



Speech by

**Hon. KEN HAYWARD**

**MEMBER FOR KALLANGUR**

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Hansard 3 April 2001

### **ZOOS AND AQUARIUMS**

**Hon. K. W. HAYWARD** (Kallangur—ALP) (11.46 a.m.): This morning I rise in the parliament to draw attention to the need for the development of a code of practice and general standards for exhibiting wildlife at commercial zoos and aquariums in Queensland—a code of practice with a binding duty of care containing offences and punishments for non-compliance with that code of practice.

Zoos enjoy a wide popularity. I am told that the estimated annual attendance at zoos world wide is 600 million. We need to think about that, because we are talking about one-tenth of the world's population attending a zoo or an aquarium on an annual basis. In Queensland, there are 37 fauna parks, zoos and aquariums. Visitor attendances at those places are increasing rapidly, because I think an awareness of animals, and not just native animals, has been increased through television, particularly by channels such as the Discovery channel.

Upon reflection, I do not think that any member of this parliament, wherever they sit and whomever they represent, believes that an enforceable code of practice and general standards should not exist. For argument's sake, would any member of this House disagree with the proposition that captive animals should be free from hunger and thirst, thermal and physical discomfort, injury, disease and pain, an inability to express their natural behaviour and, importantly, fear or distress? I do not think that any member would disagree with that. Of course not! There would not be a person in this parliament and there would not be many people in this state who would think that captive animals should be anything but free from those terrible consequences.

What measures are in place to ensure that these basic and fundamental welfare needs are being met? As the system stands now, there is an occasional visit by a person representing a government authority. Generally that person comes with the best of intentions but, really, they get only a superficial view of a particular issue—just about as much as what a tourist would see of a circumstance.

The problem with an enforceable code of practice and standards, and the appropriate penalties that would be attached to that, is how does a complaint get made in the first place? Given that a complaint has been made, how is it acted upon efficiently and effectively? There are three obvious sources of complaint: visitors to a zoo or an aquarium, the staff of a particular establishment, and the various captive animal protection societies. The most qualified source of complaints would be staff members. As it now stands, no system exists for employees of a public aquarium, zoo or fauna park to make confidential complaints about what may be happening with an animal without the fear of losing their jobs. Clearly, everybody would agree that that is an unacceptable situation. It is a situation that is of concern to employees but, more importantly, that impacts on the welfare of captive animals. In order to ensure that the code works, complainants need to have protection, and that protection would have to be part of the code. Consequently, staff would need to be trained so that they could identify a problem in each particular circumstance.

I am aware of the various steps undertaken by the Queensland government in conjunction with the Queensland Wildlife Park Association to improve various aspects of this industry through the creation of a code of practice. Of course, I am aware of the review of the Animal Protection Act 1925. However, that provides a guide only, with no binding obligations on zoo and aquarium institutions to comply. A binding code of practice is necessary, containing offences and punishments for non-compliance. Importantly, it must be a code of practice which is enforceable and which gives the opportunity for experienced zoo and aquarium people to take part in that enforcement process. I believe that it would be a step in the right direction for captive animals.