



Hon Stephen Robertson MP
Member for Stretton



Minister for Natural Resources,
Mines and Energy

1 JUN 2004

Mr N J Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Parliament House
Alice and George Streets
Brisbane Qld 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

I refer to your letter of 23 April 2004 forwarding a copy of a Petition lodged in the Queensland Legislative Assembly, requesting the House to ensure the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy works with David Gill of the Mareeba Wild Animal Park by assisting him in every possible way to get the park up and running.

My department is responsible under the *Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002* for regulating the keeping of exotic mammals, reptiles and amphibians in Queensland. My department must consider the potential for new pest animal problems to develop and risk to human safety in deciding permit applications. It was in this context that my department worked with Mr David Gill to provide permits for keeping animals, as he developed the Mareeba Wild Animal Park (the Park).

With regard to delays in assessing permit applications, Mr Gill submitted applications in mid December 2003 for the keeping of nine species, with the animals to be sourced from Tipperary Wildlife Sanctuary in the Northern Territory. Three of the species were not listed in the *Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Regulation 2003*, which resulted in the applications being rejected. Mr Gill was advised promptly and invited to submit information in support of adding the species to the Regulation.

My department received an earlier application for keeping one species prior to December 2003, but additional information was requested from Mr Gill. When this information was provided in December 2003, my department was also advised that the animals would come from Tipperary Wildlife Sanctuary. This application was further assessed along with the six remaining applications from mid December.

Level 13 Mineral House
41 George Street Brisbane Qld 4000
PO Box 456 Brisbane Albert Street
Queensland 4002 Australia
Telephone +61 7 3896 3688
Facsimile +61 7 3210 6214
Email NRME@ministerial.qld.gov.au
Website www.nrm.qld.gov.au

The assessment process included referral to the Exotic Animal Risk Assessment Committee (EARAC). Mr Gill was advised on 1 March 2004, that four species would be approved subject to an inspection of the enclosures and that two species were rejected. Final approval of the four species, with non-breeding conditions on two species, was given on 12 March 2004. On 19 March 2004, Mr Gill was advised that the seventh species was also rejected but only after my department had sought additional information that might have supported the application and had consulted again with EARAC.

Separate from the matter of permitting, breaches of the permit for the Park were reported to my department, and it had a legal duty to investigate. Complaints have been laid against Mr Gill as a result of this investigation. In early April this year, Mr Gill closed the park for his own reasons and returned to England. Despite Mr Gill's unavailability, my department has maintained regular contact with staff still at the Park, to ensure that security and care of the animals is being maintained. My department is aware from the Park's staff, its website and potential buyers, that Mr Gill is seeking to sell the park.

My department has provided advice to potential buyers with the approval of the Park management on requirements for transferring the permit to a new owner and adding additional species.

At no point was Mr Gill informed that he had to castrate animals. He was informed that non-breeding colonies of some species could be kept. This is because of the risk of escaped animals establishing pest populations. Most zoos faced with a similar decision have chosen to keep a single sex colony only. Sterilisation of animals is a decision made by some parks and is also undertaken as a management tool by zoos in certain situations.

There is no indication that the breeding of endangered species at the Park is an important or even necessary component of worldwide captive breeding programs. My department is supportive of the Park's re-opening, but it must be carried out in compliance with a permit for keeping.

I appreciate the views of the people of North Queensland and their concerns outlined in this Petition. I assure them that my department has treated Mr Gill fairly and will continue to work with present and future management of the Park to ensure that it has the best chance of re-opening under the same conditions as required of all zoos in this State.

Thank you for bringing this matter to my attention.

Yours sincerely

STEPHEN ROBERTSON MP