

LETTER FROM PETER STROUD TO LOS ANGELES CITY COUNCIL AND MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA

Dear Mayor Villaraigosa and Councilmembers,

News of the Los Angeles Zoo's plans to build a \$42 million elephant exhibit is drawing world-wide attention. As a former zoo Director, Curator and animal Keeper I have direct personal experience managing an elephant program in an urban zoo. I have also made a close study elephant welfare over the last decade. This experience and the knowledge I have gained compels me to express to you my deep misgivings about the LA Zoo's plans.

Much has been written and said already about elephant welfare in zoos and the opportunities that zoos present to foster care and concern for wildlife. Sadly behind much of the rhetoric there are few facts. Arguments are so often framed as being between so called "Activists" and zoo staff. I would offer you the following in the hope that you may be influenced to vote against continuing the development of the elephant exhibit at LA Zoo.

- 1) Elephants in urban zoos around the world would suffer from a variety of health problems and early death associated with close captivity. Recent research published in the journal Science - arguably the world's most prestigious scientific journal - and supported by a paper lately published in the journal, "Animal Reproduction Science", provides hard and irrefutable evidence of this.
- 2) Field research has revealed that elephants are social animals of great complexity, physiologically and mentally adapted to lead lives of constant social interaction and continuous movement, across broad landscapes. They are animals of deep intelligence and powerful emotions. These are not matters of conjecture but matters of fact.
- 3) No urban zoo in the world currently caters appropriately for the needs of elephants. Attempts to do so by creating small groups of disparate individuals, in small exhibits of a few acres, where constant control of individual animals by keepers must be maintained at all times just to ensure some level of exercise and mental stimulation, are wholly inadequate and ethically questionable.
- 4) The space devoted to elephants at LA Zoo could be devoted to a variety of other species in a far more cost effective way, providing higher levels of engagement and enjoyment for the people of Los Angeles, free of ethical doubt and controversy.
- 5) The LA Zoo has a brilliant opportunity to join those urban zoos that have rightly decided that indeed they cannot adequately cater for elephants. The remaining elephant Billy can and should be sent to a Sanctuary. In many ways California is perceived as leading the world as a humane and progressive society engaged with environmental issues. Sending Billy to retirement in spacious country facilities would confirm that view, while building what will inevitably be very expensive cramped and out-dated urban facilities for elephants, would not.
- 6) There is no evidence - remarkably - that keeping elephants in urban zoos in any way encourages people to care enough about elephants to actually take any significant action to assist

elephant welfare and conservation. Surely this alone should cast doubt on spending \$42 million on a new elephant exhibit.

Please reconsider building facilities for elephants at the Los Angeles Zoo. Only further elephant suffering and continuous controversy can result from any decision to continue with the current project.

Your sincerely,

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