

Submission to the Petitions Committee of the Welsh Assembly.

Petition title “calling on the Welsh Government to ban the use of wild animals in circuses in Wales”

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to provide this supporting statement .
Lesley Griffiths' AM Cabinet Secretary for Energy Planning and Rural Affairs in response to my petition stated “ the way we treat animals is an important reflection of the values of our society. Animals should be protected from pain, injury, fear and distress “.

The present position in Wales

Although no animal circuses are currently based in Wales, many do extensively tour our country. Attracted no doubt by the fact that we have a thriving tourist industry. Circus Mondao visit every year from April until July . Peter Jolly's Circus usually tour for two months or so dipping in and out of Wales, the last time they visited was 2016. Thomas Chipperfield toured Wales extensively in 2015 with his “educational show " An Evening with Lions and Tigers (he and his big cats formally toured with Peter Jolly's Circus). In total these circuses that feature wild animals are on the road for nine months of the year in England and Wales.

They use private land, as many if not all Councils in Wales will not allow them to use their land. The sites they use include land at garden centres, car boots sales, caravan and holiday parks, sea fronts and beaches. Together with land close to major roads like the A55 in north Wales, dual carriageways in Cardiff, Swansea, Hengoed and Neath. Land seems easier to find in the north which is more rural, and of course attracts more tourists. The circuses have teams of people who move into an area two weeks before their circus arrives. They put up their posters by illegally fly posting anywhere they can (these remain long after they have left) even in areas of outstanding natural beauty such as the Snowdonia National Park. Once their circus arrives in a town the signs on the highway go up, again illegally without the permission of the LA. They make their money, they leave so bring nothing to the economy of Wales . They also take no account of our culture, history or more importantly our Welsh language .

To keep wild animals they need a licence, which is granted by the LA where they are based. To tour they need a licence which is granted and policed by DEFRA. But at the present time this licence only extends to touring England. When I met with Councillor Dafydd Meurig and Ms Gwenan Mai Roberts, Public Protection Manager - Pollution Control and Licensing of

Gwynedd Council. They made it clear to me the challenges a visiting circus presents to their already stretched department. Ms Roberts also stated her colleagues felt they were operating with “one hand tied behind our backs “ . They can be refused entry to the private land to inspect the conditions the animals are kept in. Ms Roberts also admitted as far as the animals go “ we can only really check if their basic needs are provided for, and that they are moving around normally and their eyes, coats etc look okay “ . When Thomas Chipperfield visited Gwynedd in 2015 she stated that she was faced with “very challenging circumstances “ when she and a colleague inspected them.

If any concerns are identified then action can be taken, for instance to contact the RSPCA. But they often need police assistance to gain entry. By which time the circus has moved on, usually the longest period they remain in one spot in Wales is seven days. There has been only three successful prosecutions for animal cruelty in relation to animal circuses in England . Two of these related to the time the animals were in their winter quarters , so not on the road.

The recent consultation on Mobile Animal Exhibits.

This was promised by the Welsh Government following on from the Harris report, which was published in July 2016. But the remit of the consultation was widened from just circuses that use wild animals. In the summary of responses to this consultation (WG33753) it can be seen that the respondents felt the remit and title of this consultation were problematic. “ some thought that it was too broad and others were of the view that certain classes of animal, depending on their use should be excluded “.

In relation to wild animals in circuses only one question was asked, but the summary of responses stated “ there were 70 comprehensive responses to the consultation. A further 892 similar responses were received which only answered Questions 8 (on banning the use of wild animals in circuses). This strengthens my belief that this consultation should have only been about wild animals in circuses, as originally promised by Rebecca Evans AM the former Minister for Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs.

The report also stated that “ the majority of respondents believe the use of wild animals in circuses should be banned and that wild animals cannot be cared for appropriately whilst in a travelling environment “.

The Harris Report.

The remit of this report was “to provide the Welsh Government with an impartial literature review and an analysis of the scientific evidence available as to whether captive wild animals

in travelling circuses and other shows achieve their optimum welfare requirements set out under the Animal Welfare Act of 2006 and other relevant legislation “.

I think it is worth noting that this report took evidence from over 600 experts in the field, including those who work in the animal circus industry. The only differing of opinion occurred between those involved in the circus industry and the rest of the respondents in relation to the training techniques used by the profession and the impact the travelling life had on the animals used for example.

The conclusions of the Harris report stated that :

“ the scientific evidence indicates that captive wild animals in travelling circuses and mobile zoos do not achieve their optimum welfare requirements set out under the Animal Welfare Act 2006.”

“In our review of the needs of wild animals, we found that all of the “freedoms” are compromised in travelling circuses and mobile zoos “. that “ life for wild animals in travelling circuses and mobile zoos does not constitute either a " good life " or a " life worth living " .

I could also make mention of the numerous studies, reports etc that other government's and animal welfare bodies have commissioned through the years. Including Animal Defenders International, the Captive Animal Protection Society and the RSPCA (England and Wales).

All of the above-mentioned bodies submitted responses to both the Harris report and the recent consultation on MAE, as I myself did too.

The licensing system re wild animal circuses currently operating in England.

