




Speech By
Andrew Powell

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

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EXHIBITED ANIMALS BILL

 **Mr POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (5.23 pm): I rise to make a short contribution to the debate on the Exhibited Animals Bill.

Mr Stevens: Hear, hear!

Mr POWELL: I thank the Leader of Opposition Business. I do so for three primary reasons. Firstly, as the former minister for environment and heritage protection, I worked with the former minister for agriculture, forestry and fisheries to see this bill ultimately introduced into the House. I would say that it is long overdue. I know that the exhibited animals industry certainly came to the former Labor government some seven years ago and tried to get this bill cracking. I acknowledge that, even in the three years that we were in power, it was a tortuous trek to get the bill to the parliament. So I am pleased—and commend the minister for reintroducing the bill—to finally see it come into legislation because, ultimately, it will bring together several pieces of legislation and some very convoluted regulation and subordinate legislation that are hard for the industry to navigate. This bill will make it far simpler for them to do so.

The second reason that I would like to make a contribution to this debate is the role that Australia Zoo plays in employment, particularly in the electorate of Glass House. As the shadow minister pointed out, Australia Zoo is technically in the electorate of Caloundra, but it is probably one of the most significant employers in the electorate of Glass House. Over the past six years, particularly over the past three years as the former minister for the environment, I formed a very close working relationship with Terri and the team—Wes, Frank and all of the staff of Australia Zoo. They do a fantastic job out there and I am pleased to do anything that I can to assist them not only in offering top-quality tourism opportunities for both Australian and international tourists but also in their work of presenting wildlife to the public so that the public better understand wildlife and are better educated about Australian wildlife in particular and the conservation work that they do.

The second reason that I would like to make a contribution to this debate is out of professional respect for two individuals whom I knew prior to being the minister for the environment, but certainly came to appreciate even more so during my time as minister, Ms Kelsey Engle, the curator of Australia Zoo, and Mr Al Mucci, the Manager of Life Sciences at Dreamworld. Al is the president and Kelsey is a board member of the Zoo and Aquarium Association, Queensland Branch. The minister will not find two more respected individuals in their industry than Kelsey and Al and nor will he find two more professional individuals in not only how they operate within that association but also how they operate within Australia Zoo and Dreamworld.

I would like to reflect on my primary concerns. Earlier this afternoon, I listened to the minister carefully. My understanding is that the minister is addressing, at least in part, some of these concerns. If I have not picked up fully what the minister is doing, I would be very keen for him to elaborate on them in his response. Al acknowledges that it is great that this bill has come about. Al and Kelsey started working on this bill back in 2006. So in 2015—nine years later—we are getting to the end of

the process. A point that was made by the shadow minister and by AI was that, in developing the codes of practice and guidelines, they are very keen for that only to involve government members and the affected members of the industry. We all appreciate that there are well-meaning individuals who are part of organisations such as Animals Australia and Animal Liberation Queensland who are trying to free these animals from zoos without really respecting the fact that these zoos and aquariums play a very important role: firstly, to educate and, secondly, to demonstrate conservation practices and to be part of conservation practices in the form of a captive breeding program. So I would really encourage the minister to work primarily with the affected industry as he develops these codes of practice. I think that there is a place for organisations such as the RSPCA, which has a role in terms of ensuring animal welfare in particular, but some of these other groups have very much a biased approach and their ultimate aim is to shut down these zoos and aquariums. I think that would be a travesty not only for the people who work in those industries but also for Queenslanders as a whole, who would lose an opportunity to enjoy what zoos and aquariums offer and be educated by what they offer.

The other matter that both AI and Kelsey raised related to the management plans. During the public hearing into this bill AI stated—

Management plans ... for each species will have a major resource implication on both government and industry. Under the current system, management plans are required for declared pest species.

During the hearing Kelsey went on to say—

I would definitely like to reiterate the aspects of the management plans, particularly if you consider that there would be a requirement for zoos and aquaria, who are quite professional facilities, to submit management plans not only for species that we have already been approved to hold but also for species that people can hold as pets. So you can go to a pet shop and buy some of these animals under a recreational licence and there is no requirement from government for any sort of management plan in the same respect. I guess for a business like Australia Zoo or perhaps Dreamworld, which hold hundreds of species, requiring a management plan for these very low-risk species—they are evidently so low risk that an individual private person can keep them as a pet with very little reporting—seems a little bit at odds.

The committee did pick up on this. On page 31 of their report there is significant committee comment, which I acknowledge the minister spoke to in his second reading speech, then there are two subsequent recommendations. The upshot of the views by AI and Kelsey is that in the interests of trying to reduce the regulatory burden on professional exhibited animal industry bodies we do not want to create an administrative burden either on them or on the government itself that has to oversee it. I think I understood there are going to be some minor tweaks, possibly an amendment during consideration in detail, but also that the minister's department is preparing a number of example template management plans and that there is potential to amalgamate some management plans to cover a range of species so it is not a case of hundreds of species requiring individual plans at zoos the size and calibre of Dreamworld and Australia Zoo. I am getting an indication that the minister has certainly heard those views and is looking to address them.

When so many pieces of legislation are brought together into a large body of work such as this there will always be teething issues. I would ask the minister to be open to addressing any of those teething issues as they arise. If the minister needs individuals to bounce ideas off, then the department, along with EHP, certainly should be looking to continue the engagement with both Kelsey and AI. I think they have the wisdom and the respect within their industry to represent those views. With that I commend the bill to the House.