

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE
STANDING COMMITTEE**

INQUIRY INTO COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES IN GOVERNMENT

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN
AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 7 MAY 2008**

SESSION TWO

Members

Mr A.P. O’Gorman (Chairman)
Ms K. Hodson-Thomas (Deputy Chairman)
Mr S.R. Hill
Mrs J. Hughes
Dr G.G. Jacobs

Hearing commenced at 11.02 am

HUNT, MS SUSAN JANE,
Chief Executive Officer, Perth Zoo,
examined:

The CHAIRMAN: Welcome to our committee. Thanks for taking the time to visit today. I have some housekeeping to take care of first, so I ask you to give us your attention for a second. For the purposes of Hansard, when you are asked a question, you will have to answer verbally so that Hansard can record the questions and your responses. I need to read something to you, and I would like you to answer in the affirmative for the purpose of Hansard.

The committee hearing is a proceeding of Parliament and warrants the same respect that proceedings in the house itself demand. Even though you are not required to give evidence on oath, any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament. Have you completed the "Details of Witness" form?

Ms Hunt: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Did you understand the notes attached to it?

Ms Hunt: Yes, I did.

The CHAIRMAN: Did you receive and read the information for witnesses briefing sheet regarding giving evidence before parliamentary committees?

Ms Hunt: Yes, I did, thank you.

The CHAIRMAN: We have received your submission this morning. Do you wish to propose any amendments to your submission?

Ms Hunt: No.

The CHAIRMAN: Before we ask you any questions, would you like to make any statement in addition to your submission?

Ms Hunt: If I may and if it is appropriate.

The CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Ms Hunt: I thought that I would give a bit of context to the submission. It is only a brief submission, but I felt that it had some applicability to your terms of reference, particularly those relating to partnerships and working across government. The Zoo has quite a complex mandate in the twenty-first century. We have moved away from being just menageries to become conservation agencies and education, research and scientific institutions. In order to do that, we have to work constantly in partnerships. I have a background in Indigenous affairs for 12 years as a state public servant. There is a lot in the way that zoos have worked effectively across government in conservation that might assist some of your deliberations.

The other aspect of our conservation work is our work globally, because the Zoo's strategic direction, which has been endorsed by our board and by the minister, is to not just work within our borders but to look globally at conservation more broadly and to get visitors engaged in conservation action. That means that we have to work in developing countries, and, in order to do that, we have to work very closely in community development strategies. To be effective in conservation, we have to really engage local communities. That is another aspect that, in terms of the changing role of zoos, we are now very involved in working on the ground with communities.

I have mentioned in my submission some of the agreements that we have. The Zoological Parks Authority is a small agency in terms of size of government. We have about 180 staff. Therefore, in order to be effective in achieving conservation outcomes, we have to work in partnerships. I have mentioned, for example, that we have a formal agreement between the Zoological Parks Authority and the government of Indonesia in working in orangutan conservation, the conservation of Bukit Tigapuluh National Park, and in Javan gibbon conservation. That agreement is underpinned by a number of agreement with NGOs. In those agreement—I mention that in my submission—we have operational plans about how our staff will work in conjunction with NGOs on the ground to deliver the outcomes. That involves quite a lot of work in engaging local communities, and in employment strategies for local Sumatran people working in the conservation programs that we support. So, in the international sphere, there is quite a lot of global work or partnerships that we do. Also locally, we have three or four partnerships—they take the form of a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Environment and Conservation—on our breed-for-release programs. They are fairly explicit. In order for DEC, previously CALM, to release animals into protection environments, we breed the animals for them. So, to effectively work with the Department of Environment and Conservation, we have quite detailed agreements about what each of our obligations are. That works very well. We have now bred over 1 800 animals with DEC and released them back into protected environments. It is a very effective mechanism and it demonstrates, I think, some real achievements for conservation on the ground for native species in Western Australia.

In terms of other non government partnerships, we have agreements with small NGOs around conservation-specific species. Some of these projects are the Australian orangutan project, because we have similar goals in conservation, and with silvery gibbons. These are very specific programs that do not really relate to your terms of reference, but they do indicate that government agencies can form partnerships and be fairly clear about what they want to achieve jointly with partners. Certainly in my 20-odd years in government, we often do not see as much cooperation as we would wish in terms of shared goals across government. We have been able to do that, certainly with DEC and with NGOs, fairly effectively.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: Susan, if I can just interrupt you there, who initiates that? Is that driven by you or the agency, or by community organisations or NGOs?

