

11 December 2012

Dear Ms Dunstone

RE: inquiry into the effectiveness of threatened species and ecological communities' protection in Australia.

I write to you in relation to the above Senate Committee inquiry in to threatened species in Australia. The Zoo and Aquarium Association is the peak industry body for zoos and aquariums in Australia and New Zealand, representing 87 members. Due to the time imperative I have limited our comments to bullet points outlining the main areas in which we hold concerns and welcome an opportunity to expand further.

In relation to the overall effectiveness of threatened species management in Australia we have concerns over;

- The limited timeframes allocated to a recovery program. Traditionally recovery plans are for a 4-5 year period and we are not aware of any evaluation, or reporting, of the successes and the cost of the programs and the outcomes produced to date.
- The establishment of a Commissioner of the Environment who oversees the recovery process would be beneficial to the long-term survival of threatened species and communities. There are very few documented examples where the recovery of a species/community has been achieved in a short (4-5 years) period, most of the successful recovery programs taking decades to be achieved.
- Two of the greatest threatening processes in Australia are loss of habitat and feral predators. There needs to be an innovative and entrepreneurial approach to where animals are released. There are potential sites in National Parks and State Forests for the establishment/translocation of threatened species and assessing existing protected lands for the establishment of threatened species needs to be addressed.
- The need for improved focus on disease as a threatening process; gathering and collating data on Australian fauna health and disease; disease risk assessment and mitigation when managing and translocating threatened species; general biosecurity practices when managing threatened species.
- There needs to be a consistent framework for the recovery team processes which would allow stakeholders to ascertain their potential role in a program in a timely and cost-effective manner. A consistent framework across all recovery programs would enable projects to be benchmarked and for outcomes to be assessed against the cost of the program.

In respect to the role of the zoo and aquarium industry in relation to recovery programs we would like to highlight;

- Although we all hope not to take animals into captivity, for those recovery programs where captive breeding is required consultation with all relevant stakeholders needs to be undertaken early in the program development. The zoo industry is often asked to breed animals for recovery programs late in the delivery of the recovery program often under sub-optimal circumstances. In addition, captive breeding components are placed in a recovery plan without any consultation until the recovery plan has been endorsed and implementation has commenced. The cost of the captive housing and breeding has been traditionally borne solely by the industry.

- There is a need to develop a framework within which captive bred individuals are released as part of a recovery program. This framework needs to address a number of issues including monitoring of released individuals, reduction of feral predators (cats and foxes) at the release sites and related biosecurity.
- The zoo industry has species management expertise, particularly in relation to small population management, which can be utilised to assist in the management of threatened species and ecological communities, as has been done with the Tasmanian devil program.
- There is benefit in the strong advocacy role for threatening processes that our industry can provide, as 15.4 million visitors per annum are known to visit Australian zoos and aquaria.

I would be most grateful if the Zoo and Aquarium Association is listed as a primary stakeholder in the consultation process when developing future recovery plans. The Association and its members have a history of recovery plan involvement and early consultation in the process would allow for maximum benefit to be provided to the recovery process, including advocacy and captive breeding.

The zoo and aquarium industry has a diverse range of expertise in the areas of small population biology, species management and wildlife health and look forward to an opportunity to further expand on the comments herein.

Yours sincerely

Martin Phillips
Executive Director