




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

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EXHIBITED ANIMALS BILL

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (4.27 pm): I rise to speak to report on the Exhibited Animals Bill 2015. This report presents the findings from the committee's inquiry into the Exhibited Animals Bill 2015, introduced on 27 March 2015 by the Hon. Bill Byrne, Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries and Minister for Sport and Racing. The reforms in this bill were first brought to our attention in 2008 under the Bligh Labor government. The bill is similar to the LNP government's lapsed Exhibited Animals Bill 2014 considered briefly by the former Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee, though there are some notable refinements.

We are fortunate in Queensland to have a strong and vibrant exhibited animals industry worth some \$100 million to the state's economy and at least a further \$100 million in additional value to the tourism sector annually. There would be few locals or visitors to our state who have not experienced one of our iconic zoos, circuses or mobile animal exhibitions. In the year 2007, which is the most recent year where figures from individual parks published their list of attendees, we saw 1,368,141 people visit Dreamworld and 1,351,800 people visit Sea World.

Of course there are many attractions at theme parks such as Dreamworld and Sea World, but anyone who has seen their advertising knows that the animals they exhibit are a huge drawcard. The IBISWorld industry report on amusement parks and centres operation dated September 2014 noted—

Theme park revenue increased strongly from 2012-13 through 2014-15 due to greater investment in new attractions and rides, strong sales for the company's annual-pass program and improvements across the economy.

Theme park revenue dipped slightly in 2011-12 due to some poor weather ... and despite visitor numbers increasing to over five million.

In the Gold Coast Business News, Dreamworld was named one of the top 10 companies and noted—

More than two million visitors passed through the turnstiles for the first time at Ardent's Gold Coast operations which comprise DreamWorld, WhiteWater World and Skypoint in the 2014 financial year.

And we have Australia Zoo, as the member for Nanango just mentioned, which on their website state—

Corporate Sponsorship at Australia Zoo is a great way for organisations to be recognised by well over 700 000 annual visitors from all over the world whilst supporting our fight for wildlife conservation.

Thanks to the mobile animal exhibitors—those exhibitors who travel far and wide across our state, visiting our local schools and our regional and rural areas—Queenslanders living in remote and regional areas are provided with an opportunity to have contact with these animals which they may not otherwise have had the opportunity to experience. Here in South-East Queensland we have access to facilities like Dreamworld, Sea World, Australia Zoo and Underwater World, but it is not so easy for many people who live remotely in this state or those who for some other reason are unable to visit fixed animal exhibits like Dreamworld, Sea World and Australia Zoo. That is where these mobile

animal exhibitors come in. I am sure we have all seen the joy that these groups bring to people when they exhibit the animals, as they often provide the additional opportunity for a more hands-on experience for the people they visit.

This Exhibited Animals Bill 2015 is an important piece of legislation. It brings together several components around the exhibition of animals into one consolidated bill. Prior to this bill, we saw regulations and licensing schemes scattered across several pieces of legislation, making it confusing for stakeholders and potentially negligent on matters such as animal welfare and safety risks. In fact the cornerstones to this Exhibited Animals Bill are public safety, biosecurity and animal welfare.

What stakeholders in the area of animal exhibiting have had to do previously is navigate their way through more than six licensing schemes under a variety of acts. As if that was not enough, they sometimes needed more than one licence in order to operate their business in a professional manner. The Exhibited Animals Bill 2015 provides consistency. The bill is designed to protect professionals—like the groups which contributed to the committee's inquiry. At the same time, this bill will act as a deterrent to those people who may not share the same scruples when it comes to those cornerstones previously mentioned of biosecurity, animal welfare and public safety.

The Exhibited Animals Bill 2015 will require all animal exhibit applicants to provide a management plan, which will include a detailed explanation of how the applicant intends to minimise risks such as animal welfare, biosecurity and public safety risks. It is my view that preparing a management plan—which, once successful, can result in the granting of a three-year licence—provides animal exhibitors with an opportunity to display their experience and knowledge of the field; at the same time, it outlines the risks relevant to their own specific operation. In its submission, the RSPCA said—

Further to welfare considerations, we support the compulsory stipulation that a management plan must be written for all exhibited animals as we see this as an important way to ensure the appropriate care and welfare is provided to all animals in various situations.

Another positive outcome of management plans—which effectively provide licences based on risk assessment—is that a broader range of animal species will be eligible to be exhibited in Queensland. There is one restriction though that comes out of this bill—that is, the exhibiting of one category of animals. These are animals that are considered prohibited matter under the Biosecurity Act 2014 and it includes reptiles, amphibians and most exotic mammals. The main reason for this exemption is that these 'prohibited matter'—which includes most exotic mammals—are identified as posing a 'high pest establishment risk' and as such are only able to be kept in a fixed exhibit that is open to public viewing. There are some instances where these animals will be granted 12-month special approval for offsite exhibiting, such as in the case of travelling circuses.

Within the submissions and during the public inquiries, there were some concerns around the need for mobile exhibitors to provide a minimum of 900 hours each year where the animals were open to the public in what is known as a 'fixed exhibit'. It is important to note the decision around this requirement is largely as a means to deter any private collector who wishes to operate under the guise of an exhibitor but for personal enjoyment. However, the committee did make the recommendation that the stipulated 900 hours per year be reduced to 600 hours per year, or 50 hours per month, to assist mobile exhibitors meet the licensing requirements.

In addition to the risk based licensing framework, the department will carry out regular compliance assessments of all licensed exhibitors. These compliance assessments are essential to monitor the licensees and to ensure that the chief executive has all the information they require to make an informed decision on an application for a grant, a renewal or an amendment of a licence. It is my view that this monitoring, through the compliance assessments, will assist the government to reach its goals of this bill—which is to manage biosecurity, public safety and animal welfare. Further, these regular compliance assessments will help the industry take responsibility for future improvements when it comes to risk management.

This long-term strategy will enhance industry quality assurance schemes moving forward. But exhibitors who have a good track record of compliance within the industry should not fear that they will be subject to invasive compliance assessments. These compliance assessments are a means to ensure that the animal exhibit industry in Queensland remains at the high standard we currently see. Random checks will also occur to ensure best practice outcomes. I see this as creating good incentives—both financial and professional—to exhibitors when it comes to best practice in their field.

Working on the Exhibited Animals Bill 2015 was an interesting and informative experience. It was my first in my role as chair of the Agriculture and Environment Committee. In my view, the bill will implement a holistic, risk based approach to regulating the exhibited animals industry. I take this opportunity to thank all those stakeholders who made submissions and who attended public inquiries.

I felt it was a real privilege to be in the room with these people who so clearly are passionate and professional in their industry. Their contribution was invaluable, and I think I can speak on behalf of the whole committee when I say that we were impressed with their professionalism, passion, dedication to and care of the animals that they exhibit.

The provisions in this bill will help to ensure that this important industry continues to maintain its excellent animal welfare biosecurity and work safety record, and that exhibitors and their staff will maintain their high standards of professionalism and care. I want to thank the exhibitors and others who shared their views on the legislation with my committee and with the former committee. I also acknowledge the effort and professionalism of departmental staff who advised the committee on provisions of the bill. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the committee secretariat—Rob Hansen, Megan Johns, Tamara Vitale and Rhia Campillo—for their professionalism, their support and their patience. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the particularly constructive approach adopted by committee members—the member for Burnett who is the deputy chair, the member for Maranoa, the member for Logan, the member for Mackay and the member for Hervey Bay. I commend this report to the House.