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P. O. Box 849

Galt, CA 95632

Phone: 209/745-2606

Fax: 209/745-1809

E-mail: info@pawsweb.org

www.pawsweb.org

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Open Letter to FJ Productions Regarding Its Making of Film With Live Elephant

The Performing Animal Welfare Society (PAWS), and the organizations, conservationists, sanctuaries, and entertainment industry professionals signed onto this letter, are astonished that your company is using a live elephant in the production of your film *Saving Flora*. To add insult to injury, you are using Tai – *an elephant who was stolen from her family in the wild as a baby and trained to perform, including in circuses* – to tell the story of an elephant who is escaping an abusive circus. Either your company is unaware of this, or is turning a blind eye to the inhumane use of elephants for entertainment.

Video evidence easily found online* shows handlers with Have Trunk Will Travel, the California-based company that owns Tai, striking and forcefully hooking elephants with a bullhook – a weapon resembling a fireplace poker with a sharpened metal tip – to force elephants to perform tricks during training sessions. Tai's owners have publicly defended this appalling practice, stating, "We stand by our care and training methods."

The brutal training of elephants used in film productions, circuses and other "entertainment" is meant to ensure that an animal performs consistently and on cue. You, the actors, and crew will never see the most abusive training, which takes place well before an elephant arrives on set. No handler ever wants to "correct" an elephant with the bullhook on set or where cast or crew may witness this abuse. (Starting in January 2018 the bullhook will be prohibited throughout California, as the state recognizes this weapon is inhumane.)

No doubt, your intended audience would be horrified by the way Tai is trained in the video, when handlers thought no one was there to witness her treatment. The public is increasingly concerned about the use and mistreatment of animals for entertainment, as evidenced by the closure of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus and the backlash against SeaWorld after release of the film *Blackfish*, causing attendance and stock prices to plummet. Cities and states across the U.S. have enacted laws to regulate the use of elephants and other wild animals for "entertainment."

Film productions are not immune to controversy. The public was outraged at a scared dog being forced into a pool for a scene in *A Dog's Purpose*, which even the film's producer condemned. A pledge to donate a few dollars to a handful of organizations will not be enough to offset the images of Tai and other elephants – including a calf – being struck, hooked and stabbed with a bullhook during training. In the end, the only message this film will send is that it is acceptable to exploit mistreated captive elephants for entertainment and profit.

Elephants are self-aware, highly intelligent, and sensitive animals who deserve our utmost respect and protection. Tai's involvement in this film is an affront to anyone who cares about these magnificent animals.

*Have Trunk Will Travel Elephant Training video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L1AvNGWAKCY>
Animal Defenders International.

We strongly urge you to reconsider the use of Tai and instead utilize a computer-generated elephant to tell your story, as many productions are now doing. PAWS and the organizations and individuals signed onto this letter stand ready to educate and warn the public of the cruelty associated with this and any film release that exploits a captive elephant.



Ed Stewart

President and Co-founder, Performing Animal Welfare Society (PAWS)

Together with:

Scott Blais, CEO and President, Global Sanctuary for Elephants (Brazil)

Catherine Doyle, M.S., Director of Science, Research & Advocacy, Performing Animal Welfare Society (PAWS)

Nancy Blaney, Director of Government Affairs, Animal Welfare Institute

Toni Frohoff, Ph. D., Elephant Scientist & Campaign Director, In Defense of Animals

Petter Granli, CEO, ElephantVoices

Carrie LeBlanc, M.A., Executive Director, CompassionWorks International

Dr. Cynthia Moss, Program Director and Trustee, Amboseli Trust for Elephants (Africa)

Nicole Paquette, Vice President of Wildlife Protection, The Humane Society of the United States

Dr. Joyce Poole, Scientific Director, ElephantVoices (Africa)

Stephen Wells, Executive Director, Animal Legal Defense Fund

Delcianna Winders, Vice President and Deputy General Counsel, PETA Foundation

Janice Zeitlin, CEO, The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee

The following entertainment industry professionals endorse this letter:

Bob Barker, Emmy Award and Lifetime Achievement Award Winner, Television Host, Producer, Actor

Kim Basinger, Academy Award-winning Actress

Jorja Fox, Actress, *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, *ER*, *West Wing*

Ross McCall, Actor, *Band of Brothers*, *White Collar*, *24: Live Another Day*

Kevin Nealon, Actor, Writer and Comedian, *Weeds*, *Saturday Night Live*

Kristin Bauer van Straten, Actress, HBO's *True Blood*, *Once Upon A Time*

Betty Thomas, Director, Producer and Actress, *Hill Street Blues*, *Audrey*

Lily Tomlin, Actress, Comedienne, Producer

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