

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

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Submission to Inquiry into Exhibition of Exotic Animals in Circuses and Exhibition of Cetaceans in New South Wales

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The following countries have, to date, banned the use of exotic animals in circuses:

- Austria
- Bolivia
- Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Colombia
- Costa Rica
- Croatia
- Cyprus
- El Salvador
- Estonia
- Greece
- Guatemala
- Ireland
- Israel
- Luxembourg
- Macedonia
- Malta
- Mexico
- The Netherlands
- Paraguay
- Peru
- Romania
- Scotland
- Singapore
- Slovakia
- Slovenia

In addition to the nationwide ban in Israel (enacted in 1995), Tel-Aviv, its major city, has banned circuses with *any* performing animals, exotic or domestic, since 2005. In the United States, in the last twelve months, both Hawaii and New Jersey have enacted statewide bans on wild animal circuses; as I write, a similar bill has been presented in Massachusetts. Around Australia, some 40 councils have similar bans in place, the most recent being enacted in Canterbury-Bankstown in Sydney in June, 2018.

Animal welfare organisations in New South Wales, such as the RSPCA, the Animal Welfare League, the International Fund for Animal Welfare, the World Society for the

Protection of Animals, Animal Liberation, the World League for the Protection of Animals and Voiceless are absolutely opposed to circuses with performing animals and support a statewide ban.

Why is this happening?

Numerous websites (e.g. <https://www.stopcircussuffering.com>; www.circuses.com; www.peta.org; www.circuswatch.com; http://www.ad-international.org/adi_home) expose the terrible behind-the-scenes abuses to which circus animals – exotic AND domestic - are subjected and the misery of their existences, and indicate the worldwide movement, in our time, towards the total eradication of these disgraceful survivals of a belief that maintains that we have a right to do whatever we like to animals so long as we can turn a profit in the process.

Why does NSW continue to approve circuses with performing animals when the world at large is moving to their eradication?

Some of the numerous reasons for this opposition and these bans, and the growing humane enlightenment, worldwide, about the moral evil of forcing animals to ‘perform’ in circuses for the amusement and profit of human beings are as follows:

- 1) All circus tricks are unnatural behaviour for animals. Therefore, they must be trained with the use of bullhooks, whips, metal spikes, hotplates and electric prods, and learn to obey out of fear of punishment. **This NSW continues to endorse.**
- 2) Circus animals spend almost their entire lives in chains or cooped up in cages or behind electric fences, sometimes for up to 20 hours per day. In the wild, they walk for as much time as they spend immobilised in captivity. **This NSW approves.**
- 3) Circus animals are forced to travel thousands of kilometres each year in captivity, usually in filthy, cramped compartments merely to provide a couple of hours’ amusement for human beings. **This NSW finds acceptable.**
- 4) Animals in circuses are a threat to public safety. Since 1990, circus elephants trying to escape their miserable existence have killed 57 people. (This website lists numerous incidents where circus animals, driven to distraction by the cruelty inflicted on them, have turned on their trainers and thereby posed a danger to audiences enjoying their misery:

<https://www.grunge.com/118257/circus-animals-turned-trainers>. **Does NSW have no objections to its community being exposed to this danger?**

5) A substantial proportion of audiences at circuses are children. At school, and elsewhere, children are being taught to appreciate and respect animals, especially wild animals, for their natural behaviour and in their natural habitat, focusing on:

- where animals come from,
- how they live in the wild,
- their current conservation status,
- their instinctive behavioural patterns,
- their particular requirements,
- how they interact with other animals and
- their place in nature.

Circuses, on the other hand, contradicting this excellent education, indicate to children that it is right to make imprisoned and terrified animals perform unnatural acts for audiences' amusement and that it is funny to watch beautiful and dignified creatures, tricked out in tawdry costume, going through dangerous and demeaning acts for human entertainment. **NSW currently finds children's exposure to this misrepresentation of the animal world not only acceptable, but actively, publicly endorses and encourages it by continuing to approve performing-animal circuses.**

As a senior educator and Fellow of the Australian College of Educators, I condemn the exposure of children and their impressionable minds to this abuse of animals for entertainment.

How circuses respond to such criticism

In response to these criticisms, circus owners (whose livelihood depends upon the exploitation of animals) routinely claim that the trainers 'love' the animals in their care. They would hardly say otherwise. They further insist that the animals 'love' being in the circus and performing their tricks. As the animals can't speak, their owners are in no fear of contradiction. If this were so, why does every animal that has the opportunity to do so, escape from its captors and tormentors whenever possible? Lennon's Circus lion 'tamer', Geoffrey Lennon, was attacked by three lions during a performance in

Penrith, some years ago, leaving many children in the audience in a severely distressed state after this display of circus animals' 'love' for their keepers.

