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Inquiry into Biosecurity & Quarantine Arrangements Submission from Zoos Victoria

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this submission.

Firstly, we would like to refer you to the submission that has been made by the Zoo and Aquarium Association. This submission reflects the Zoo industry position, and as an association member we endorse and support this position.

This document outlines Zoos Victoria's perspectives on matters relating to the Inquiry.

The regular international movement of animals between zoological institutions within Australia is a necessary and critical component of the management of our captive animal collections. Exchanges are required to contribute to sustainable populations through the recruitment of additional animals, both to supplement small population and enhance genetic diversity. Furthermore, such exchanges provide clear conservation benefits, including opportunities for involvement in Recovery Programs – both through maintaining insurance populations and holding animals for potential release/re-introduction back into the wild. As evidenced by the Aegis Report, zoos in this region also contribute to conservation through community education programs. During 2009/2010 Zoos Victoria attracted some 1.8 Million visitors to its three sites at Melbourne, Healesville and Werribee.

Zoos Victoria has established and nurtured an effective working relationship with AQIS regarding quarantine approvals. Of particular note is the assistance provided by AQIS/Biosecurity Australia, notably the work of Dr Bernie Robinson in progressing several assessments, including those for Asian Elephants.

We believe that there are opportunities to 'streamline' processes for zoological institutions with respect to aspects of Biosecurity and Quarantine. Clearly, zoological institutions consider the health of their animal collections as a priority, and any animal acquisition (whether domestic or international) must be managed so as to reduce potential for introduction of any disease.

Zoos Victoria like other association member zoos contributes to our knowledge of the incidence and frequency of disease. Initiatives such as the Australian Wildlife Health Network provide a valuable resource to monitor events. When importing animals, Zoos Victoria veterinary staff seek detailed information regarding the



health status of any individual animals being considered for import. Zoos Victoria actively undertakes post arrival surveillance of recently imported animals, this surveillance continuing after animal have been released from quarantine by Australian Quarantine and Inspection Services Staff (AQIS).

The current situation can be onerous and reduce opportunities for zoos in this region to become involved with Recovery Programs for threatened species. Matters such as the risk of exotic species becoming established as feral populations have impacted on ability for zoos to acquire animals.

A further concern is the time taken to complete reviews. Progressing an Import Risk Analysis (IRA) can take many years – the current Primate IRA has been ‘in progress’ for over ten years. The Bovid IRA has recently been approved to support import of Bovids by Australian zoos from New Zealand. This IRA has taken in excess of 7 years to complete.

Clearly legislation impacts on ability of zoos to acquire animals, and determines those species that may be held by zoos. In order for zoos to effectively plan and manage their collections, a more robust and concrete time-frame for completing assessments would be of benefit.

A significant concern of zoos is the need for repeated assessments, that is, several agencies assessing and making findings on the same piece of information. An example of this relates to potential for disease transmission which forms part of the Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry’s (DAFF) IRA process, and is also assessed by the Department of Environment Water Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) relative to amendments to the ‘List of Specimens taken to be Suitable for Live Import’. The information is also assessed by the Vertebrate Pests Committee whose membership comprises representation by both DAFF and DEWHA.

Thus outcomes that would benefit the operations of zoos, whilst ensuring that the Biosecurity of Australia is not compromised include:

- Enhanced resourcing to enable assessments to be completed in a more timely manner
- More robust time-lines regarding assessment process, and commitment to meeting these timelines
- Single ‘assessment’ of information provided, rather than several agencies conducting separate assessments of information.

Regarding the Terms of Reference for this Inquiry, the following comments are made:

The adequacy and current biosecurity and quarantine arrangements including resourcing

- As noted above there is concern about resources available to progress assessments such as IRAs
- The issue of Quarantine Permits typically occurs in a timely and effective manner
- There does seem to be some inconsistencies between advice provided by State and Commonwealth representatives of AQIS, which results in

confusion and frustration (however the inconsistencies may be due to miscommunication and misunderstanding)

Projected demand and resourcing requirements

- Given that many exotic species held by zoos in the region comprise aged and/or non-breeding populations, it is anticipated that there will be an increased demand to import species
- Given that at a global level zoos are moving towards enhanced inter-regional collaboration in order to most effectively manage populations, it is anticipated that there will be an increased demand for international shipments
- With respect to mammals, priorities for Zoos Victoria is to refresh the 'hoofstock herds' at Werribee Open Range Zoo, and determine options for long term holdings of carnivores, primates and hoofstock at Melbourne Zoo.
- There are several species held by zoos in this region that have not been imported since the mid 1980s, thus these species are not listed on the DEWHA 'List of Specimens taken to be Suitable for Live Import', and required assessments shall need to be completed in order to progress international acquisitions.
- Should zoos progress a sizeable import of hoofstock via New Zealand, there will be a need to construct facilities in New Zealand to accommodate animals prior to their shipment to Australia. Animals would be shipped from other regions to New Zealand where they would be housed for 12 months.
- Access to bird quarantine facilities would benefit zoo collections, including potential to develop further dedicated bird quarantine facilities that might also provide accommodation for confiscated animals.

Progress toward achievement of reform of Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service export fees and charges

- No additional comment, please see Zoo and Aquarium Association submission

Progress in implementation of the 'Beale Review' recommendations and their place in meeting projected Biosecurity demand and resourcing, and any related matters

- Zoos Victoria agrees that as a stakeholder, we have a significant role to play in providing for the Biosecurity of Australia
- We believe that we actively contribute to the above objective through our rigorous monitoring of the health of our populations, and diligence in ensuring that our quarantine practices are consistent with AQIS requirements.
- We believe that assessment of matters relating to quarantine and biosecurity should be streamlined into a single assessment.

We look forward to the Zoo Industry being considered as a key stakeholder relating to the outcomes of this Inquiry, and shall welcome opportunities to provide additional comments and examples of the impacts of current legislation on the way in which we can do business and contribute to conservation outcomes.

Yours sincerely

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Chief Executive Officer