Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee

Wild Animals in Travelling Circuses (Scotland) Bill

Written submission from the Cairngorm Reindeer Centre

The Cairngorm Reindeer were re-introduced to Scotland in 1952. Sixty-five years on, the herd serves as a very popular, year-round visitor attraction in Speyside, offering the opportunity to encounter these engaging animals in their natural environment.

As an animal domesticated as a beast of burden and for meat, skins and milk, haltering, harnessing and training them has been part of their “make-up” for 1,000s of years. Man would not have been able to live in the Arctic and sub-arctic unless he had domesticated reindeer. They are the farm animal of the north, replacing the cow, sheep, horse and goat which are unable to survive in such extreme environments.

For many years part of the income for the Cairngorm Reindeer herd has been derived from Christmas parades and shows. During the months of November and December our trained and habituated reindeer are used to pull sleighs in light switch-ons, Santa’s grottos and street parades. As well as providing a spectacle, which many people come to enjoy, we are able to educate people about the natural history of this animal and encourage them to see the reindeer at home. Our longest standing event is the Mercat Shopping Centre, Kirkcaldy, which we have visited annually since 1988 – it is always well attended and we have seen generations of families attend to see the parade over the years.

In 2012, the Cairngorm herd was recognised by the Association of World Reindeer Herders as an example of domesticated reindeer living and being herded by man in their natural environment. With this, Scotland was included as a full member to the Association, and Elizabeth Smith and Alex Smith were appointed to represent Scotland at their Congresses.

As a company, we have two main objections to the Bill:

1. The definition of Wild Animal – “animals commonly domesticated in the UK”

2. The lack of definition of “travelling circus”

1. As explained in the Explanatory notes (session 5 (21017)) under the ‘Meaning of “wild animal”’ the definition would make any animals not commonly domesticated in the UK a wild animal, which would then apply to domesticated animals including reindeer, llamas/alpacas and birds of prey. This then gives animal rights groups the “ammunition” to lobby/protest about the use of reindeer in Christmas events, llamas/alpacas at country shows and birds of prey at public events.

The definition of ‘wild animal’ should be the same as defined in the ‘Dangerous wild animals act’ 1976 (modification)(Scotland) Order 2008

2. The definition of “travelling circus” has not been explored at all and any mention in debate falls back to “the public’s/layman’s” perception of a travelling circus. This is not sufficient since the main objectors to performing
animals in any form are animal rights groups who will quickly extend the phrase “travelling circus” to any show, parade or mobile display of animals that have to be transported to the place of the “event”.

More thought and investigation needs to go into this definition, but using the definition of wild animals based on the Dangerous Wild Animals Act would greatly help to properly define travelling circus with wild animals.

This Bill has come about as a result of consultation during 2013/14. As Industry stakeholders we were not consulted.

The Cairngorm Reindeer Centre was consulted during the research of the Welsh report by Harris, Dorning et al. and we responded. However we do have concerns about the objectivity of the Welsh report, which has been used to support the WATC Bill.

Here at the Cairngorm Reindeer Centre we have no opinion about “travelling circuses with wild animals”, as long as that means what it says and cannot be misconstrued and used by animal rights groups to stop the use of animals which are obviously domesticated in mobile displays, such as reindeer and llamas.

Significant emphasis was made in the notes accompanying the bill that there was no financial loss to Scottish businesses by implementing the Bill, because a “travelling circus with wild animals” had only performed in Scotland twice in the previous eight years.

If, however, the definitions of “wild animal” and “travelling circus” are not properly explained then ultimately the Bill (as a result of pressure from animal rights groups, using the legislation as their main tool) will bring about the ban of practices like ours, i.e. reindeer parades, exhibitions and shows. The animal rights groups will target our clients – shopping centres, town centres and garden centres – who will eventually relent to pressure and stop “booking” our reindeer. With the Bill to support them the animal rights groups will have an extremely strong hand. We would suffer serious financial loss if these activities were curtailed.

We do hope you will consider the potentially large impact on businesses such as ours if the Bill fails to define the terms more clearly.