

The Senate References Committee Inquiry into Biosecurity and Quarantine Arrangements

Submission on behalf of the Zoo and Aquarium Association

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a paper to the Senate Inquiry into Biosecurity and Quarantine Arrangements.

Introduction

The Zoo and Aquarium Association (the Association) represents every major zoo and aquarium institution in Australia and New Zealand. We have over 70 member institutions, housing more than 3900 species. This paper address the issues identified in the Terms of Reference, as they pertain to the Association, its member institutions, the zoo industry and Australia's wildlife in general. We also refer the Committee to the submissions made by the Australian Wildlife Health Network (AWHN), the Wildlife Diseases Association-Australasia (WDA-A), the Australian Registry of Wildlife Health (ARWH) and Zoos Victoria. We endorse the comments made by these organisations.

The Value of Zoos and Aquariums

Zoos in Australia play a key role in global and national conservation with a focus on preservation of biodiversity and environmental education. Currently zoos and aquariums meet 4 out of 5 of ex situ criteria and 4 of 13 of in situ criteria as part Australia's signatory commitment to the Convention on Biological Diversity. The sector also plays an important part in Australian society as the second most popular cultural activity (after cinema) with over 15 million visitors a year.

Submission

1. The Association supports and encourages the full implementation of the recommendations contained within the Beale Review. In particular, the Association and its member zoos endorse the co-management and co-regulatory approach recommended by Beale¹, with industry taking responsibility to establish and meet minimum biosecurity standards. The Australian zoo industry is actively participating in the preparation and implementation of zoo industry biosecurity guidelines (the National Zoo Biosecurity Manual), led by the Association and assisted by DAFF.

As part of a co-management approach, the Association believes a national quality assurance body should be established to fulfil the Beale Review recommendations and to carry out biosecurity and quarantine audits of zoos and aquariums. The national body would also be able to audit the national animal welfare standards established through the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy². This would be the most efficient and effective mechanism for governments and business.

¹ Beale Review recommendation 28.

² AAWS stated objective: Enhanced national approach and commitment to ensure high standards of animal welfare.

2. Zoos are important conservation partners in the global conservation effort, they contribute significantly to Australian society and are key tourist attractions³. To maintain a viable sector there is a need to import new stock to establish or genetically supplement species breeding programs within Australia. The Association believes the current regulations and processes associated with importation of zoo animals are cumbersome, inefficient and at times crippling slow. We believe these processes could be streamlined, to the benefit of all. The current importation assessment processes (IRA, Live Animal Import List and Vertebrate Pest Committee listing for importation) are complex and time-consuming, with considerable duplication and inefficiency in the assessment processes. Import health assessments through the Import Risk Analysis process (Biosecurity Australia) have been extensively delayed due to lack of prioritisation within DAFF.

The Beale⁴ and Hawke⁵ Reviews both make recommendations for the streamlining these process and the development of a national system.

3. Australia's draft Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010-2020 vision statement is for our 'biodiversity to be healthy, resilient to climate change and valued for its essential contribution to our existence'. The nation currently lacks a well-developed, well-resourced strategy for monitoring and responding to wildlife health or disease concerns and is therefore at risk of not being able to fulfil the vision of the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy or contain emerging risks to public health and the economy.

The Association is concerned with Australia's lack of adequate diagnostic capabilities to test for significant wildlife and exotic diseases and believes this shortcoming needs to be addressed, as recommended in the Beale Review⁶.

Zoos and Aquariums offer an unrivalled wildlife surveillance resource, of benefit to the nation's biosecurity. Australia's principal zoos treat over 14,000 cases pa of sick or injured free-ranging wildlife through their wildlife hospitals. Zoos and Aquariums also have the necessary leading veterinary services to support surveillance requirements. The Association believes that key zoos and aquariums should be formally integrated in to a national biosecurity surveillance network.

The Association also emphasises the need for an analysis capability through organisations such as the Australian Wildlife Health Network to produce 'intelligence' for decision-makers rather than just providing raw information.

In summary, to progress Australia's commitment to Biosecurity and Quarantine arrangements, the Association recommends the following:

- The Beale Review recommendations are implemented in full.

³ Socio-economic Value of Zoos and Aquariums Report, Mar 09, Aegis Consulting & Applied Economics.

⁴ Beale Review recommendation 7,9,16, 35c

⁵ Hawke Review recommendation 1b, 23(1), 42.

⁶ Beale Review recommendation 58

- A national quality assurance body for the zoo and aquarium sector to be established for a co regulatory approach to biosecurity and Australian Animal Welfare Standards.
- That the process for import risk assessments (DAFF), live import list (DEWHA), and the Vertebrate Pest Committee listing (NRM committee & MCPI) be streamlined in to a single process and a national approach adopted for vertebrate pest risk assessment.
- Australia develops diagnostic capabilities to test for significant wildlife and exotic diseases which could pose a threat to Australia's economy, public health and biodiversity
- Provide the necessary resourcing to the Australian Wildlife Health Network to provide the strategy and practice of wildlife disease surveillance, investigation, intelligence production, and response.
- That the Government incorporates Australian zoos into the National biosecurity surveillance program.

The Association and its members have a genuine interest in national biosecurity issues particularly in the protection of the environment and for ensuring a viable zoo and aquarium sector. The Association would welcome the opportunity to meet with members of the Senate Reference Committee or their representatives to assist with the Inquiry.

Yours Faithfully

Martin Phillips
Executive Director

4th August 2010