

**Submission  
No 84**

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

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## Exhibition of exotic animals in circuses and exhibition of cetaceans in New South Wales

When I was a child I was an avid reader. I vividly remember circus stories such as Walt Disney's Dumbo the elephant and a myriad of others based on animals in circuses.

This coupled with many Hollywood movies<sup>1</sup> showcasing animals performing tricks was what I believed animals just did and never gave it a second thought.

The excitement of the big top coming to the outer suburbs of Sydney was a huge highlight for me as a kid and I remember thinking the animals were happy performing for audiences.

But this one-off occasion for me was but a few days in the captive lives of the poor circus animals.

How easily we are manipulated and blinded to the true situation of animals performing in captivity. No animal should be exploited and forced to provide entertainment for humans.

Thankfully our societal norms continue to evolve. It was not that long ago (late 19<sup>th</sup> century) that a group of Indigenous Australians were promoted in US circuses as 'Australian cannibals'. They performed – alongside Jumbo the elephant – dancing, singing and throwing boomerangs to delight the crowds.

Thank goodness that has come to an end.

Unfortunately, the sad situation is still continuing for animals – who are never given a choice. Animals who are taken from their natural environments and forced to live unnaturally, living in small caged areas with dubious enrichment, travelling from town to town, bright lights, noise, being ogled and forced to do demeaning tricks for the entertainment of spectators. Who knows what they are forced to endure whilst being trained and the methods deployed. The isolation and deprivation is heartbreaking to witness.

I remember a circus owner was bemoaning the negative pressure on circuses with animal acts. He said it wasn't as if the animals were plucked from the wild and forced to perform but instead had been bred for generations in the circus – they were part of the family.

I am however rather certain that the animals originated from the wild at some point! Also, generations of animals being born in the circus environments is not an argument as regardless of where animals are born they still have their instinctive behaviors and these are suppressed.

Imagine if generations of humans were born in a prison, where they remained all their lives, trained to perform tricks for the daily gratification of others. Would you think this is natural and acceptable?

The same applies to animals in dolphinariums. Being held captive in a chlorine cage and denied the right to live a natural life and being forced to do tricks to “entertain” is cruel and disgusting.

No matter what, animals are not here for our entertainment. We have no right to dominate them and they should be respected as the unique creatures they are. They should have every right to live a life, free from enslavement and cruelty and instead be able to live their lives as intended free of exploitation.

Just because animals are not the same as us does not give us the right to dominate them, deny them their dignity and cause emotional, social and physical suffering. They are different but no less important than humans.

In recent history, we have recognised and made efforts to end racism and sexism. We are currently addressing sexual predation upon children within the church, the stolen generations, ill treatment of people with disability and the elderly.

All these changes have come about when society sees the wrong and does something about it.

The next bastion of change is the way we treat animals, to end speciesism and recognise animal sentience.

Ending the use of animals in circuses and dolphinariums is a step in the right direction.

We can no longer consider the imprisonment of animals as being acceptable. The practice is archaic and out of touch with community sentiment.

So many other countries have banned animals in entertainment – we should too. Humans can do amazing feats of performance to entertain, amaze and delight.

Let this be the benchmark of entertainment – animal free.

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