Behind-the-scenes secret video evidence has shown repeatedly the extreme cruelty inflicted upon animals in order to make them perform – sharp iron rods being driven into elephants' feet to make them 'dance', an orang-utan being punched virtually into insensibility by three men so it can go on stage and appear passive (one of its assailants then appearing before the audience, ignorant of the backstage brutality, as its 'loving' keeper), and so on. Former circus employees have 'come out' and told the truth about what the public never sees, as in this case of a Ringling Brothers' Circus employee in the United States:

“[A]fter one of the performances in Denver, one of the adult females by the name of Nicole was severely beaten by Randy and Adam because she performed poorly. The elephants were taken back to the holding area and after the other elephants were chained in place, Randy took Nicole and tried to get her to do the routine she refused to do during the performance. When Nicole refused to do the movements as instructed Randy took a bull hook and began beating Nicole in the head, on the trunk and behind the front feet.

The beating continued until the handle of the bull hook shattered.

While Randy was beating Nicole in the head and trunk area, Adam began beating her on the lumbar and hindquarter area on the right hand side. One of the strikes by Adam to the lumbar area resulted in the metal hook penetrating the skin and causing an open wound from which blood began flowing. After the beating was over a person by the name of Sonny doctored the wound with some type of powder to stop the bleeding. No other veterinary care was provided to my knowledge. All the animal crew previously identified were present and witnessed the beating.”

One assumes NSW does not endorse such shocking cruelty. How does it propose ensuring that it never takes place, seeing there is abundant evidence that it is routine practice?

Anyone who has tried to teach a family pet a simple trick, such as getting the dog to shake hands, knows

- a) that this takes weeks of repetition and
- b) even when perfected, the dog cannot be relied upon to perform it in company.

Circuses need much more complicated tricks than mere hand-and-paw shaking to turn a profit and cannot afford any unreliability at performances the public have paid to see: such as an elephant that refuses to ‘dance’, a monkey that won’t get on its bike, a dog that won’t jump through a ring of fire. **The only way circus owners can ensure that their animals perform complicated tricks and do so, on cue, is through fear of punishment.** Horses ‘walk’ on their hind-legs for the amusement of the audience, trembling as they do so, for fear of the whipping they will get (and have got) if they don’t.

These situations, and numerous like them, day in, day out, for the entire miserable life of a circus animal, NSW is effectively approving by approving the animal-circus industry.

Why, then, is there still some public support for animal circuses?

You may ask: ‘If the circus is as terrible as you say, why do members of the general public continue coming to see it?’

To begin, only a tiny fraction of people today ever attend performing-animal circuses which have been, blessedly, in sharp decline since the middle of the twentieth century. The days when these were immensely popular entertainments have long past. Most people, indeed, are unaware that such circuses still exist in NSW and are appalled to learn that they do.

Then, it is sad fact of life that some people, keen to be entertained and amused, at any cost, are content not to know or think about what goes on ‘behind the scenes’. It is a classic example of being in ‘denial’. Enjoying their couple of hours, with the animal acts mixed up with the funny clowns and other human performers, the audience fails to discriminate between the voluntary performance by the human participants and the enforced ones by the animals and how they are achieved, in the generally jolly atmosphere of the Big Top, the children squealing with amazement and delight, everyone laughing. They also fail to consider that the performance they have seen, a one-off, is to be repeated endlessly throughout the circus animal’s life (and that that *is* its life – there is nothing else), until it is too old or sick to perform again, at which time it can be disposed of, like a now-useless racehorse.

The exposure this year of the horseracing industry and what it does once its animals are no longer of money-earning potential reveals clearly the mindset of those involved in animal-exploiting entertainment industries, for all their protestations of ‘love’ of their animals.

The circus culture today is flourishing *without* animals

Where circus is *not* in decline today, is in the non-performing-animal circus world. Wonderful troupes such as Circus Oz, Cirque du Soleil, Flying Fruit Fly Circus, Imperial Circus of China and Swamp Circus Theatre exist for people who love the atmosphere of the circus, without any animal being cruelly treated and exploited. Pierre Parisien, of Cirque du Soleil, has said: ‘we will never have animals in our shows. They are animals, not performers. They should be in the jungle’. These marvellous and immensely popular entertainments are firmly in the circus tradition, but with one, splendid exception – all their performers are human beings, with the freedom of *choice* to perform if they want to, and not, if they don’t want to; and to prepare for their performances without being lashed and terrified into doing them.

These are the circuses of the enlightened and humane future, not the barbaric circuses based on forced animal performance which NSW continues to endorse and welcome.

NO ANIMAL, WILD OR DOMESTIC, SHOULD BE IN A CIRCUS.

As a long-time NSW resident and taxpayer, I respectfully submit to the Committee that the time is long overdue for the State Government to recognise the moral evil of performing-animal circuses and join with the numerous other enlightened nations, states, local authorities and cities, worldwide, and ban these anachronistic, barbaric entertainments from this State.