

Bil Anifeiliaid Gwyllt a Sycrasau (Cymru) | Wild Animals and Circuses (Wales) Bill
WA 06

Ymateb gan : Born Free Foundation

Evidence from : Born Free Foundation



Background

The Born Free Foundation was founded as Zoo Check in 1984, and since then has become a leading wildlife charity working to ensure that all wild animals, whether living in captivity or in the wild, are treated with compassion and respect and are able to live their lives according to their needs.

We welcome the introduction of this Bill, and believe that a ban on the use of wild animals in travelling circuses in Wales is long overdue.

It is our understanding that the ban is proposed on the grounds of ethical considerations. It is important to take into account that concerns for animal welfare are not divorced from ethics, and that public opinion against the use of wild animals in circuses reflects a spectrum of animal welfare and other sensibilities.

Wild animal circus acts are opposed by both the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) and the British Veterinary Association, on the grounds that the welfare needs of non-domesticated, wild animals cannot be met within a travelling circus – in terms of housing or being able to express normal behaviour.

The Born Free Foundation agrees with the conclusion of the report to the Welsh Government by Prof. Stephen Harris, that: “Life for wild animals in travelling circuses does not appear to constitute either a ‘good life’ or a ‘life worth living’”.

We are convinced that there are powerful grounds to prohibit wild animals from travelling circuses on ethical grounds, as have been explored in implementing bans in Scotland and the Republic of Ireland.

Public opinion

- *2010 - Defra Public Consultation*
94.5% of respondents considered a ban on the use of wild animals in circuses the best option to achieve better welfare standards
- *2018 - Survey for the Born Free Foundation 16.9.18*
79.77% of UK respondents agree with statement: "wild animals in circuses should be banned"

Definition of circus

Born Free believes that there is a clear need for a definition of "circus" / "travelling circus", either on the face of the Bill or in statutory guidance.

This is an area for particularly careful scrutiny, in order to make a clear distinction between travelling circuses and mobile animal exhibits. The latter are also worthy of consideration in relation to ethical and animal welfare concerns, but we consider that the best course of action is to restrict the current Bill to travelling circuses.

In particular, there may be a need to distinguish between the use of animals in itinerant shows (where the animals live "on the road", as in a circus), and in shows that return to a home base daily or after a few days.

Definition of wild animal

We are convinced that the definition of wild animal in the Zoo Licensing Act 1981 ("animals not normally domesticated in Great Britain") is sound and practicable, and should be employed in this case; Defra's Guidance on interpreting this definition is particularly helpful (see Annex A, "Zoo Licensing Act 1981 Guide to the Act's provisions", Defra 2012).

Scope of proposed ban

We are convinced that the "use" of wild animals in travelling circuses should include not only performance and exhibition, but also keeping wild animals within a circus or taking wild animals on tour with a circus. There is a risk that it will be impossible to police the ban if circuses are permitted to have wild animals on tour, and there will be legal considerations over whether or not these animals are considered to be "exhibited". Objections to using wild animals in travelling circuses stem, in part, from the repeated travel that to which the animals are subjected: this would remain a feature of these animals' lives unless the ban also applies to taking animals on the road.

Fate of animals following ban

Born Free stands ready to work with Government and other NGOs to find suitable sanctuary homes for any wild animals that are no longer wanted by circuses in the event of a ban.

Nonetheless, we consider that the ban on the “use” of wild animals in circuses means that animals would remain the property of their current owners, and that, where appropriate, licensing under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 or other legislation should be sought.