In the light of Lesley Griffiths statement of 14/12/17 together with past discussions I have had with our First Minister Carwyn Jones AM. I think it's important members consider this subject.

On 13 May 2011 the UK Government announced its decision to introduce a licensing system rather than a ban on wild animals in circuses. In doing so the UK Government cited concern over a legal challenge to a ban in Austria. However, the case against the Austrian ban was later dropped.

The UK Government said that their licensing system would cover **all** aspects of life for a wild animal in a travelling circus environment including:

Good accommodation and housing whilst being transported at a performance, and in winter quarters

Full veterinary care

Controlling carefully who has access to the animals

Diet including food storage, preparation and provision

Environment such as noise and temperature

Welfare during training and performance

However the licensing documents in the public domain paint an altogether different picture.

These licence inspection reports concerning Circus Mondao are an example of the issues with reference to accommodation and housing.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reports-on-2-circuses-between-26-june-2014-and-22-january-2015>

At the time of the above inspection (at the animals winter quarters) the Inspector also raised concerns about the animals veterinary treatment.

It became clear to him during this unannounced inspection that Circus Mondao were self-medicating their animals, including their baby Camel (who was born on the road in Wales the previous year). The camel had "open and weeping sores on each of its legs". Circus Mondao's licence was instantly suspended, later to be reinstated, but only on certain conditions; one being that they wouldn't take their wild animals back to this location. They did exactly this in April 2017, with DEFRA having to insist certain animals were returned to their home base while they were at this location.

Veterinary treatment should be provided by a designated lead vet, who often lives close to the circuses home base. Veterinary consultations can of course be done by phone. Many

small animal veterinary practices right across Wales clearly excel in the range of treatments they can offer both companion and farm animals. But realistically how many would claim to see such animals as Reindeer, Camels, Zebra, Tigers and Lions on a regular basis? It's my understanding that the RCVS guidelines state that an animal should be registered with a veterinary practice before they are treated. Also ideally any vet who treats an animal should have the past clinical history, from previous vets to consult.

When Thomas Chipperfield was in Llanwnda near Caernarfon in 2015, it became clear that one of his Lions had sustained an injury to one of his rear legs. This prompted me to consider what veterinary provisions were available in our particularly rural area of north west Wales. In reality the RCVS University's Leahurst faculty located on The Wirral, 12 miles south of Liverpool would have been the nearest appropriate option with the expertise required to treat animals defined as wild.

I have read most of the travelling circus license applications, including the applications that were unsuccessful for example Thomas Chipperfield's and Anthony Beckwith before they toured Cymru in 2015. Also any related inspection reports from the DEFRA Inspectors, I can honestly say I have been haunted by their contents, especially with my background and love of animals.

Position in other countries.

The practice of using wild animals in travelling circuses has been banned in over 35 countries. With the Republic of Ireland announcing their intention to ban at the end of this month. I believe Scotland's ban is effective from the 1st January 2018. Roseanna Cunningham Environment Secretary has been quoted as saying "this is an important act that will not only prevent travelling circuses ever showing wild animals in Scotland in the future. But will also demonstrate to the wider world that we are one of the growing number of countries that no longer condones the use of wild animals in this way".

Last week Michael Gove MP indicated that the UK Government intend finally to bring forward legislation that was first drafted five years ago. However in realistic terms, it will be next year before such legislation can be presented to the UK Parliament, if at all. I personally do not hold out much hope of this going forward in the UK Parliament.

In Conclusion

The petition I present to you today contains 6,388 signatures, and as such will trigger a debate on the floor of The Senedd. These signatures were collected online and on paper from all over Wales. At events like food fairs, Dog Shows, Universities Freshers Fair's, The National Eisteddfod of Wales. People from all sections of our community willingly signed, many expressing the view that they thought this practice had already been banned. I have

been deeply humbled that many people have even thanked me for asking them to sign, and launching my petition in the first place. This is the second petition calling for a ban, to be presented to the Petitions Committee in three years. With RSPCA Cymru's petition of 2015 gaining over 7,000 signatures all from Wales.

It is clear the Harris report of 2016 gives the Welsh Government the independent scientific evidence to put a ban into place, as does the conclusions from the recent consultation on MAE.

It is my understanding that legislation can be brought forward by two routes. Either by primary legislation, or by way of the Animal Welfare Act of 2007. The Wales Act of 2011 gave the Welsh Government the power to act in these matters.

To me personally this isn't a political issue, it's an animal welfare issue. That is my background, as a former branch Trustee and Volunteer for an animal welfare organisation . For over forty years I have been fighting for a ban to be brought forward first by the UK Government and since 2011 the Welsh Government. Thomas Chipperfield touring Cymru in 2015, during which he visited my beloved home town of Caernarfon . Was truly abhorrent to me, and many others. My MP Hywel Williams said at the time " the days of loading animals onto the back of trucks, to tour our country purely for people's entertainment has long since passed " .

I urge you as a Committee and as Assembly Members to do everything in your power to ensure the Welsh Government acts in a timely manner to bring forward legislation to ban this outdated practice in Wales.

If I can assist members or the Welsh Government further in their deliberations I would be more than happy to do so.

Linda Evelyn Joyce Jones 14/1/2018.