

WELLINGTON



January 6th, 2011

Maarten Weavers
Chief Executive
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
Executive Wing
Parliament Buildings
WELLINGTON 6011

Dear Maarten,

Thank you for your letter of November 19th, 2010 in regard to the acquisition of Giant pandas for New Zealand.

I am writing to inform you that Wellington Zoo Trust is very keen to be considered further for this project. We have supported the Prime Minister in this project every time it has been discussed in the media as we feel that the acquisition of Giant panda will be of great benefit to New Zealand and that Wellington is the place they should be.

In support of our request to host two Giant panda I would like to supply the following information for you to consider.

All the major capital city zoos have had pandas over the last three decades (e.g. London, Paris, Berlin, Washington DC and Tokyo). Given New Zealand's relationship with China (especially the free trade agreement) Wellington is well positioned to join these other capital cities in hosting Giant pandas as they will play a large part in diplomatic relations between the two countries.

As Lonely Planet's 'coolest little capital in the world' and fourth best city to visit in 2011, we believe that hosting the world's most iconic animal fits with this reputation. Her Worship Celia Wade-Brown was a long term member of the Wellington Zoo Trust Board until her election as Mayor of Wellington in October 2010 and we have her approval to inform you of our intention to be considered further for this project.

We believe that housing Giant panda is consistent with Wellington Zoo's overall strategy and goals of being the 'best little Zoo in the world'. As the capital city zoo we see our long term objective as being a key player in tourism, science, conservation and community engagement for New Zealand.

Wellington Zoo has won a number of prestigious awards over the last two years for sustainability and environmental and business leadership and our new capital projects have also won architectural and construction awards at the highest level. We were Sustainable Business of the Year in 2009 and we won the inaugural Encore Business Environmental Leadership award in 2010. The Nest Te Kōhanga won Best New Exhibit at the Regional Zoo Industry Awards in 2010 – the first time a New Zealand zoo has won this award. Wellington Zoo prides itself on delivering consistent quality experiences and with developing healthy and resilient partnerships.

Wellington Zoo Trust

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Wellington Zoo has already had discussions and exchanged information with other zoos who house Giant panda, particularly Adelaide Zoo, which is an excellent comparative study in terms of size and visitation levels. Our Board Chair, CFO and General Manager Operations have visited Adelaide Zoo to see their Giant panda exhibit and Wellington Zoo paid for Dr Chris West, CEO of Zoos South Australia, to visit Wellington to discuss Adelaide Zoo's Giant panda experience with us and local and central government officials. Dr Chris West and I are members of the regional zoo industry Board and Wellington Zoo's Collections Coordinator sits on the regional zoo Species Management Committee. Our Group Manager Commercial Development is the Regional Convenor of the zoo industry Marketing Specialist Advisory Group and our Group Manager Visitor Experience completed a study tour of USA zoos in 2010 - notably Washington and San Diego, two Giant panda host zoos.

We have also had discussions with project management firm, Hassell, in Australia who are willing to share the feasibility study they produced for Adelaide Zoo. A member of our Trust Board is a Director in Corporate Finance for Deloitte and she is willing to work with the partner organisations of this project on the feasibility studies.

We are five years through a ten year capital redevelopment programme for the Zoo which includes a redeveloped Asian precinct. We believe this area could easily be extended to house Giant pandas in context. As a species Giant panda complement Asian animals in our existing collection which includes Malayan sun bears, Nepalese red pandas, Asian otters and Sumatran tigers. Wellington Zoo has already designated an area of the Zoo which could be developed for a Giant panda exhibit. The Asian precinct in Wellington Zoo is located next to the New Zealand precinct which would be an ideal link for this project. We have long term relationships with world renowned zoo exhibit designers and local project and construction firms who would be more than willing to assist us with this project. We have also had ongoing success with fundraising and commercial relationships which would also be key components for this project.

Wellington has a suitable climate for Giant pandas, similar to their native mountains of Sichuan Province. Wellington has mild weather thus the Giant pandas would not have to be restricted to air-conditioned rooms during the summer as they do in some other zoos.

Wellington also has a suitable climate for growing bamboo, especially two of the giant panda's favourites (*Bambusa oldhami* and *Phyllostachys spp.*). The NZ Bamboo Society is located in Wellington and Wellington Zoo would explore partnering with the Society. We have had advice from them before regarding our red panda diet. We also believe that growing bamboo to assist the Zoo is an excellent way to involve the community, similar to community eucalyptus growing for feeding koala in zoos in Australia. We also have approval from ERMA to import bamboo should that be required in special circumstances.

Wellington Zoo has the staff knowledge to manage Giant pandas. Professor Alan Dixson, formerly the Director of Conservation Research at San Diego Zoo, is a world-expert on Giant panda breeding and currently sits on the Wellington Zoo Trust Board as well as being a Professor at Victoria University. He has significant connections to academics in China, especially Beijing. Mauritz Basson, the General Manager Operations of Wellington Zoo, was previously a curator at Johannesburg Zoo where he worked with several bear species, including polar bears, grizzly bears, sun bears and Asiatic black bears.

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Wellington Zoo is one of a handful of zoos that have successfully bred and reared sun bears, evidence of our expertise in bear husbandry. Wellington Zoo is the only zoo in New Zealand that currently holds bears of any kind so we have the husbandry expertise necessary to host such precious animals as Giant panda. Wellington Zoo also has a conservation relationship with Free the Bears Asia in regard to sun bears and we have provided husbandry and education advice to that organisation in Vietnam and Cambodia.

The Nest Te Kōhanga, our new, award winning, state of the art animal hospital, is the perfect place for care of Giant panda. Veterinary excellence is one of the conditions required by the Chinese government for panda host zoos. The Nest Te Kōhanga has featured on television's Wild Vets and is staffed by qualified vets and vet nurses. Wellington Zoo also has a three year veterinary masters programme in Wildlife and Zoo Medicine for qualified vets in partnership with Massey University - the only one of its kind in New Zealand.

Currently all zoos that have pandas on loan from China have a research focus. Wellington Zoo has strong connections to Victoria University and Massey University in biological sciences and veterinary science; a Giant panda research team would convene to select a research angle that is point of difference for Wellington Zoo. China currently loans pandas to countries for 10 years (they arrive as juveniles) and this results in two-way information exchange about Giant pandas. Since the new era of loans began at San Diego Zoo in 1998, conservation advances have been significant. Researchers (Chinese and loan countries) have unlocked the breeding mysteries, as Giant pandas historically were poor breeders in captivity, and captive births continue to increase each year. Wellington Zoo sees supports this as a contribution to conservation of Giant panda.

Anecdotally we believe there is an appetite in the Wellington community to support Wellington Zoo to host Giant panda. Positively Wellington Tourism has expressed their support as have other supporters of the Zoo in the community such as WWF New Zealand, various Probus and Rotary clubs, and of course, our own membership. While we can quickly start the necessary investigations, we are aware that we will be guided by central government especially in regard to engaging with the Chinese Government and key interests in Wellington to ensure success.

In conclusion I would like to confirm Wellington Zoo Trust's wish to be considered further as a host zoo for Giant panda and we look forward to discussing this exciting project further with you. If you require any further information before the next phase of discussions please don't hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Karen Fifield
Chief Executive

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