SUBMSSION – DEBBIE WALL

Item 2 of the Report of the Standing Policy Committee on Protection, Community Services and Parks dated April 11, 2022 regarding Further Proposed Responsible Pet Ownership By-law Amendmentss

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Personal information
Full name: Debbie Wall
Email address:
Phone:
Job title:
Organization:
Address:
City: Winnipeg
Province or territory: Manitoba
Postal code:

Delegation information
Committee: Council
Committee - council: Support the recommendations
Committee - other: N/A
Agenda item (number and title): Responsible Pet Ownership By-Law updates.

Service inquiry: Submit Comments in writing
Participation preference: N/A

Comments in writing: "Shut up, Nikki." The young Cockatoo had taught herself to mimic this phrase after hearing it repeatedly in response to her screeching which was her way of coping with the boredom and frustration of captivity. Her guardian's "solution" was to plunge her into darkness by shutting her in a closet.

Cruizer, a Peruvian guinea pig whose long hair had grown into a painful matt the size and thickness of a cantaloupe rind over his hindquarters. Dozens of turtles, no bigger than a silver dollar when purchased, surrendered when they grew to be the size of dinner plates. Newton, a lovebird who picked her feathers until she was completely bald and Toot, her partner, who died after panicking and flying into the side of their cage. A lizard of unknown species who succumbed to a botched attempt to treat a severe external parasite infestation.

These stories illustrate some of the fall-out from the pet industry I witnessed during my 35 years working in veterinary practices. In Manitoba, it is legal to keep native wildlife under only very specific circumstances, such as being a certified wildlife rehabilitator. But those animals being sold as "exotic pets" are wildlife native to other countries. Apparently the only qualification to have them in one's possession is a valid credit card. Many of these animals suffer when their physical, psychological or social needs are not met in captivity.

Even those with more basic requirements do not necessarily fare much better. Pet store care guides indicate Betta fishes should be housed in aquariums no smaller than 3 gallons. Yet they are often

displayed for sale in tiny, barren, plastic cups slightly bigger than their bodies. A quick search for tanks reveals many that are half a gallon in capacity, some being sold as "hip and trendy" wall mounts. The Bettas themselves are considered nothing more than decorative items, much like the plastic plants that "enrich" their environment.

It is worth noting here that several European countries have banned fish bowls and recently AgroBiothers Laboratoire, a French aquarium vendor, has announced it will no longer sell aquariums under 15 litres because they believe putting fishes in anything smaller is abusive.

Canada has the shameful reputation of having some of the weakest animal protection laws in the developed world. That is because any time we try to make meaningful change there is pushback from those whose profits are threatened and who will resort to fear-mongering and the spreading of misinformation to maintain the status quo. An ad run by Petland featuring a picture of a little girl and a lovebird with the line, "My best friend may be banned -WILL YOURS?" is truly a classic. Any time animals are exploited in activities where there is pride, prestige or profit to be had, the potential for their suffering is limited only by the capacity of humans to "justify" it.

Is it possible that some businesses could lose profits or close all together as a result of up-grades to the RPO by-laws? Perhaps. But this happens all the time, especially with the advancement in technology. I doubt there are many who would forego their cell phones if it meant hundreds of jobs at Eastman Kodak Company could be restored. But change is not limited to technology. We are evolving towards a world that is more just and businesses will have to learn to adapt.

The pet industry has trotted out "The Five Freedoms" as representing their guiding principles. But captivity, by its very definition, is freedom denied. It is particular disingenuous to suggest that these animals have the "freedom to engage in natural behaviors." Their birthright to flight, forage, traverse their home ranges, seek a mate and, in some cases, even stretch to their full length is taken from them.

Also disingenuous is the pet industry's argument against the proposed "Positive List" of "Allowable Animals." They claim it will be "unfair to Winnipeggers who may not be dog or cat owners, but who still want a pet as a member of their family household." That still leaves dozens of species to choose from. But, apparently, this won't satisfy hobbyists, collectors or the industry's pocket book. There also needs to be a limit on the numbers of animals one can keep. With each addition there is less time and resources to be devoted to all and the need to evacuate in case of emergency also has to be considered. In November of last year, hundreds of reptiles died in an Edmonton house fire. Dozens of empty plastic totes, where the victims "lived" and died, were pictured strewn across the lawn in the aftermath.

There is a global call for the end of the wildlife trade which is destroying habitats and endangering species while increasing the risk of pandemics and invasive species. No being should be abducted from the wild to endure an existence in captivity and it is unconscionable that animals are bred for profit while others are literally dying for the want of a good home. Extended periods of solitary confinement of human prisoners, even those who have committed the most heinous of crimes, is considered torture. But we impose a life-time of same on the most innocent of beings . . . so we can call them "pets." If Covid can teach us anything, it should be empathy for those who are in isolation, unable to interact with family or friends and denied the ability to engage in meaningful activities.

So it can be argued that no wild animal should be kept in captivity, other than in the context of rescue or sanctuary. And it was in that spirit that Senator Murray Sinclair introduced The Jane Goodall Act on

November 17, 2020. He said it was reflective of Indigenous values of respect and stewardship and our relationship and connection to the natural world. Having said that, I realize that will not not be a reality in the proposed changes to the RPO by-law. But at least having a "Positive List" will limit the species that can be kept to those who have a lesser chance of suffering the most.
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