Ms Hunt: From the Zoological Parks Authority perspective, we have driven it at an executive level. I think I have mentioned in one aspect of my submission the importance of commitment at a very high level, and the recognition of shared goals of similar agencies. The high-level commitment is very important. I bring all our agreements and MOUs to our corporate executive, which is a group of five. I also put them through my Zoo board, because I am very keen that it is very transparent in terms of what we want to achieve. So, it is certainly done at executive level. There is in government and in NGOs a lot of fuzziness around partnerships, so I have found that the best way to achieve it is to be quite explicit in letters of intent and MOUs.

Mr S.R. HILL: Obviously, you are a passionate person about driving that. However, if, for example, you were taken away from your role and a new CEO came in, there could be a different perspective altogether again, could there not?

Ms Hunt: There could be. I am actually about to move into a new role, so it is very front-of-mind for me. I am going to DEC. What we have done is build into our corporate executive structure that there will be six-monthly reports to the Indonesian government on progress on our MOU. That will mean that six-monthly reviews of that process will become part of our operational planning. We are also pushing it through my board, because they now want regular reports on how all the MOUs are tracking. We want to make it part of our business, and that is what I have been very committed to doing. However, yes, to actually embed it into organisations is a challenge, and we do need to have high-level commitment.

The CHAIRMAN: Susan, you talk about high-level commitment. How does that go down to the grassroots level in your organisation, to your employees who tend the animals and look after the Zoo itself? How do they get involved in these MOUs, for example, with Indonesia and things like that?

Ms Hunt: Certainly part of a healthy organisation is to have that engagement right throughout the team. We are actually small enough that we can have full staff meetings, and at those meetings we report on progress on those agreements. Because of the nature of our business and our expertise in orangutan captive husbandry, for example, we have staff who go to Indonesia and work with the locals and train them up. We are talking about a reintroduction program for those orangutans that cannot be integrated into the wild, so our staff will work with the locals on that. We also have staff exchanges. We actually train Indonesians who come out to the Zoo. We have training programs, as well as industry enrichment. I notice that across government there is not much engagement with Indonesia, but luckily in the conservation area, because we actually have those animals in the Zoo, it is seen to be quite legitimate as a Zoo movement to work in situ, as we call it. We have been able to engage staff by getting them involved and by having staff exchanges, and that is part of the MOU.

The CHAIRMAN: Is that also part of the community development that you mentioned in your opening remarks?

Ms Hunt: Yes. Part of the agreement with the Indonesian government and with our partner in Indonesia, which is the Frankfurt Zoological Society, is that we employ and train local people. It is also that we help fund the local school, because there would not be a school in that national park if it was not for this program. Part of the agreement is also that we assist with education programs on the ground. It is in a very remote part of Sumatra and in an extraordinary part of the world. We actually have all the mega fauna from that area that we show at the Zoo, so we also involve the public by showcasing the work that we are doing in Indonesia.

Mr S.R. HILL: Just getting back to the Australian jurisdiction, do you have any relationship with the RSPCA, or any programs with the education department, such as taking it into preprimary schools? Do you have any of those sorts of partnerships?

Ms Hunt: Yes. We have a number of partnerships. The RSPCA sits on our animal ethics committee. It is not a formal agreement, but it is a close affiliation, because we want to showcase best practice in welfare. We have agreements with the education department. We fund all our own education programs. However, we are in the process of forging a partnership with the education department, because government school access to the Zoo has dropped, and we are very concerned about that as a government agency. Therefore, we have forged a partnership that was initiated by the Zoological Parks Authority saying to DET, "This is not good enough; we need state government kids in our best Zoo", and they have now provided a grant to us, and we are in the process of developing an agreement to fund strategies that will enhance and hopefully increase government school access to Zoo programs. That is one thing. The other thing in the Australian context—I have mentioned the DEC one—is the Australian Wildlife Conservancy. I am not sure if you are aware of that. That is more of a conservation initiative. That is becoming a very large non-government organisation. It purchases large cattle stations and rehabilitates the land and puts back native species. We are about to sign an MOU with them on promoting conservation programs on the ground.

