

Thursday, November 07, 2013

Chair, The Hon Natasha Maclaren-Jones MLC

Standing Committee No. 3

Parliament House

Macquarie Street

Sydney NSW 2000

Taronga Zoo Sydney
Taronga Western Plains
Zoo Dubbo
Taronga Foundation
Research and
Conservation Centre
Australian Conservation
Genetics Centre
Wildlife Hospital
Australian Wildlife
Health Network
Australian Registry
of Wildlife Health
Marine Rescue Unit
Australian Marine Mammal
Research Centre
Education Centre
Training Institute
Zoo Mobile

Inquiry into tourism in local communities

Dear Madam Chair and members of the committee,

I attach below responses to questions on notice directed to me during the recent committee roundtable on October 10th 2013. Before responding, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the committee for taking the time to undertake part of their review in Dubbo, and furthermore, availing themselves to conduct a site inspection of Taronga Western Plains Zoo. Your enthusiasm for our industry and our establishment is greatly appreciated.

My responses follow the accompanying extract of the round table transcript of October 10th:

Question:

Mr SCOT MacDONALD: We are out of time so I will give you some questions to respond to on notice—I do not need a response right now. Somewhere in the submission you mentioned that you were concerned about regulation of the display and exhibit of animals. Do you have a recommendation for regulatory change that we could consider that would benefit the zoo? Can you give us your thoughts as to what impact Animals Australia or Voiceless might be having on your business? Is that a threat to you in the future? I think you have already answered some of the other things I was going to raise about social media, but if there is anything more you want to add on that issue then that would be good. I see from your submission that you do not support special rate variations. I was interested in that, and it is one of our terms of reference. I guess my question is: are you concerned about the methodology and that whoever benefits ends up paying? I do not quite hear what Ms Barlow said about tourism. Did you say that people are or are not interested in tourism?

Response:

In reference to regulation, the comments included in my original submission made reference to the fact that NSW is the most heavily regulated state in relation to the exhibit of animals. This comment was to reinforce the fact that we do not believe that any further implementation of new or expanded regulation would necessarily achieve the desired effect, which is not yet established. For visitor

economy related activities the regulator should be considered as the consumer, ie self regulation via consumer demand and participation is perhaps the most effective means.

Our organisation is in constant consultation with the NSW Department of Primary Industry in relation to the regulation of the zoo industry and will continue to work with the department in an attempt to achieve practical professional standards that meet the needs of both parties.

In response to questions relating to NGO impacts on business, it is not evident that this had had any impact on visitation.

Regarding Rate Variations, it was not our intent in the original submission to oppose special rate variations, but to point out that very few examples of compulsory rate variation participation have been effective. It is our firm belief that industry at large needs to participate more financially toward support investment in local visitor economies, however, this should probably be considered in an elective fashion or perhaps through incentivising tourism businesses to participate in cooperative programs.

Question:

CHAIR: I have one question for Taronga Western Plains Zoo to take on notice in relation to capital investment and funding. It is about not only your long-term plan and how you got to where you are but also your overseas market. Mr Fuller mentioned this morning about the zoo targeting visitors from the Chinese market,

amongst others. Was that with package deals and programs? Was that something you initiated at a local level or have you worked in with government as part of a statewide plan?

Response:

Taronga and Taronga Western Plains Zoo are both working extensively with Destination NSW and Tourism Australia to ensure that both properties are in the best possible position to capitalize on any realistic opportunity brought about from the burgeoning Chinese inbound market. In doing so, we need to consider our product and how it responds to this and other potential growth markets. In turn, this influences capital investment, visitor experience initiatives as well as how these are packaged and presented to the market to ensure that these respond to available consumer demand.

The other key element in any inbound product is ensuring that the wholesale distribution network through inbound operators are acutely aware of and support on-selling the product you are offering. Relationship management, commercial arrangements with these operators, as well as access and price all influence the effectiveness and practicality of inbound visitation. It should be noted, that particularly for regional and remote locations that there is considerably more work to do to ensure

that international visitors are part of their consumer mix, and growth will likely be incremental as opposed to a significant influx unless a new paradigm was offered through significant investment or innovative product development which responded directly to the target group audience.

Question:

The Hon. NIALL BLAIR: And, while we are putting questions on notice, I would like Mr Fuller to expand on the long-term view versus short-term view mentality that he talked about in his opening statement.

CHAIR: We will send these questions to you in writing as well. We will send you a list.

The Hon. NIALL BLAIR: I just wanted Mr Fuller to expand on that long-term view versus the short-term view. You were saying that there is money going to short-term projects versus longer term projects.

Mr FULLER: Yes, I was talking about 12-month projects versus strategic activities.

The Hon. NIALL BLAIR: Yes, if you could expand on that then that would be great; and maybe OROC would like to respond to that question as well.

Response:

In referring to a long term view, this related to the application of grant and government program funding for initiatives such as cooperative marketing and product development. To date, each program initiated in NSW has been made available on an annual or one off basis. For any sustained growth or change to be brought about through visitation and its effect on local communities investment must be considered more strategically and allow for multiple year / mid to long term projects which can in time build market awareness, brand presence and sustain visitation growth and provide the responding return on investment. The current framework, by default, encourages discreet projects with a very short term view or narrow results focus.

Question:

CHAIR: I have one final question about destination management plans and grant applications. How have you have that process? Has it been an improvement or has it been challenging? All those questions will be sent to you and you do have 21 days to respond. Thank you very much for your time this morning, and particularly to Matthew Fuller and your staff. We have all had a great experience as visitors.

Response:

Our experience with the current round of grant applications has been very positive due to the success that we have achieved through 2 out of the five funded projects of the RVEF (Regional Visitor Economy Fund) program. The process is incredibly thorough, some would say arduous, although obviously the state needs to ensure that it is investing in worthwhile and measurable programs

which align with the objectives of the Visitor Economy Taskforce Industry Action Plan. The contract process is more streamlined and simpler than that of the Federal equivalent which is positive.

Destination Management Planning is essential for any Visitor Economy, and in essence is the business plan for tourism related activities. Our participation in the establishment of such for our area through Inland NSW has been very positive, productive, and has provided a great catalyst to bring operators and other key stakeholders together.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the above listed further response to inform the committees review. We look forward to your findings and continuing to work cooperatively with the NSW Government on realizing new opportunities for visitor economies across our state.

Sincerely,

Matthew Fuller

General Manager

Taronga Western Plains Zoo