



# AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF ZOO VETERINARIANS

*"Dedicated to wildlife health and conservation"*

581705 White Oak Road • Yulee, Florida, 32097 • 904-225-3275 • Fax 904-225-3289

## AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF ZOO VETERINARIANS

### POLICY STATEMENT

#### REPRODUCTION OF NON-DOMESTIC ANIMALS (ZOOLOGICAL SPECIES) UNDER PROFESSIONAL CARE

##### Legislation and Regulations Preventing the Practice of Veterinary Medicine

#### **Policy**

The AAZV opposes federal, state, and local legislation and regulations that directly or indirectly restrict or prevent the reproduction of non-domestic animals under professional care. Such legislation and regulations restrict and prevent the best practice of veterinary medicine, in some cases are counter to State veterinary practice acts, and can adversely affect the health and welfare of animals. Furthermore, the AAZV opposes legislation or regulation intended to limit or restrict the transportation of animals as a means of preventing reproduction. When necessary, the AAZV will seek input from other veterinary associations, professional organizations, and stakeholders to inform legislators and regulators of unintended consequences of such legislation.

#### **Background**

Legislation and regulations have emerged at the federal, state, and/or local levels that intentionally or inadvertently restrict or prevent the reproduction of non-domestic animals under professional care. Such recently enacted and proposed regulations restrict or prevent the best practice of veterinary medicine and can adversely affect the health and welfare of animals. In some cases, these regulations are counter to State practice acts and circumvent the veterinarian's role under the United States Animal Welfare Act (AWA), which identifies the veterinarian as responsible for the provision of adequate veterinary care and overseeing the adequacy of other aspects of animal care and use. Such regulations often appear benign, but directly affect best veterinary practices or standards and may run counter to a veterinarian's best medical judgment. Further, such regulations may be focused in scope or species, but establish legal precedent that may have long-term consequences affecting the veterinary profession.

The AWA establishes standards of care and treatment of animals exhibited to the public. The United States Department of Agriculture provides federal oversight under the Act to ensure the health and welfare of animals in zoos and aquariums. Additional legislation and regulations result in unnecessary and inconsistent care standards between locations and species. Accreditation standards by professional trade organizations, such as the Association of Zoos and Aquariums and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums, as well as third parties, such as American Humane, provide additional care and welfare standards that reinforce and exceed AWA standards.

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Breeding and transportation bans can result in the need to house animals in suboptimal facilities and/or social groupings. Physical isolation of animals to prevent breeding and the inability to transport animals to other facilities can result in undesirable social groupings that have health and welfare impacts. Effective contraception methods are not established for all species and are licensed in even fewer. Pharmaceutical use for contraception can adversely affect animal behaviors and health; determinations on the appropriateness and conditions of their use must remain at the discretion of the veterinarian providing oversight of care.

While often appearing benign or focused on a niche concern such as orcas or other cetaceans, current and anticipated legislation and regulations driven by activist groups are being used as a tool to advance their agendas. Such groups aim to end the public display of animals in zoos and aquariums based on ethical objections, regardless of scientifically established parameters of animal health and welfare. Over 181 million people annually visit zoos and aquariums in the United States. Data collected from animals under professional care provides scientific data that directly benefits animal care and conservation. Organizations accredited by the AZA contribute over \$200 million dollars annually to conservation programs and operate over 2,800 educational programs reaching over 70 million individuals. The AAZV firmly believes the scientific, education, and conservation programs provided by these organizations have immense societal value benefiting the global care of animals and conservation of wildlife.