[11.15 am]

Again, we just use it as a mechanism to achieve our goal, which is to enhance conservation on the ground and to engage our visitors—they can be virtual visitors to our website through information technology—in our conservation action. We are actively trying to pursue that. MOUs—the lead agency stuff, which I am sure you would have researched in the 1990s—are a similar model. We cannot achieve it without them, so we actively seek out the partnerships.

The CHAIRMAN: Do the MOUs work for you all the time or do you need a legislative framework to continue this work?

Ms Hunt: The point about engagement of commitment at the senior levels is important. Potentially, CEO agreements would be a mechanism. I do not think that legislative attention would be necessary in the conservation area unless we were faced with a very difficult situation when agencies—again, cabinet should stamp the table and bang their heads together to get them to work. We are open to partnerships. At the moment there is very little openness to those sorts of partnerships. We are seen to be fairly unusual in the state government in many respects, which is a shame. They can be encouraged in the rhetoric around how we effectively plan. I do not think that the language helps much around joined-up government and all the different terminology. It can be as simple as shared outcomes and how we achieve them. Sorry, that is just my hobby horse.

The CHAIRMAN: In terms of finances and budgets in some of your collaborative arrangements, is there a financial aspect to that? Who controls that financial aspect, and does it ever cause a stumbling block between agencies and NGOs?

Ms Hunt: Finances can be quite complicated. There is quite a large body of work around monitoring the effectiveness of conservation programs. They are useful models. It is happening globally. We are part of the world zoo movement and a lot of this is just work we are borrowing. We are quite explicit about the nature of what we want to achieve within the agreement and how it will be measured. We usually attach an addendum about monitoring processes. The dollars used for our work in Sumatra is public money. It is not only state government money, but also money raised from the public through fundraising for conservation programs, so we have to be very transparent about how we manage that. We manage that in very clear agreements. We do not have any administrative costs. The Zoo covers all that and all the public money goes straight to the conservation outcome that we identify in our material about the project. Yes, it has to be specified very clearly. Again, I bring all the details to our executive. It is a very open and transparent process, but it can cause difficulties. For example, the MOUs with DEC have been set in stone for a number of years and, of course, oncosts have increased and they have to be regularly monitored. The amount of food that the western swamp tortoise eats might increase and the weather could change. We have to be transparent and regularly review the agreements. It is a matter of due diligence around the nature of the agreements that we put in place. The financial matters are sensitive, but they are stated very clearly and explicitly. When managing the program offshore in Indonesia in particular, I run it through our board and brief the minister in detail because of the nature of sending money offshore. A German NGO carried out a due diligence report and that NGO manages other similar projects. We make sure that it is assessed rigorously. There are other issues around cooperation and in-kind support. Many of the in situ groups that we support might use the Zoo's grounds for a fundraiser. They are supporting conservation of another organisation, so it is more a case of in-kind support than dollars.

The CHAIRMAN: You mentioned your agreement with DEC. Do you have key performance indicators in it and if you have, how did you develop them?

Ms Hunt: The programs we are running jointly with DEC are run through species recovery programs. They are set through DEC. We are an addendum to that recovery program. DEC measures its work on dibblers, numbats or western swamp tortoises and our measurements are reported in the performance indicators through the budget papers fairly simplistically around the number of animals we breed for release. That is sometimes a little confusing because Shark Bay mice breed prolifically but numbats do not. The report might say that we have bred 100 this year, but that does not tell you much. Sometimes measurement in this area is problematic but it is a matter of managing and monitoring the partnership in a proactive and positive way towards a very clear outcome that we want to achieve conservation in the wild. We look at how animals survive as part of the recovery program.

Mrs J. HUGHES: I have a question not so much on state or international borders, but about the issue of cane toads and those types of things. Cane toads have crossed three of four states and involve three or four governments, including the federal government. Would an MOU be sufficient to deal with that problem, or is there a need for something that is more binding?

Ms Hunt: Cane toads are a contentious issue. We are involved in that through membership of one of the groups that work with government. We look at what we want to achieve in terms of the conservation education of our visitors. We have a cane toad exhibit at the Zoo, which we initiated in conjunction with Stop the Toad, and we hand out its material. It depends on us as a player. We would not need an MOU to do that. However, if we were looking at DEC potentially trying to understand and get the best outcome to stop the toad, an MOU could be a good mechanism but there is some basic work to be done about who does what in that instance. It is not uncommon that a process of sitting around the table and thrashing out the issues rather than causing duplication and misunderstanding could be really effective. Certainly in my previous work in Indigenous affairs, agreements were the way to go.

