall social setting (e.g. with the kids, or your life partner) are what is most critical in a experience.

Indeed the Smithsonian Institute conducted an exit survey of visitors to an safari 'elephant' wildlife park and the vast major of visitors reported having an experience that exceeded their expectations even though they did not directly encounter an elephant.

What does some of the research indicate

Overall I think, the information, research and technology would indicate:

- A need for institutions to have less focus on having big mammals or having 'big animal events' which, in many cases have a disbenefit as they often require animals to be kept in confined, "impoverished" environments. It is not just cruel: when one species creates a place and captures and/or confines other species for public or private human enjoyment, a 'display' paradigm is established amongst the wider public.

- There is also a need to replace the old idea of zoos, aquariums, and circuses as being places "to get close to big wild animals" or 'seeing wild animals do tricks' with the paradigm of these places being "dynamic interactive environment centres" - more like Scienceworks.
 1. For example, there are many cases where Werribee-style or Dubbo style open range zoos- that allow the animals to a varied and active life - can be successful. Such 'safaris' can be incredible wildlife experiences, and humans are not (in principle) interfering or compromising the animals whom they encounter. Having people pay to have such great experiences in a future zoo or aquarium would genuinely benefit conservation without compromising animal welfare (in contrast to the current paradigm of conservation contributions by individuals or organizations that pay to hunt as a "conservation" activity).
 2. As another example, projection technology, Four-dimensional (4D) theatres, and simulators have the potential to dramatically expand our ability to engage public by showing them global events and phenomena, related to the species as a whole. I am not suggesting this about simply showing a nature documentary- but about giving people virtual and augmented reality experiences (eg going underwater). Although these experiences may not be "real," they are proving to be popular and educational with guests, and most importantly, they do not harm animals or compromise ethics.
 3. Clever displays and exhibits can be designed to give perspectives outside a person's normal environment- such as getting up to treetop level, going underwater, or donning on the ears of a elephant so you can hear what an elephant does.

- There is a special case for cetaceans, given their somewhat unique relationship with humans. Whether cetaceans should be protected from being used as 'ecotourism exhibits' is not an intuitively easy decision to make. Unless there is clear evidence—which there is not—that cetaceans are physically and psychologically harmed in a systemic manner, moral opposition towards such practices must pivot on the alleged unnaturalness of such exhibition. Proponents of exhibition believe that captivity is harmless, natural (to some extent) and serves a purpose (in other words, there is a functional need for it). But such supporters of dolphin captivity conflate issues of legality (for example, 'meeting international standards' in terms of housing the dolphins) with that of 'natural'. In other words, they seem to implicitly assume that because captivity is legal, it must be 'natural'. Yet, it is clearly unnatural to subject wild animals to confined spaces and such confinement, as well as their purposeful performance for entertainment, is detrimental to their well-being; hence the authorities must stop exhibiting dolphins.