Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee

Wild Animals in Travelling Circuses (Scotland) Bill

Written Submission from the British Veterinary Association Scottish Branch

1) BVA is the national representative body for the veterinary profession in the United Kingdom and has over 16,000 members. Our primary aim is to represent, support and champion the interests of the veterinary profession in this country, and we therefore take a keen interest in all issues affecting the profession, including animal health and welfare, public health, regulatory issues and employment matters.

2) BVA’s Scottish Branch brings together representatives of the BVA’s territorial and specialist divisions, government, academic institutions and research organisations in Scotland. The Branch advises BVA on the consensus view of Scottish members on Scottish and United Kingdom issues.

3) BVA supports the proposed Bill to ban the use of any wild animal in a travelling circus in Scotland. BVA believes that it is not possible to meet the specific welfare needs of non-domesticated, wild animals within travelling circuses and that the welfare of these animals is emblematic of the way we treat all animals under the care of humans. We believe that in order to ensure meaningful impact the Bill should cover all wild animals without exception and only apply to wild animals used in travelling circuses to avoid unintended consequences for other types of animal displays that may move to temporary locations.


We believe that the welfare needs of non-domesticated, wild animals cannot be met within a travelling circus. The Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 sets out that owners and keepers, including circus operators, have a duty of care to take all reasonable steps to meet the following welfare needs of animals in their care:

- The need for suitable environment
- The need for a suitable diet
- The need to exhibit normal behaviour
- The need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals
- The need to be protected pain, suffering, injury and disease

Captive wild animals have complex welfare needs and instinctive natural behavioural needs that must be met. Travelling circuses, by definition, necessitate the regular transportation of wild animals between sites and locations, as such their facilities must be portable and often size-limited in
order to fit to the changeable location and travelling needs of the circus. With this in mind, travelling circuses are less able meet wild animals’ need for a suitable environment, with adequate space, enrichment materials, temperature and noise regulation - obstructing wild animals’ in the pursuit of activities and behavioural expression that is natural to them.

Likewise, time spent travelling, and performance schedules, may disrupt the normal diet of wild animals, impacting on the storage, preparation and provision of food needed to ensure these animals have a suitable diet.

Further, as space can be limited in travelling circuses, circuses may use group-housing of wild animals. This could result in unsuitable social groupings for individual animals and high social density, which can respectively result in stress, aggression and abnormal behaviour.

To note is that research commissioned by the Welsh Government¹ found a body of scientific evidence that indicated that travelling circuses do not meet the ‘optimal welfare requirements’ of the captive wild animals in their care and that evidence would support a ban on wild animals in travelling circuses on welfare grounds (Dorning et al., 2016).

5) **Respect for wild animals**

From an ethical perspective BVA considers that the welfare of these animals is emblematic of the way we treat all animals under the care of humans and can negatively impact on the development of responsible and respectful attitudes towards animals. We are concerned that the continued use of wild animals in circuses has the potential to undermine the public’s understanding of animals as sentient beings with complex welfare needs, instead framing animals as commodities that can be used to perform unnatural behaviours for human entertainment and promoting sub-optimal welfare practices that may be extrapolated and influence the way humans treat all animals.

6) **No benefit**

We see no benefit for humans or wild animals from the use of wild animals in travelling circuses. BVA believes that any perceived benefit of using animals in wild circuses cannot justify the possible welfare risks. This sentiment was clearly echoed with the Scottish Government’s consultation to ban wild animals in travelling circuses on ethical grounds, in which 96% of responses agreed that there were no benefits to having wild animals in travelling circuses.

7) **Definition of ‘wild animals’**

BVA supports the Bill’s proposed definition of ‘wild animal’ to mean ‘an animal other than one of a kind that is commonly domesticated in the British

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Islands’. We believe that this ban should cover all wide animal species without exception.

8) **Definition of ‘circus operator’ and ‘travelling circuses’**

BVA is broadly supportive of the Bill’s definition of ‘circus operator’ and ‘travelling circus’. However, as there are now a variety of contexts in which animals travel for display and educational purposes, we would like reassurance that the Bill will only apply to wild animals used in travelling circuses, avoiding any unintended consequences for other types of animals displays that may move to temporary locations.