

Submission
No 271

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

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Submission – Craig Bullen

I make this submission as an interested person in the exhibition of exotic animals in opposition to the proposal Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Inquiry into the use of exotic animals in circus and the exhibitions of cetaceans in New South Wales and in support of the continued use and further breeding of exotic animals for mobile exhibition in circus.

I have been involved in the circus (I am third generation circus) and film/tv industry in Australia and abroad working with both exotic and domestic animals. The exotic animals currently on exhibition in Australia are lions and macaque monkeys which have been captive bred for generations and exhibited in enclosures approved by the Department of Primary Industries (DPI). The DPI is responsible for the inspecting, auditing and licencing under the Standards for Circus Animals, standards that were made with industry consultation and have effectively addressed and monitored the welfare needs of circus animals.

Welfare

There have been many peer reviewed studies regarding the welfare concerns for exotic animals in circus. Of note, is the report from internationally renowned Dr Kiley-Worthington in the UK whose extensive study of the condition of circus animals addresses the perception of dignity of performing animals in travelling circuses in her book “Animals in Circuses and Zoos – Chiron’s World. Dr Kiley-Worthington addresses the arguments made regarding the value of, public perception and dignity of wild animals in travelling circuses.

Regarding conservation/education:

“Circuses could have an important role to play here, particularly in relation to the elephants and some of the threatened big cats. I see this role not only in breeding the endangered species (which is the case of the snow leopard they have already had some success with) but in raising public interest to the plight of species by demonstrating their special cognitive abilities”.

Regarding dignity:

“In this way they [circuses] could have an important role to play in educating the public and heightening the respect for individual animals, their unique intelligences and amazing abilities”.

Italy, the UK and more recently Wales have proposed bans on exotic and/or wild animals. To date none have been successful and it must be stated that evidence given against circuses in all of these instances, particularly literature authored or co-authored by Professor Stephen Harris, has been discredited publicly. Professor Ted Friend, an eminent American animal behaviourist, while at first flattered to have the work of himself and his colleagues extensively quoted in such documents, was appalled to discover that their work had been (as his letter put it) ‘egregiously misrepresented’ with information cherry picked to suit an anti circus argument. Professor Friend submitted a lengthy complaint to the Italian Government regarding similar matters in July 2017 where he condemned the “180-degree spin” of his actual findings in reports by Professor Stephen Harris.

Animal Rights Agenda

While I praise all of those that work for the cause of animal welfare, I am also disheartened at individuals and organisations who refuse to acknowledge welfare improvements in favour

of “animal rights” agenda. The philosophy of animals rights is in direct opposition to that of animal welfare as it seeks to end all contact between human and animals. I strongly disagree that this would be in the best interest of the welfare of animals or would be of any benefit to either humans or animals alike. The organisations pushing this agenda profit financially and/or politically by running emotive campaigns with old overseas footage of animal abuse designed to generate outrage towards those whose work with and/or maintain a lifestyle with animals.

Circus Standards

My personal experiences with the circus has shown me an incredible affection and rapport that exists between the trainers and their animals. Circuses have sought advice from world leading behaviourists and welfarists to ensure all aspects of the animal’s welfare has been met. Circuses themselves have been leaders in guaranteeing high standards in regards to the welfare of their animals. Licensing is stringent and inspections are carried out regularly by governing bodies to ensure that all aspects of animal welfare are being covered including nutrition, day to day care, transport and enclosures. Circuses are required to keep extensive recorded documentation of all aspects of animal care, training and handling and this demonstrates the high standards upheld within licensed circuses.

Circus performances demonstrate the bond between humans and animals that has been nurtured through countless hours of contact. Circuses take animals to regional areas where the community do not always get to witness the amazing abilities of these animals and being close up sparks an interest that inspires people to be proactive in the conservation and care of these exotic animals.

Community Expectation

As outlined in the terms of the proposal, consideration is in line with community expectation. I hope that after reading the positive body of evidence presented here provided by open-minded and honest research, you will choose to protect the circus and its animal performers. Removing the public’s right to choose seems unethical (perhaps even discriminatory) given the evidence provided.

Thank you for your consideration of these points. I am happy to provide further information, comments, documentation etc. if requested.