Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee

Wild Animals in Travelling Circuses (Scotland) Bill

Written submission from The British Horse Society (Scotland)

WILD ANIMALS IN TRAVELLING CIRCUSES

The British Horse Society (Scotland) welcomes the Wild Animals in Travelling Circuses (Scotland) Bill agreeing that it should be an offence if the person causes or permits a wild animal to be used in a travelling circus, we also agree with the definitions and powers proposed in the Bill.

Other businesses that use wild animals as a form of entertainment such as zoo’s and wildlife parks are heavily regulated for instance they have to ensure a natural environment and see that every animal enjoys the five freedoms;

- Freedom from Hunger and thirst.
- Freedom from Discomfort
- Freedom from Pain, Injury or Disease.
- Freedom to Express Normal Behaviour.
- Freedom from Fear and Distress

In addition as an equine welfare organisation the British Horse Society is aware of the stress that travelling puts on horses, there is plenty of science based evidence, and equines are domesticated. The Welfare of animals (Transport) order 2006 enforces regulations for transporting equines. For a horse to be transported there are minimum standard requirements; to ensure the welfare and safety are paramount European Transport Regulation requires the transporter to hold the “Transporting Horses on Short (up to 8 hours) or Long Journeys (over 8 hours)” qualification. Local authorities through Trading Standards are obliged to carry out welfare checks with the Animal and Plant Health Agency carrying out inspections at point of loading and ports. The vehicle also requires inspection if used for long journeys. However, the problems arise when a group of unfamiliar horses are loaded on to a lorry.

When a horse is placed in this situation it elicits the stress response both on a biological and behavioural level. An indication of this is raised inflammatory response, which if sustained for a prolonged period has the potential implications of dehydration, diarrhoea, colic, laminitis, and rhabdomyolysis.

Behaviourally the horse is being placed in an environment where each new horse is perceived as a threat, were the horse will rely on heightened fight or flight response to protect its self, causing harm to those on either side. The length of the journey also has a physiological impact, with increasing hours increasing fatigue and likelihood of muscle metabolism.

It must be understood that a short journey is up to 8 hours which in reality could mean a distance of over 490 miles, the equivalent of London to Dundee. The vehicle
is not required to be inspected for these distances which could see horses herded onto cattle lorry’s without partitions, increasing the potential for overcrowding, no rest, food or water. The consequences are horses arriving at their destination highly stressed, difficult to handle, and in an injured state.

Zebras are wild equines often used in zoos and parks and potentially in circuses, they have the same physiology as horses and ponies.

Finally all animal species used for performance should be kept to the same standards as all other working animals we attach some research from 2006 that questions historical welfare standards to date in circuses which we are sure you are familiar with.

Thank you for bringing this bill forward.