



Pet Project

Animals get a humane deal as PGI supports online portal that connects pet owners with studios seeking to use them in films and shows

* BHAKTI MEHTA

Animals and other creatures often feature in films, television shows and now web content, to either up the cutesie quotient, as extras or supporting characters and sometimes even as the main protagonists. But the process of getting them onboard lacked transparency, to the detriment of the hapless animals and their owners.

Now all that is changing. To simplify the approval process for the use of animals in films, television and on the web, the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) has launched a web portal that will introduce transparency, eliminate dubious agents and speed up the entire process. Needless to add, filmmakers will benefit immensely.

The AWBI is conducting workshops across the country to create awareness among animal owners and the industry, on the new online system to obtain approvals. They are doing this with the support of the Producers Guild of India (PGI).

At the first workshop in Mumbai on May 8, AWBI officials met animal owners to explain the revised process to seek pre-shoot permissions for providing animals for filming across platforms. Prachi Jain, Assistant Secretary, AWBI, said the board supported the use of live animals in the cinematic space but it wanted them to be treated humanely and was also intent on removing lacunae in the process.

Explaining the features of the new online portal for obtaining permissions, Jain took studio representatives and animal owners through the registration process, pointing out that it would eliminate middlemen and help owners directly associate with the AWBI and through them, with filmmakers or show makers.

It would also reduce the incidence of animal abuse as the AWBI has to be updated every month regarding their health at the AWBI. Since the new process, which begins from June 1, has a one-time animal owner registration fee of ₹500, corruption too would be eliminated, she said. After the initial registration, the AWBI would provide an 'Owner Certificate'.

The process requires animal owners to give the description of the film or TV show or web show that the animal is working on, how many animals they have provided for a particular project, details regarding producers, studio and director along with details of the scene the animal will feature in. This was important so that the AWBI knows that the animal is not harmed in any scenario. If there is an update, the board would have to be notified via email.

Another mandatory point in this application process is the health of the animals. All the animals that are to be used in any kind of scene need to be medically approved by a practicing



veterinarian. A health certificate is needed for every application of each and every animal. If the animal is suffering from any health issue, it will not be allowed to be a part of the project until it is treated.

Following are the types of forms available on the official website of AWFI, ospar.nic.in:

- Application for registration of animal owner
- Application pre-shoot permission
- Application for certification
- Format for self-declaration for animal owner registration
- Format for self-declaration for pre-shoot permission
- Format for self-declaration for certification
- Fitness certificate for animal owner registration
- Part-A fitness certificate for pre-shoot permission

The website's user-friendly interface also guides animal owners and producers on how to apply and the rules and regulations of the AWFI and the law. It also mentions that any producer who is registered with the board can log into their account and apply for any animal that they want to shoot with. Supply is region-based throughout India, so the producer can select the animal owner they want from any part of the country. The entire approval process from the board should take three to four days.



Kulmeet Makkar

Chief Executive Officer, Producers Guild of India

When asked about this new initiative, Makkar says, “The previous system had many complications. There were no timelines for taking permissions; it would even take months at times. There were a lot of middlemen involved because in the offline system, people were playing the role of agents. They used to create difficulties and then come back to the producers saying it could not be done unless a certain amount of money was paid.

He adds, “This lack of transparency led to the industry getting extremely fed up and then we took this up with the Ministry at the highest level. Then the decision was taken to take everything online so that it is easier and more transparent for producers. The recently appointed members of the board are extremely proactive, friendly to the industry and are keen to make this happen.”

The initiative has been taken after animal rights groups and NGOs repeatedly expressed concerns regarding mistreatment of animals on film sets. “We realized that the people who were responsible for getting the animals to us were not the owners, they were suppliers. I believe that if an owner gives the animal directly, they will be more careful and the animals will be treated properly. This registration of animal owners means we have got all the ‘parents’ onboard who will look after the animals as someone would look after their own child. They will make sure the animals are healthy, transported well and taken care of. And, at the same time, producers can avail a professional and systematic service,” says Makkar.



Siddharth Roy Kapur

President, Producers Guild of India

Siddharth Roy Kapur states, “We sincerely appreciate the efforts of the Animal Welfare Board of India to address industry concerns by introducing an online mechanism to make the whole process of obtaining permissions to use animals for filming much easier. The Guild is committed to producing content in a responsible manner, and will continue to work closely with all relevant agencies involved in shoot permissions, to ensure our members’ compliance with regulations, while at the same time ensuring operational efficiency for our shoots.”



Dr Neelam Bala

Secretary, Animal Welfare Board of India

Dr Neelam Bala says, “In this new process, animal owners and producers have to register to the AWFI first. People who own performing animals have to pay ₹500 for a lifetime registration. They can then update the number of animals they have, in case of births and deaths, on the website. The purpose of this new process is to introduce transparency between all parties. It will also save a lot of time. PGI has been very supportive of this process in terms of organizing the workshop that we had in Mumbai recently. They called producers, animal owners and the media so that we get acquainted with them and can spread the word. This process will ensure that producers will use only animals that are registered on the website by their owners.”