

17th April 2020

Hon David Littleproud MP
Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management

Dear Minister Littleproud,

RE: Immediate financial assistance for zoos, wildlife parks & mobile wildlife exhibitors

Animal Care Australia (ACA) is a national incorporated association established to lobby for real animal welfare by those who keep, breed and care for animals. Our goal is to promote and encourage high standards in all interactions with the animals in our care.

Currently Wildlife Exhibitors across Australia including zoos, wildlife parks, mobile exhibitors, petting farms, and circuses are all closed to the public due to Covid-19 and social-distancing requirements and because of this are receiving no income. Income that is vital to maintaining the welfare and healthy upkeep of the animals within their care. It's not just about 'traditional' wildlife exhibitors. Businesses that operate camel rides and horse riding centres, those who run public-accessed 'hobby farms' are all in the same situation. All animal businesses that rely on the public to visit need urgent help right now.

Unlike most other industries, this industry cannot simply close their gates or doors and walk away, animals still require the same level of care they receive every day. This requires staff to be present. Many operators have taken positive steps to minimise this workload, however unfortunately many skilled individuals have had to be stood down.

Animal Care Australia acknowledges that there are a number of relief packages that are available for the industry to access, but the problem is immediate access, which is not forthcoming due to the timing and release dates of the packages. The animals cannot wait months for the industry to receive relief around tax time, or wait many weeks through processing systems - the animals need to eat now. It is only a matter of time before we are likely to see negative welfare outcomes for some animals, or worse still some needing to resort to the euthanasia of those animals simply because their upkeep can no longer be maintained and their welfare guaranteed.

As you would be aware, the drought, followed by the unprecedented bushfires followed by floods has resulted in the majority of operators across the sector already facing huge financial burdens. Maintaining animal welfare standards and meeting permit obligations requires significant costs despite revenue dropping by 100% for most operators. If relief is not received urgently, there may be an animal welfare crisis. Unlike in other industries where works may be re-engaged to different roles, these facilities are not in a position to take large numbers of animals to assist in relieving the burdens of smaller facilities.

It is imperative that the 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, not all operators have been able to achieve this, already resulting in their permanent closure and animals having to be re-homed – placing those animals under unfortunate stress. Stress that could have been avoided had governments considered the plight of this sector sooner.

Cash payments for animal welfare essentials are urgently required. Many exhibitors have contacted governments outlining costs and recommending payment sums that would assist. We implore you to take those submissions in to consideration – before matters become more crucial.

Australia is not alone in this pandemic, and similar plights are being experienced around the world. Some foreign governments have recognised this by providing grants to assist in covering essential food costs,

and vital expenses. Animal Care Australia believe the federal and state governments should step forward and provide emergency financial packages (instant cash payments) in the same manner they did during the bushfire crisis to support animal welfare. In Australia there has always been a strong welfare focused wildlife exhibition sector, and a relief package would allow the industry to maintain its world class standards, and as the Prime Minister continues to express, 'see them come out the other side' to assist in growing the Australian economy as a vital aspect of the tourism industry which has had catastrophic impacts and will require a strong return to recover.

We look forward to your reply.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M Donnelly". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'M' and a long, sweeping underline.

Michael Donnelly
President, Animal Care Australia.
0400 323 843