

18th May 2020

The Hon David Littleproud MP
Federal Minister for Agriculture

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RE: Follow-up for Immediate financial assistance for mobile wildlife exhibitors

On the 17th April 2020 Animal Care Australia (ACA) contacted your office requesting immediate financial assistance for wildlife exhibitors.

On the 28th April 2020 you publicly announced a \$94.6 million Morrison Government initiative to help zoos, wildlife parks and aquariums pull through the COVID-19 pandemic. Minister, you repeatedly added the funding was “for all wildlife exhibitors” to ensure animals’ welfare needs were being met.

This has proven to be nothing more than a false statement. The release of the eligibility criteria for the funding clearly outlines the funding is not to include mobile zoos, nature-based and on-farm tourism experiences, farms, fisheries, reserves, marine-based experiences and also circuses within Australia. This exclusion encompasses an extremely large number of wildlife exhibitors.

It seems remarkably ironic that state and federal governments insist these operators be registered and licensed as wildlife exhibitors and yet the list for funding eligibility was collated by the Zoo and Aquarium Association (ZAA) and Tourism Authorities and NOT the databases maintained by your department who are responsible for ensuring animal welfare standards are maintained.

This outcome is a huge oversight of government responsibility at both a state and federal level.

The current eligibility criteria include:

1. The business has the support of its state or territory tourism organisation; and
2. Operates a fixed exhibiting zoo, aquarium or wildlife park feeding and actively caring for animals; and
3. is a unique tourism attraction important at a national, state or regional level, driving interstate and international tourism; and
4. contributes to the conservation and presentation of animals and meets any required animal welfare standards; and
5. usually derives income from tourism and as a result of the COVID-19 related shutdown must have experienced a downturn in that business.

Animal Care Australia contests only one of the 5 above criteria are focused on animal welfare – in stark contrast to the announcement made.

1. ACA strongly argues that mobile and petting zoos along with on-farm businesses provide a greater level of public interaction and inject an equal sum of income into local community sectors which SHOULD NOT exclude them simply because they don’t appear in a tourism pamphlet. These services provide education, and fulfillment for many at children’s birthday parties, agricultural fairs and shows and wildlife-based seminars.
2. ACA questions the legitimacy of the requirement for the organisations to be of a ‘fixed’ activity? Could your department please explain how animals who are ‘moved’ around the country do not count for welfare assistance, while ironically the licensing conditions to do so include specific criteria that MUST be met to ensure animal welfare is maintained during their transport.
3. ACA requests your department explain why international and interstate tourism is a qualifying marker over the importance of investment into local tourism.
4. Mobile and petting zoos along with the circus and on farm tourism all provide education about the species within each display expanding into a greater understanding of the need for conservation of all animal species.

5. All wildlife exhibitors, including petting zoos, circuses, and all other animal-based businesses reliant upon public access for income have experienced a 100% downturn due to the Covid-19 lockdowns!

Australian circuses not only have animal-based costs but also vehicular maintenance costs and employ many casuals including international visitors on working visas. The government has chosen to ignore the international working visa sector and many operators have found themselves in a position of not only financially supporting their animals but their casual staff as well. This is without any government assistance, as yet again, these do not meet the eligibility criteria. **Australians choosing to support their mates!**

A 'farm' based wildlife exhibitor in the Mornington Peninsula does not predominantly cater to tourists – their primary focus is children and people with special needs. Why is this operator not eligible? They are providing an extraordinary experience to a remarkable sector of our community and **yet the Government has chosen to ignore them!**

In recent months animal rights extremists (ARE) have launched moves against the existence of mobile exhibitors, petting zoos and the circus jeopardising the financial security of these exhibitors. It would be politically damaging if the welfare of the animals within this sector was to suffer and subsequently feed into the rhetorical fervour being perpetrated by the ARE movement. This is something we should all be working together on to avoid.

It is imperative that your department and your government offers relief to ensure that animals remain in their existing facility, under the care of keepers that they have bonded with, to maintain their daily routines, thereby ensuring the best welfare outcomes. Sadly, since previously contacting you more operators have been unable to achieve this resulting in their permanent closure. Animals have now required re-homing which has placed those animals under unfortunate stress. Stress that could have been avoided had governments considered the plight of this sector sooner. This scenario has moved beyond the 'wait and see' period and it is now crucial that everyone receives immediate assistance. **Cash payments for animal welfare essentials are urgently required.**

ACA acknowledges the larger zoos and wildlife parks will contribute to the stabilisation and growth of Australia's economy, however, local economies are equally as vital to ensure a sound foundation for the national economy.

If providing additional funding is an issue ACA would like to encourage you to consider allowing ALL wildlife exhibitors to re-open now. Cafes and other shops are allowed to be open and these are in enclosed spaces. Zoos and wildlife exhibitors operate in mostly open space and also provide a great place for people to chill, relax and unwind. They can easily apply the one person every 4 sqm's rule and social distancing.

ACA, ZAA, the Australian Circus Festival and the Wildlife Exhibitors Network (WEN) are liaising together in a show of support for all wildlife exhibitors and circus. We implore you to join us in supporting ALL wildlife exhibitors.

We look forward to your reply.

Kind regards,



Michael Donnelly
President, Animal Care Australia.
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