Mrs J. HUGHES: We were just talking to some people about some cross-border issues. Cane toads have no borders either. How should different states relate to each other? Do we need to say, "No, that's on your side of the border?" Would legislation of that sort create a better collaboration?

Ms Hunt: It comes down to the question of commitment and ways of working. If you have to be heavy-handed and can see an outcome by doing that, it will not happen anyway but it is an option. To get to that outcome, it would be good for the bureaucrats to come to that position themselves. Certainly a position I have come to very strongly in the zoo movement is that we are part of the global species management system. We cannot breed a tiger without approval from the species coordinator in London. That is how locked in we are with cooperation. That is a really useful model that could be replicated. We do not sell and buy animals; it is based on cooperation across the region and globally. That is legal and is conducted through CITES by the United Nations. That is an interesting model.

Mrs J. HUGHES: That is a collaborative approach.

Ms Hunt: Very much so. Every endangered or threatened animal in our zoo is managed either regionally or globally. We cannot breed them without approvals. The CITES processes, although contentious, might be something to look at.

Mr S.R. HILL: You have given us the positives; what are some of the failures? Which programs have not gone anywhere and what have been the shortcomings?

Ms Hunt: I am a very positive person. I think that shortcomings occur when the programs are not driven hard by an organisation and the organisation does not consider it to be part of its core work. You are right to ask about how that commitment might be continued. I have tried to embed it in the organisation. Contractual arrangements are levels of agreement. We have a \$4 million contract for our catering services. Unless that is managed actively and seen as a better way to provide better services for the customers, it will fall down. It is similar with MOUs. There is no difference; it is a contract to agree to achieve an outcome.

The CHAIRMAN: You said that if you want to breed a tiger, you have to get approval from someone in London. If you did not bother to get those approvals, what sanctions could apply? How can the sanctions be enforced in Western Australia?

Ms Hunt: It would mean that we would have a big problem with the genetics of our tigers. As an agency that is committed to providing back-up populations if the in situ populations collapse, it would create inbreeding and the unsuccessful breeding of endangered animals. We would be kicked out of the regional association in the longer term and we would not be able to breed animals because we could not get suitable genetic stock. The nature of our business would diminish.

The CHAIRMAN: Is it not a legal sanction as such?

Ms Hunt: I understand that it is now. The federal government is legislating that we cannot import an animal without being part of a managed program. That already is in place but we cannot import an animal without a conservation outcome in the country of origin. They are becoming quite proscriptive about what zoos and wildlife parks are doing. There is a legal framework through the commonwealth Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts. There is a legislative basis for that.

Mrs J. HUGHES: The consequences are quite dire considering it is a whole species you are talking about. Practice is extremely important.

Ms Hunt: Yes. Zoos have a very strong conservation push, but also the nature of the business would fail. The way we engage people in conservation is to get them immersed in animals.

The CHAIRMAN: You also mentioned that you do not buy and sell animals commercially. If you are bringing in a new animal, there is a cost attached to that. It is not just a partnership where animals are passed around the world or are delivered.

Ms Hunt: There are agreements. They are not written but it is the practice that the receiving zoo pays the transportation costs of an animal. No money is paid for the animal, per se.

The CHAIRMAN: If the Zoo breeds a tiger, for example, and sends it to Taronga Zoo, is there no charge for that?

Ms Hunt: No. We just sent a rhinoceros to Monarto Zoo for breeding at no cost to us. Three of our staff went with the animal to ensure that the transition was well managed. That rhinoceros will go to a breeding program. We also sent two to Christchurch last year, which is a very long distance. There is no cost to us. The receiving zoo pays the costs because it enhances its breeding outcomes and collection.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you for coming in. Before you go, I will read a closing statement to tell you exactly what will happen from now on. Thank you for your giving evidence before the committee this morning. A transcript of the hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of minor errors. Please make these corrections and return the transcript to us within 10 days of receiving it. If it is not returned within this period, it will be deemed to be correct. Thank you very much, Susan.

Hearing concluded at 11.30 am