



SYDNEY ZOO WINS APPROVAL TO EXTEND OPENING HOURS FOR SMALL-GROUP TOURS, ANIMAL ENCOUNTERS

25 November 2019

A new zoo in western Sydney has won conditional planning approval to extend its operating hours.

Sydney Zoo, scheduled to open its doors next month, sought to modify its existing development consent to offer private small-group tours and animal experiences for up to 600 visitors between 7.30am and 9am, seven days a week.

In addition to the limited-access exotic and native wildlife experiences, the Zoo sought permission to host temporary and community events outside public opening hours.

The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment completed its whole-of-government assessment in July, which recommended the modification application should be approved; however, the matter was sent to the Independent Planning Commission (IPC) for determination because Blacktown City Council was initially opposed to the changes.

Commissioners Russell Miller AM (Panel chair) and Alan Coutts were appointed to consider the application and make a final decision. They met with the Applicant and Department – as well as the operators of the nearby Featherdale Wildlife Park, who expressed concern about potential economic harm to the Park's operations.

The Panel did not meet Council because it withdrew its objection before the matter came to the Commission.

Under conditions imposed on its original development consent by the former Planning Assessment Commission (PAC), Sydney Zoo is obliged to provide a different offering from existing animal parks.

After considering all the evidence, the IPC has today (Monday 25 November 2019) determined to approve the modification application but limiting visitor numbers for small group tours and private zoo experiences to a maximum of 300, as recommended by the Department.

In its Statement of Reasons for Decision, the Commission concluded the application “is in the public interest because it extends the opportunity for the Sydney Zoo to offer programs of benefit to the community.”

“The Commission acknowledges the concerns raised by Featherdale... in relation to the social and economic impacts affecting its ongoing operations,” it stated.

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“The Commission’s view is that the differentiation conditions decided upon by the PAC, should largely ameliorate any potential negative broader social or economic impacts.”

“The Commission notes that the Application does not propose any amendments to the differentiation requirements set by the PAC... Therefore, the Applicant would continue to be bound by the requirements of those conditions,” it noted.

“The Commission finds that conducting private zoo experiences and small group tours, differentiated as the PAC had required, are likely to have positive social and economic impacts for the Western Sydney community, although not significantly so.

“The Commission also finds that temporary events and community events outside of the approved public opening hours are also likely to provide positive social and economic benefits for the Western Sydney community.

“The Commission is also of the view that approval of the following operational activities to be conducted outside of the approved public opening hours will have minimal environmental impact:

- maintenance activities;
- emergency activities; and
- delivery of goods, waste collection and food delivery.

“In summary, the Commission finds that the modifications proposed as part of the Application, including the extended hours of operation and the introduction of private zoo experiences and small group tours, would not lead to additional adverse and unacceptable social and economic impacts at a regional scale,” it concluded.

In summary, the Commission found:

- the Application will not introduce any additional social and economic impacts that have not been previously assessed by the PAC, in its determination of the original application
- the Application has potential to increase social and economic benefits throughout Western Sydney by providing increased opportunities for interactions between Sydney Zoo and other regional operators which is a requirement of Condition C9 of the Existing Development Consent
- given the differentiation required by current Conditions, granting consent to the Application would not lead to additional adverse or unacceptable social and economic impacts
- the differentiation requirements imposed by the PAC to address the social and economic impacts of Sydney Zoo remain relevant.

The Commission’s full Statement of Reasons for Decision is available here:

<https://www.ipcn.nsw.gov.au/projects/2019/07/sydney-zoo-mod-3>

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