

17 Ellen Avenue
Keilor East
Victoria 3033
Australia

20 September 2010

Dear Councillor,

We the under-signed are writing to you about the recent decision of the Auckland City Council to support the expansion of the Auckland Zoo to allow the acquisition of additional Asian elephants. We urge you to reconsider this decision in light of the following information:

1. **No urban zoo in the world can adequately cater to the needs of elephants.** Sound science tells us that elephants are social animals that spend their lives in and around families of closely related individuals, moving across vast areas. Family life cannot be created in a zoo and there is growing evidence that simply placing unrelated elephants together does not simulate natural social life. Urban zoos can neither provide sufficient space for elephants, nor sufficient environmental complexity.
2. **Importation is highly expensive and logistically complex.** Auckland Zoo could only acquire additional elephants by importing them from overseas. The only sources are existing zoo breeding programs or populations of elephants in the Asian countries in which elephants live naturally.
3. **Removing elephants from existing zoo programs will neither assist the sustainability of zoo elephant populations nor assist the welfare of the elephants involved.** Existing zoo populations of Asian elephants, internationally, are not self-sustaining because of a combination of insufficient genetic diversity and skewed age structure.
4. **Removing elephants from Asian countries is unethical.** The recent importation of elephants from Thailand to Australia revealed a range of issues including the current impossibility of proving that imported elephants are actually captive born and not plundered from the wild.
5. **The attempted importation of elephants to New Zealand would generate great international controversy.** The good name of both the City of Auckland, and of New Zealand as a country, will be damaged.
6. **Building for urban elephants is always more expensive than initially estimated.** Even attempting to create basic living conditions for a “herd” of elephants in Auckland Zoo will be extremely expensive. The estimate of \$NZ13 million is almost certainly an under-estimate. The National Zoo in Washington has recently spent an astonishing \$US50 million on basic and inadequate facilities for a proposed total of nine elephants. In Australia, the Melbourne Zoo and Sydney’s Taronga Zoo each spent in excess of \$AU15 million.
7. **Elephants are very expensive to keep.** The ongoing maintenance of elephants in urban zoos has been estimated to cost not less than \$NZ100,000 per specimen per year, not including the maintenance of facilities and capital depreciation. To maintain a “herd” of 10 elephants, not less than \$NZ1,000,000.00 per annum should be allocated.
8. **Urban elephants are NOT a sound investment.** It has been demonstrated that elephants in an urban zoo are not a permanent draw-card sustaining high zoo visitation over time. The birth of elephant calves can result in peaks in visitor numbers but over time such attractions fade and in the long-term they are not cost-effective.
9. **Elephants do not fit the Auckland City “brand”.** Elephants can be readily experienced in many places around the world and their presence in Auckland Zoo would not enhance Auckland or New Zealand as a destination for visitors.

We urge you to reconsider the Council’s decision to support the acquisition of Asian elephants by Auckland Zoo. The elephant Burma, should be sent to live with other elephants in an open-range zoo or sanctuary.

Yours sincerely,

Mr. Will Travers, Chief Executive Officer, Born Free Foundation, Horsham, UK
will@bornfree.org.uk

Mr. Adam Roberts, Executive Vice President, Born Free Foundation USA, Washington DC, USA
adam@bornfreeusa.org

Dr. Cynthia Moss, Director, Amboseli Trust for Elephants, Kenya
cmoss@elephanttrust.org

Dr. Keith Lindsay, Amboseli Trust for Elephants, Oxford, UK
wklindsay@googlemail.com

Dr. Joyce Poole, Director, Elephant Voices, Norway and Kenya
jpoole@elephantvoices.org

Dr. Robert Atkinson, Head of Wildlife, RSPCA, Horsham, UK
ratkins@rspca.org.uk

Ms. Carol Buckley, Elephant Aid International, Hohenwald, Tennessee, USA
elevisions@aol.com

Ms. Catherine Doyle, Director, Elephant Campaign, In Defense of Animals, Los Angeles, California, USA
davidkca@earthlink.net

Mr. Don Elroy, Stop Animal Exploitation Now, Ohio, USA
Jetsonboy1@charter.net

Ms. Glenys Oogjes, Executive Director, Animals Australia, Melbourne, Australia
googjes@animalsaustralia.org

Mr. Jorge Basave, International Fund for Animal Welfare, Sydney, Australia
jabasave@ifaw.org

Ms. Verna Simpson, Humane Society International, Sydney, Australia
verna@hsi.org

Mr. Hans Kriek, SAFE, New Zealand
hans@safe.org.nz

Mr. Bob Kerridge, National President, RNZSPCA, New Zealand
Bob.kerridge@sPCA.org.nz

Ms. Bridget Vercoe, Country Manager, WSPA, New Zealand
BridgetVercoe@wspa.org.nz

Dr. Mel Richardson, Consultant Wildlife Veterinarian, Paradise, California, USA
Doctormel1950@sbcglobal.net

Mr. David Hancocks, Architect and Design Consultant, Melbourne, Australia
dhan8403@bigpond.net.au

Ms. Lisa Kane JD, Coalition for Captive Elephant Wellbeing, Madison, Wisconsin, USA
lisafkane@hotmail.com

Ms. Amy Mayers, Vision Communications, Washington DC, USA
ammcomms@rcn.com

Mr. Peter Stroud, Zoological Consultant, Melbourne, Australia
pcstroud@mac.com