Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee

Wild Animals in Travelling Circuses (Scotland) Bill

Written submission from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) Foundation

I am writing on behalf of the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) Foundation – and our more than 1.2 million members and supporters, many of whom live in Scotland – in response to the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee’s call for written evidence in support of the Wild Animals in Travelling Circuses (Scotland) Bill.

Please find below PETA’s views on the specific areas being examined by the committee:

1. The ethical basis for the bill, as opposed to other justifications such as animal welfare

Denying wild animals everything that’s natural and important to them; separating them from their families; using pain, fear, and food deprivation to force them to learn tricks; and keeping them caged, penned, or shackled for the majority of their lives cause them immense physical and psychological suffering. Pacing, bar-biting, circling, and self-mutilation are commonly observed in animals who are made to perform, and experts agree that these neurotic forms of behaviour are caused by the frustration of being kept in captivity. Knowing what we do today about wild animals' intelligence and complex social and environmental needs, attempting to justify their unnecessary suffering in the name of human entertainment is unethical and inhumane.

The Public Agrees That Using Wild Animals in Travelling Circuses Is Unethical

In 2014, the Scottish government commissioned a public consultation on proposals to ban the use of wild animals in travelling circuses on ethical grounds – and the response was overwhelmingly in favour of a ban:

- 96 per cent of respondents said that concerns surrounding the travelling circus environment could only be resolved by a ban.
- 89.5 per cent stated that they believed exhibitions and performances compromised respect for the animals concerned.
- 94.7 per cent responded that they believed using animals in circuses had an adverse impact on the development of respectful and responsible attitudes towards animals in children and young people.

Wild Animals Are Subjected to Abusive Training Techniques

Abuse can begin at an early age for wild animals in travelling shows. PETA US previously released undercover footage revealing the forcible, physically and psychologically abusive training methods that are used by circus trainers on baby elephants. These include binding animals with ropes, digging into them with
bullhooks (sharp, steel-tipped devices that resemble a fireplace poker), and shocking them with electric prods until they struggle on the ground and vocalise their pain. These violent training sessions can last for three to four hours a day, until the animals learn – out of fear of punishment – to perform confusing tricks.

*Circuses Teach Children the Wrong Lesson*

Exposing children and young people to animal abuse in the circus industry teaches them that it’s acceptable to dominate, whip, chain, and beat other living, feeling beings who experience the pain of the whips and the stress of confinement to the same extent that we would.

Furthermore, experts in early childhood development have warned against taking children to circuses that force animals to perform, because they’ve found that observing such acts inhibits children’s ability to develop empathy towards humans and animals alike by teaching them that other living beings are merely objects to be manipulated for their own enjoyment.

2. **The effectiveness of making it an offence to use wild animals in travelling circuses**

PETA supports the Scottish government in making it a punishable offence to use wild animals in travelling circuses in Scotland.

3. **Alternative approaches to preventing the use of wild animals being used in travelling circuses**

The welfare problems experienced by animals in travelling circuses are inherent to their use in these exhibits and cannot be ameliorated by any change in practice. Extreme confinement and physical stress during transport (and potentially during the off-season) – in combination with the necessity of using psychologically and possibly physically abusive training methods – inevitably compromise the welfare of these animals. This means that nothing short of a complete ban will be sufficient to prevent this cruelty – and anything other than a complete ban would not only fail wild animals but also disregard the public’s clear support for a ban.

4. **The definitions of key phrases in the bill, such as "wild animal", "animal", "circus operator", and "travelling circus"**

We support the proposed definitions in sections 2 and 3 of the bill.

5. **Proposed culpability**

We support the proposed individual culpability in section 4 of the bill.

6. **The effectiveness of proposed powers of enforcement**

We support the proposed powers of enforcement as outlined in section 6 of the bill.

In summary, PETA supports the bill banning the use of wild animals. By joining the growing list of countries that have banned the use of wild animals in circuses,
Scotland would send a strong message to the rest of the UK and the world that it respects animals and takes protecting their interests seriously.