

March 5, 1974

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Mr. Robert W. Schoning, Director  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
3300 Whitehaven Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20035

Hello, Mr. Schoning:

We have read in AMUSEMENT BUSINESS the recent article (March 9) concerning hearings on the exhibition of sea lions and the possible future additional restrictions on the possession and exhibition of these animals. The article mentioned that you were interested in hearing from other individuals and interests concerning these issues. While we do not represent the circus business, we are certainly involved in the amusement industry, as well as in scientific research with animals, and in these capacities we speak concerning sea lions in particular, and marine mammals in general.

A word about our credentials: we are the pioneering firm in the modern, scientific, humane training methods now being used in the production of most animal shows and trained animal exhibitions around the country. We have been in business for 27 years and have published widely in the scientific and popular literature, (see enclosed) including a college textbook on animal behavior. Our staff includes graduate biologists, graduate psychologists, specialists in animal husbandry, and many with specialized skills and technicians, special certifications in animal training and care. We are a recognized training facility of the Veterans Administration and have put veterans through our special training technicians' program. Also, we have trained a large number of government and private industry personnel in animal training and handling techniques. An extremely large number of those now engaged in training marine mammals in this country received their training directly or indirectly from ABE.

In the course of a 10 year contract with Marineland of Florida (from 1955 through 1964) we designed and produced the present Marineland show and trained their personnel. We have also been similarly involved with the shows at Marineland of the Pacific, Marine World, Redwood City, California. In our scientific capacity, we were consultants-to the U. S. Navy Marine Mammal program which began at China Lake and Point Mugu, California, in the early '60's, and our

present general manager and chief biologist is the former training director of this program. We managed and conducted all research at the Navy Marine Mammal facility in Key West, Florida, during late 1967, 1968, and 1969. A cross-section of our experience with aquatic mammals includes otters, sea lions, seals, many species of dolphins (including, in cooperation with the Fort Worth Zoo, pioneering training research on fresh water species), and many of the larger toothed whales.

In the course of this long involvement with marine mammals, certain points have become very clear to us. One of the first concerns the education of the public with regard to animals in general and these animals in particular. The first exposure of the public to these animals came from the entertainment industry. If it had not been for traveling circus troupes of sea lions and the later permanent installations such as Marineland of Florida, little would really be known about these remarkable animals, and perhaps no concern would have arisen which would have prevented their mass slaughter for skins, meat, blubber, and the like. As you may recall, Marineland of Florida was originally designed as a scientific laboratory and a studio for the photography of marine life; however its ultimate success as a scientific establishment and the public recognition of its usefulness to the scientific community came only after its popular success as a tourist attraction.

The present state of the art with regard to the keeping of marine mammals in captivity, their care, feeding, health, and much of the information concerning their habits and natural history have been the result of the collection and keeping of the animals for exhibition to the public by private enterprise. To turn now on the groups that developed this art and technology is not only unfair but may also deprive us in the future of valuable sources of information. With the present concern for more knowledge of our fellow creatures, how they live, how they learn, and the general desire for extension of this concern to the younger generation, it seems to make little sense to deprive this generation and future ones of the opportunity to see these animals in the flesh and to learn what they can do, how they learn, and how they can relate to man. Although zoos and other public facilities are fulfilling part of this need, certainly the entertainment industry has a large part to fill in this regard, particularly with regard to demonstrating the remarkable capabilities of these animals. In addition, in many instances, scientific research, the benefits of which have been made known throughout the entire scientific community, has been funded and staffed by private, and in this case, the amusement business. The private enterprise establishments have often not been sparing of their hard acquired knowledge in these fields.

Concerning the economic issue, there is certainly a point here. The exhibition and training of animals for shows is an important part of the amusement industry -- certainly a significant segment of American business. One has only to look around at the tourist



attractions, zoos, parks, and special establishments which exhibit animals in one form or another to realize their impact (particularly since the great training revolution of the '50's and '60's in which, as we have mentioned, we were the pioneering company). If one thinks only of the sea lion trainers involved, the numbers are not so terribly large, although it is certainly manifestly unfair to deprive them of their livelihood, so long as they are handling their animals in a responsible manner. One must also look not only at the trainers, but at the ancillary personnel connected with these exhibits -- guides, caretakers, ticket takers, etc. There are possibly whole tourist attractions which would go out of business, or have their businesses substantially reduced, if they did not have the opportunity to present marine mammals to the public. One might also point out that this control over the trainers' and exhibitors' sources of livelihood has been turned over to persons in the government with scientific and institutional backgrounds, who, while competent in their own spheres, may not understand the problems of amusement business nor perhaps appreciate its contributions. It should also be noted that large numbers of individuals and firms in the amusement business are small business concerns who do not have financial means to pursue their interests in the courts should this become necessary.

