



Briefing Paper

FROM EXTERNAL RELATIONS – WALES

National Assembly for Wales Petitions Committee: e-Petition 809: Ban the Use of Wild Animals in Circuses in Wales

RSPCA Cymru welcomes the opportunity to provide a briefing to the Petitions Committee following our summer 2015 public campaign to ban the use of wild animals in circuses.

CURRENT POSITION

The use of wild animals in circuses is still legal in Wales. It is possible for circuses and other such travelling menageries that use wild animals to comply with the law as it stands, despite significant concerns about the welfare of animals in these settings.

PURPOSE OF CAMPAIGN

RSPCA Cymru has long pushed for a complete ban on the use of wild animals in circuses. The power to introduce a ban lies with the National Assembly for Wales – either under section 12 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 or via primary legislation.

The complex needs of wild animals can never be adequately met in a circus environment with regular transport, cramped and bare temporary housing, forced training and performance all unavoidable realities for the animals.

The forced movement, human handling, noise, vibration, cage motion and confinement that are part and parcel of transportation are well documented sources of stress in a wide range of species¹. The cumulative effect of frequent transport events is a significant welfare problem for circus animals, and is one that cannot be overcome due to their itinerant nature.

The vehicles used to transport animals from site to site are limited in size to the maximum dimension legally allowed on roads. This, coupled with need to easily erect and dismantle enclosures and their contents, greatly limits both the size and complexity of environment that circus animals can be provided. For example, enclosures are on average a quarter of the size as the minimum recommended by zoos². Circuses³ are simply unable to provide wild animals with the standard of housing and care expected in modern zoos, which themselves are not without welfare problems, leading to an impoverished life². Furthermore, circuses are purely for entertainment, making the 'costs' to animal welfare even more unacceptable.

¹ e.g. Anonymous (2004) Opinion of the Scientific Panel on Animal Health and Welfare on a request from the Commission related to the welfare of animals during transport. *EFSA Journal* 44: 1–36

² Iossa G, Soulsbury CD, Harris S (2009) Are wild animals suited to a travelling circus life? *Animal Welfare* 18: 129–140

³ Including those operating under alternative titles, such as 'travelling' and 'educational' shows.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN THE CAMPAIGN

There has been significant public support for e-petition 809. In addition to 517 signatures gathered on the assembly.wales website between 15 May and 09 October 2015 an additional 7,268 signatures were gathered via the RSPCA Cymru website and offline by our network of volunteers.

An important element of RSPCA Cymru-collected signatures came from supporters physically gathering signatures in communities right across Wales. It should be noted that RSPCA Cymru only collected signatures from those resident in Wales, adding a particular weight and legitimacy to this petition in the argument for decisive action on the matter in Wales.

A recurrent theme from the public has been that they believed that the use of wild animals in circuses had already been banned. However the high profile 'travelling show' with lions and tigers that has toured Wales throughout the summer appears to have dispelled this myth. The marketing of such shows does not appear to have fooled the public who, in our experience, continue to consider them equivalent to circuses and should be banned, like those formally referring to themselves as 'circuses'. Indeed one travelling show that has recently been touring Wales would appear to have applied, and failed to obtain, a license to operate a circus in England⁴.

NEXT STEPS

We urge the Welsh Government to introduce legislation to ban the use of wild animals in circuses and follow the example set by many of our European neighbours and countries much further afield, namely Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Israel, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Singapore.

It should also be noted that this has been ruled a Member State issue under European law, and the RSPCA believe it is not even necessary to utilise primary legislation but instead a ban could be introduced through regulations under the Animal Welfare Act in Wales.

Here in Wales the public are clear, a poll⁵ commissioned by RSPCA Cymru found that 74 percent of the public support a ban on wild animals performing in circuses in Wales after hearing that other European countries have banned animal performances in circuses⁶. This, combined with the petition provides a substantial mandate for decisive action on the matter.

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/circus-inspection-reports-2015>

⁵ All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1036 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 19th – 22nd August 2015. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all Welsh adults (aged 18+).

⁶ Strictly embargoed until 00.01 on 20 October 2015.