Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee

Wild Animals in Travelling Circuses (Scotland) Bill

Written submission from Peter Jolly’s Circus

Peter Jolly and Family from Peter Jolly’s Circus 2017

Thank you for this opportunity to give Peter Jolly’s Circus a chance to reply with regards to the Wild Animals in Travelling Circuses (Scotland) Bill.

We are a relatively small circus run by myself, Peter Jolly sr, my wife and our huge extended family.

We are a family circus and we do everything ourselves, we have only outsourced an act once but other than that we don’t hire in any acts at all. We do engage seasonal workers to help with tent construction and other manual tasks and some, who come to us year after year, do help with some of the animals. Checking their water and leading them in an out, cleaning, etc.

We have been operating as an independent circus for 46 years this year. My wife comes from 7th generation of circus families and until recently when she passed away her Mum spent many happy days with us in the summer enjoying being with the family, around the animals and remembering with fondness the joys of circus life of her own youth. I went straight from school onto a major UK circus and learned the difficult but fantastic art of correct animal husbandry and training. Over the years we have worked with and owned most species, however not elephants and nowadays we have hoof stock and small mammals.

Our children were brought up on our circus and now we have the joy of watching our grandchildren doing the same. Our children and our children’s children are part of our circus and some of our grandchildren appear in the afternoon show and early evening shows alongside their parents, but allowances are made for their frame of mind and willingness to join in. We believe in the motto, No Pressure, No Problem. Over the last two weeks one of our grandsons had his school friends from his local school visit us along with their families and this is great as he talks about what his family does during the touring season but until people see for themselves they have no idea. He was so proud standing in the ring and watching and listening to his school friends laughing, clapping and enjoying his performance.

We have another daughter who is married to a farmer but spends as much time as possible during the school holidays with us with her two children. The youngest grandchildren, twin boys in true circus tradition sit with their Grandmother and watch the show whenever possible.

We have a roving tutor for the children during the touring season who liaises with their local schools to make sure the children are on the correct learning path and during the winter months when we are at our home farm the children attend the local schools. The roving tutor sends reports back to the schools to make sure the children are keeping up to the standard expected of them.
We are old fashioned in that we believe in the old circus traditions, we always have our children’s marriages blessed in our circus ring and the babies are christened in the ring.

Because we have mainly hoof stock we play on farmers fields where our animals can enjoy grazing when not working and the camels can graze the hedgerows, if the weather permits we leave them out overnight. Our journeys are short, on average 20 -25 miles each trip. We open from Wednesday to Saturday, sometimes Sunday over a bank holiday. Our animals are loaded last and unloaded first and mostly only spend an hour or two travelling.

We have been licensed by DEFRA since the start of the DEFRA regulations and apart from one or two blips have had no problems renewing our license.

We also welcomed the Welsh Assembly when they were testing their Mobile Animal Exhibits checklists and invited them to test inspect our circus, which they did, paperwork available on request. We want to work with governments and make sure animals are safe and well in the circus industry.

We are from time to time dismayed and worried with regards to the wrongful accusations made against us regarding the welfare and wellbeing of our animals when our whole life revolves around keeping our animals safe and well with the best possible care and attention. Our children, grandchildren and animals are the reason we wake up in the morning and go about our business, we spend all our energy and time perfecting our art and looking after our family which includes our beloved animals.

We want to continue with our family circus with animals, it is what we know and work together with and for. Our animals know nothing of the wild, they have everything they need and are treated as part of our family.

Our circus is a place where family entertainment is upmost, it is a place of joy for all family members, Mums, Dads, Grandmas, Granddads, Aunties, Uncles and children of all ages can enjoy a show with no rude remarks, no swearing, no bare flesh, just happy times in safe surroundings.

We get the accusation that animals should not be in entertainment, well our animals don’t do high tricks they do movements they would do naturally. We say that the animal rights are making the word ‘entertainment’ a dirty word. Children visiting the circus can see and smell the animals up close and when they visit the circus zoo after the show they get to learn more facts about the animals, educational talks about the animals they have seen and enjoyed.

We would therefore ask you to revisit your Bill and make provisions for the ethical approach to animal training and keeping as it is on the ground, not what some people believe based on animal rights agendas. Just one visit to our circus would show you that we are ethical in all our dealings, with family, staff, customers, traders and of course our animals.

Please do not take our life away on the whim and nonsensical beliefs of the animal rights, please come and visit us anytime.