

May 10, 2024

Dr. Roxanne Mullaney  
Deputy Administrator, Animal Care  
U.S. Department of Agriculture

Via email: [REDACTED]

Re: **Request to Further Investigate Sloth Death at SeaQuest  
Woodbridge LLC (License No. 22-C-0161)**

Dear Dr. Mullaney:

I am writing on behalf of PETA to request that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) further investigate the May 31, 2023 death of a four-month old sloth, Suzy, at SeaQuest Woodbridge LLC (license no. 22-C-0161). On June 6, 2023, PETA submitted a complaint to USDA after learning that Suzy reportedly died from malnutrition. *See* Complaint No. AC23-0784. The circumstances surrounding Suzy's death as documented by the USDA appear to violate the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) and SeaQuest Woodbridge has yet to face any consequences.

SeaQuest Woodbridge imported Suzy from S & S Exotics (license no. 74-B-0469) on May 3, 2023. Ex. 1 (CVI). SeaQuest reported to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Fish and Wildlife (NJFW) that she died on May 31, 2023—less than a month after arriving at SeaQuest—from unknown causes. Ex. 2 (SeaQuest Mortality Report, 2023). According to USDA's complaint response, SeaQuest thought Suzy was weaned, and she was being fed mostly fruits and vegetables. Ex. 3 (USDA Complaint Response, July 2023). She was reportedly taken to the veterinarian on May 17, 2023 after she "was found unresponsive and underweight by facility staff." *Id.* The USDA described her condition as "emaciated, dehydrated, and bloated" and noted the facility failed to bring her to a veterinarian for several days. *Id.* The veterinarian determined that Suzy's "diet was inappropriate and started her on formula with added fiber." *Id.* Suzy was supposedly treated for nine (9) days at the veterinarian's office and was discharged to SeaQuest on May 25. *Id.* Suzy was found unresponsive and died six (6) days later. *Id.* A necropsy and histopathology were reportedly performed, although it does not appear that USDA reviewed those records. *Id.*

Wildlife veterinarian Dr. Mason Payne opined that the bloated condition described by the USDA could indicate dysbiosis of the gut flora, since sloths are unable to belch. Proper gut flora is crucial for digestion and nutrient absorption in sloths and was likely altered by the poor diet high in sugar and starch. Dr. Payne explained that a four-month-old sloth would be fully weaned, eating solid foods, and the care and diet necessary for a four-month-old sloth would be the same as for a three-month-old sloth. According to Dr. Payne, sloth diets should be low in sugar and starch (less than 15%), and should consist mostly of browse (leaves, twigs, and flowers) and leafy greens, with a moderate amount of non-leafy vegetables, and the

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occasional fruit and protein source. Many accredited institutions will supplement the browse and leafy greens with a formulated low-starch high-fiber primate biscuit. Dr. Payne advised that high amounts of starches or sugars, which would be present in a diet containing mostly fruits and vegetables, would be detrimental to a sloth's gut flora. Dr. Payne opined that SeaQuest provided Suzy with a diet high in sugar and starch, which is inappropriate for the species and likely altered her gut flora. Regardless of whether Suzy was three months old or four months old, she was old enough to be weaned and would have been eating solid foods. Any suggestion on SeaQuest's part that the age of this sloth had any role to play in her death is a red herring. SeaQuest should be knowledgeable of the basic dietary requirements for a sloth eating solid foods. SeaQuest's lack of knowledge of a sloth's basic dietary requirements likely play a role in Suzy's death.

**SeaQuest Woodbridge was not cited for Suzy's death** and has yet to face any consequences. Failing to recognize and provide a young sloth with an adequate diet is an indication that SeaQuest Woodbridge does not have the appropriate knowledge and experience to be handling this species in apparent violation of 9 C.F.R. § 2.131(a), which requires that "[a]ll licensees who maintain wild or exotic animals must demonstrate adequate experience and knowledge of the species they maintain." Failing to provide this sloth with an adequate diet appears to violate 9 C.F.R. § 3.129(a), which requires that "food shall be wholesome, palatable, and free from contamination and of sufficient quantity and nutritive value to maintain all animals in good health." At a minimum, SeaQuest should have been cited for these issues.

Suzy is not the first sloth to die at SeaQuest Woodbridge. In early 2020, [reports surfaced](#) that a sloth named Flash died at SeaQuest Woodbridge and was simply replaced with another sloth. SeaQuest reported this sloth's death to NJFW, stating that Flash died on December 11, 2019 and that this animal "arrived very sick and did not recover with emergency vet care." Ex. 4 (SeaQuest Quarterly Mortality Report, March 2020). While it is unclear when Flash arrived at SeaQuest Woodbridge, veterinary records show that Flash was taken to the vet on November 27, 2019 and stayed under intensive care until December 7, 2019 when SeaQuest removed this animal from the vet **against medical advice**. Ex. 5 (Flash #1 Vet Records). According to Dr. Payne, being released against medical advice indicates that the veterinarian treating Flash felt this sloth still needed to be hospitalized, but SeaQuest decided to take the animal back to their facility anyway. Dr. Payne advised that if SeaQuest was unwilling to pay for continued emergency care, the humane thing to do would have been to euthanize Flash, as this sloth was obviously not going to survive without intensive care. Dr. Payne explained that based on the charges for service, it appears Flash had a very low red blood cell count, low glucose levels, wasn't eating, and was dehydrated. The veterinarian ran multiple sets of bloodwork, including lead and zinc toxicity levels, and fecal tests. They also had Flash on IV fluids, IV glucose, IV antibiotics, dewormers, and put in a feeding tube during the last few days before SeaQuest removed Flash from the vet. Dr. Payne opined that even though the care was very intensive, it appears Flash had a severe systemic infection that was difficult to treat. SeaQuest removed Flash from the life-saving treatment she was receiving, and as a result, this sloth suffered for four (4) days before dying. SeaQuest Woodbridge never faced any consequences for this sloth's death either.

A recent [nationwide ABC News investigation](#) revealed widespread animal welfare and public safety concerns at SeaQuest locations across the country. The USDA was well aware of the egregious issues at SeaQuest long before this exposé aired, and the agency's lack of action is deafening. With the increased public scrutiny from this national spotlight, USDA should take meaningful and immediate enforcement action, including further investigating Suzy's death.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. Please inform me of the complaint number that your agency assigns to this correspondence.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michelle Sinnott".

**Michelle Sinnott, Esq.**  
Director, Captive Animal Law Enforcement