Certain other issues which have arisen in this controversy seem to concern what is natural, what is humane, what is a wild animal and should be left in the wild. Here certainly the information and opinions of experts should be relevant.

In the first place, it should be obvious on casual inspection that it is hard to distinguish between purely "wild" and purely "domestic" animals. Parrots, finches, and many other commonly kept pet birds are often caught in the wild and brought into captivity. Wild horses are captured and domesticated; domestic horses, donkeys, and pigs often revert to the wild. Our ordinary barnyard pig is a breed of Sus scrofa, the European wild pig, and if allowed to revert to the wild, will freely interbreed with the wild species and in a few generations will be indistinguishable from them. Some of the so-called domestic chickens, particularly in the South, lead an almost wild life, roost in the trees, forage for their food, and so on, and yet are the same Gallus gallus that goes to market as a broiler or spends its life in a small cage laying eggs until it is so old (one year plus) that it is fit only for butchering. Elephants, dolphins, sea lions, deer are examples of similar wild-tame species. In other words, wildness domesticity is a continuum. What makes more sense is to classify animals as to their tamability and adaptability to human care. On these criteria, elephants, dolphins, sea lions, deer, some of the big cats and great apes, and a number of other species seem to fit into the semi-domesticated categories. Classical zoo authorities often use the criterion of breeding in captivity. All these species do so to a certain extent, although not as much perhaps as the zoo keepers would like. It should be pointed out that although the elephant has been "domesticated" for thousands of years, it has not been notably successful in breeding in

captivity in zoos in this country, at least, until the 1960's. However one regards this particular criterion, the point is that sea lions, dolphins, and some other marine mammals are very adaptable to human care -- like most many gregarious animals such as horses and dogs they become attached to their human "family" and respond very well to the conditions of "captivity."

As far as their health and care are concerned, responsible handlers and keepers of these animals normally have good records for the survival of their charges. Since in most cases, the livelihood of the trainers and handlers depends on the lives of their animals, it makes only good business sense, even if nothing else were involved, to take the best of care of the animals. Sea lions and dolphins in the wild are particularly subject to many natural parasites, bacterial and viral illnesses. In the care of their human keepers, these ailments are given prompt treatment. While exact statistics are not available, certainly the longevity of these animals in captivity is improving as the volume of medical and nutritional knowledge has increased.

Another point: The standing crop of sea lions in the coastal waters of the Eastern Pacific is quite probably vastly greater than the harvest of sea lions for exhibition. We realize that one of the purposes of the Marine Mammal Protection Act is to allow time to do determinative studies concerning which of these species of animals may be truly endangered. However, casual inspection of the offshore California islands should suffice to assure one that in relation to the small number of animals required for exhibitions in this country, the population is in no way threatened.

Again, in the case of dolphins, although the percentage of the population taken for shows and exhibitions has certainly increased dramatically since the 1950's and early '60's when these animals first came to prominence in the public eye, the number taken for these purposes is certainly very small compared to the number killed by man by accident (in tuna fishing, for example) or on purpose (by other nations for food). It is quite possible that had these animals not been put on exhibition by Marine Studios (Marineland of Florida) and then by countless other oceanaria no one would now care enough about them to realize they were being needlessly killed in fishing accidents.

Concerning the "tricks" and "acts" which these animals are asked to do for demonstration to the public, these behaviors are simply, and can be nothing but, extensions of natural behaviors. The retrieval of objects, on land or in the water, is simply an example of a behavior seen all the time in the wild in these animals -- they retrieve in their hunting, they play with bits of sea-weed, sticks, rocks, and anything they can get their mouths on. Simply to ask them to get a ball instead of some sea-weed, is not degrading or

turning them into clowns. In addition to the play behavior, in which they are very rich, they get a piece of fish in addition; what could be a more ideal set-up for a sea lion? All the behaviors which a trained sea lion exhibits can be converted into demonstrations of what a sea lion does naturally.

There are certainly questions of portable versus fixed location exhibits of sea lions and dolphins. Sea lions have proved much more adaptable to frequent moves than have dolphins; however, there is a modern technology of dolphin transport, which when properly executed, is extremely safe and foolproof. Again much of this technology arose in the private enterprise sector of marine mammal care and exhibition. There should certainly be guidelines governing acceptable handling, care, and transport of all these animals, and there should be reasonable monitoring of the practices. However, we do suggest that regulations not be made so restrictive and rigid that new and improved techniques might possibly be prohibited.

In summary, to resolve at this point that all sea lion exhibits should be terminated, or made impossible to continue, is to be grossly unfair to the public, to the exhibitors, and possibly to the animals themselves.

Sincerely,

Marian Breland  
President

Robert E. Bailey  
Vice-President

MB/de

Encl.

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