

3rd September 2020

‘Ending the manipulation and misrepresentation of the circus to the public’

In reference to articles printed in the Australian Community Media press on August 29th 2020. Quite frankly I am appalled at the attempt made by Ms Emma Hurst (Animal Justice Party) to purposely mislead and misinform your readers, the general public and in doing so manipulate the outcome of the current NSW Inquiry into exotic animals in circus and cetaceans in marine parks. The most glaring manipulation and misrepresentation is the photograph attached to the article **‘Ending animal exploitation in circuses’** dated 29th August 2020 and circulated throughout your Australian Community Media outlets.

The photograph of a ‘supposed lion wagon’ is nothing more than a ‘stock’ image of what is clearly a film industry prop. A closer look at the prop highlights the following:

- Bars look to be hollow and light weight you can see that a couple are slightly bent in the middle.
- No interlocking flat bar running along horizontal in the middle of the bars
- Wooden frame. You can see this from the way the corners connect inside near the bars.
- The bars are also set into drilled holes in the wooden frames.
- Wheels are not made for work as there are no flat metal strips bolted to the outside of them

This supposed wagon would not hold a domestic cat – let alone a lion.

The inference within the article is that these ‘beast wagons’ are used by two travelling Australian circuses. These wagons are NOT owned or utilised by any circus in Australia.

The attempt to compare the animals feeling in lockdown to our current lockdown situation is an extremely conniving ploy. The residents within the Melbourne residential towers were permitted far less exercise per day than the animals within the circus.

In her article, Ms Hurst utilises the word ‘exotic’ to explain the types of animals she wishes to see banned within the circus. In true political form she is playing the sympathy card to manipulate people into thinking Australian circus are using animals ‘snatched from the jungle’. The truth is far more enlightening, beginning with the definition of ‘exotic’. That being: ‘originating in or characteristic of a distant foreign country.’

Let’s look at that for one moment along with the animals cared for by both Stardust & Lennon Bros Circuses. Between them they have camels, Rhesus Monkeys, lions, horses, donkeys, ponies, goats, pigs and dogs. By the definition above all of these animals are ‘characteristic of a foreign country’ – however none of these animals have originated from a foreign country. All of the animals in question have been bred in Australia, from multi-generations. Her ploy is to catch you out – ‘the lions are from Africa!’ Yes, maybe they were – but many, many decades ago.

There is no definition of exotic used within NSW Animal Welfare Legislation. What is used, are ‘non-native’, ‘stock’ ‘companion’ and ‘domesticated’ animals. All of the animals in circus including the ‘tame’ lions & monkeys fit within those definitions and therefore are kept and cared for under the strictest guidelines within the legislation. Ms Hurst is attempting to introduce a new word/definition to make the current legislation inapplicable to the circus. By doing so and by introducing a new definition of a circus into the Inquiry she is attempting to round up all traveling

exhibitors, education shows, petting zoos, expos, agricultural shows and even the film & television industry.

Another misdirect of Ms Hurst's is her failure to address the fact the circus has not been prosecuted for animal abuse. She fails to disprove that fact and attempts to gloss over that vital point by claiming the RSPCA has lobbied against circus for decades. Again failing to point out that the RSPCA inspects the circus very regularly and it also has not been able to substantiate any 'reported claims of abuse'. In fact the current Inquiry has called upon the RSPCA NSW Inspectorate to provide evidence to the contrary.

Her next most devious attempt to manipulate the truth is the mention of a UK University of Bristol study that '*concluded it is impossible for circuses to meet the behavioural and welfare needs of exotic animals.*' Having to rely on an overseas study that is over a decade old, not linked to or researched in Australian circus, she could not provide a more current or even Australian-based study?

People would be unaware this study was carried out by Professor Stephen Harris, the very same professor who was discredited for 'misleading science, 'cherry-picking studies' and 'manipulating evidence'. He was caught out manipulating the results and claiming 'peer reviews' were completed when in fact those 'peers' were his university students and not the reported 'peers' required from within the sectors being studied. He was removed/retired from his position soon after those findings.

"Zoochosis ...highly likely animals in circuses experience similar or potentially even worse" Does Ms Hurst know this for a fact? Can she provide documentation that the animals cared for by Stardust & Lennon Bros are experiencing 'zoochosis' or is this simply another one of her anthropomorphising attempts to speak for the animals – like when she claimed to know what 'Calamity' the dolphin from the Dolphin Marine Conservation Park and 'Liya' the polar bear from Sea World were thinking upon their deaths.

"... a lion in a circus gets just 20m for up to 11 months at a time... for up to 18 hours a day they can be kept in even tinier "beast wagons". Absolute fabrication!

The transport trailer that the lions travel in measures in at 33sqm - it is reverse-cycle air-conditioned and is only utilised for transporting and as their sleeping quarters. The Circus is only permitted to travel for no more than 2 hours without stopping and providing the animals with food and water, with any stoppage of more than 15 mins requiring sides of transport vehicles to be opened to allow full ventilation & light. The circus must be stationary for at least 12 hours in every 24 hour period. The circus travels for 10-11 months of the year staying at each location for approximately 3-4 weeks before moving on. When on location the lions have full access to their constructed enclosure which measures in at 400 sqm. Totalling this with their sleeping quarters the lions have an area of 433sqm – a far greater size than Ms Hurst's claim! The animals are not being 'caged' in just 20m for 11 months of the year. At a stretch they are restricted to their transport vehicles for a couple of hours every month.

All of the animals within Australian circuses are well cared for, with the highest standards, and are bonded to their carers who truly love and respect them every day. The circus is on 'show' to the public every time it arrives in a location. People from far and wide visit the circus with their cameras, with their social media and this in itself has the circus constantly scrutinised and yes 'inspected' on a daily basis. If these animals were truly being abused and mistreated there would be acknowledged, reported and proven convictions against the circus. There simply are not!

Ms Hurst's issue is not founded on fact of abuse, or fact of poor welfare or fact of bad husbandry – in fact she cannot provide any facts to substantiate her claims – just rhetorical rantings and the 'humanising' of animals for her own political gain.

Michael Donnelly
President, Animal Care Australia