Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee

Wild Animals in Travelling Circuses (Scotland) Bill

Written submission from Equity

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Equity is the trade union representing over 42,000 performers and other creative personnel. Within that total we represent a significant number of performers who work for, or own, circuses, some of which include animals, and the Bill could have a direct impact on how they operate. All the responses to your call for views are based on preserving jobs and workplaces for those members.

Ethical Basis for the Bill

We do not have a view to offer on the ethicality of the use of animals in travelling circuses.

Effectiveness of the creation of an offence

We do not have a view to offer on law enforcement matters.

Alternative approaches to preventing wild animals being used in travelling circuses

We not have alternative approaches to suggest but it is our understanding that no circuses with wild animals have visited Scotland in recent years.

Definitions of key phrases

‘Wild Animal’: The definition proposed in the Bill seems to be too narrow in that it bans all but animals which have been commonly domesticated in the British Islands. Our understanding is that circus animals have been bred in captivity for generations and are used to living with man. The definition of wild animals used by the European Court of Justice would seem to be more appropriate which is “any animal which was not bred in captivity, or an animal that was bred in captivity which has been lawfully released into the wild as part of a repopulation or re-introduction programme. Secondly, an animal should not be considered “captive-bred” unless it was bred in captivity using animals which were lawfully in captivity”. This would then allow wild species which have effectively become domesticated.

‘Animal’: Being the definition is ‘a vertebrate other than man’ this would include fish, mammals, reptiles and birds and therefore encompass the intended species.

‘Circus Operator’: The term would seem to encompass circus proprietors and circus managers and other such terms so should be adequate.

‘Travelling Circus’: This definition would appear to be accurate.

Proposed culpability / Effectiveness of proposed powers of enforcement

We do not have a view to offer on these matters.
Overall we believe the current licensing regime for wild animals applying in England with frequent inspections is sufficient to maintain good animal welfare standards and regulate these activities. We note also that Wales recently considered a ban but then opted for a licensing system as well. Having the same regime in operation throughout the UK would seem to be the clearest solution for the industry.

Ultimately the public would decide whether they wished to attend circuses which include wild animals. The number of Scottish residents favouring a ban on wild animals appears to be very small.

Should you wish us to provide any further evidence or attend any meetings then please contact my office.

Thank you for your attention.