



Mornington Peninsula Shire Council

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10 January 2010

Dear Councillors,

Animal circuses operating on public land

We write to express our disappointment and concern upon learning that your Council is continuing to allow animal circuses – including those which use exotic animals – to operate on public land within your municipality.

Lawyers for Animals is a not-for-profit incorporated association run by a management committee of lawyers. Its objectives include: alleviating the suffering of animals by engaging with those who create or administer laws in Australia to strengthen legal protection for animals; developing awareness of animal suffering among the legal profession and the wider Australian public through information and education; and promoting better animal welfare practices amongst animal-related industries in Australia.

We note that the RSPCA's policy on animal circuses is clear. On their website, they state that:

.... no circus, no matter how well managed, can provide an appropriate environment for wild animals.

Performing circus animals are kept for prolonged periods in close confinement, in artificial social groups and are continually being transported between circus venues for the duration of their performing lives. All for the purpose of entertainment. The life of a circus animal leads to stress, boredom and often results in abnormal behaviours or stereotypies, such as repetitive pacing or swaying.

[See: http://kb.rspca.org.au/What-is-the-RSPCAs-view-on-the-use-of-animals-in-circuses_146.html]

Putting it more bluntly: circus animals are commonly chained, caged, forced to live in cramped and unsuitable housing, and transported from town to town in wagons. Circuses deny captive-born wild animals the opportunity to exhibit their natural behaviours. Such animals do not lose the instinctive needs with which they are born; rather, they need to socialise and roam freely in order to remain sane. As Jan Creamer, chief executive of Animal Defenders International says: "It's rather as if you and I were asked to spend the rest of our lives living in our bathroom." Strictly choreographed animal circus presentations, generated by gruelling and monotonous training, frustrate and demean their subjects. At the same time, the absence of true 'volition', on the part of the performing animals, degrades their human audience.

The world is increasingly rallying against this form of 'entertainment', and opting for successful non-animal alternatives such as *Cirque du Soleil* and *Silvers Grand Magic Circus*. Countries like Singapore, Austria and Bolivia have banned animal circuses altogether. Already, around 40 Councils across Australia – including six in Victoria and two in Queensland – have passed bylaws banning animal circuses from operating on Council land [see: <http://www.animalcircuses.com/news.aspx>]. Gold Coast, Ipswich, and Lismore City Councils are the most recent additions to this growing list. Exotic animal circuses are no longer allowed to operate anywhere in the Australian Capital Territory [see:

<http://www.animalcircuses.com/bannedareas.aspx>].

The public, and children in particular, learn nothing beneficial or positive about animals by seeing them perform in circuses; in fact, quite the opposite: they learn to disrespect that which is natural. As the RSPCA's scientific research officer, Dr. Mandy Symons, says: "We're hoping that other councils will follow in the footsteps of Ipswich and the Gold Coast... These animals should be moved to open-plan zoos where they are able to express normal behaviours."

We ask that Mornington Peninsula Shire Council pass a bylaw to prohibit the operation of animal circuses on public land within your municipality. In the interim, until such a bylaw can be drafted and approved, we ask that all further permits and leases of public land to animal circuses be denied. We note that non-animal circuses may be approached to fill any perceived gap in public entertainment.

Should the Council require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact the principal author via email: nichola@lawyersforanimals.org.au

Yours faithfully,

(signed copy to follow by mail)

Nichola Donovan

President

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