

Welsh Assembly All Party Group on Animal Welfare – 04.12.07

In Attendance:

Rob Atkinson – Head of Wildlife, RSPCA
Lorraine Barrett AM (Lab, Cardiff South & Penarth)
John Campbell – Protect Our Wild Animals
Suzanne Campbell – Protect Our Wild Animals
Chris Draper – Born Free Foundation
Sian Edwards – Dogs Trust
Bethan Jenkins AM (Plaid, South Wales West)
Philip Jones – International League for the Protection of Horses
Claire Lawson – Public Affairs Manager for Wales, RSPCA
Eleri Lloyd – Morgan Allen Moore
Sarah Marsh – Greyhound Rescue Wales
Nick Ramsay AM (Con, Monmouth)
Craig Redmond – Captive Animals' Protection Society
Tina Reece – RSPCA
Alun Streeter – OCVO
Alain Thomas – Greyhound Rescue Wales

Item 1: Chair's Welcome and Introduction

Lorraine Barrett AM opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and invited Rob Atkinson, Head of Wildlife for the RSPCA, to give his presentation.

Item 2: Topic for Discussion: Wild Animals in Circuses

Rob Atkinson (RSPCA):

- Stated that circuses are little-studied, but that there were elements critical to circuses' existence which were known stressors.
- **Transport**
 - ❖ Said that transport had been widely studied, and there was limited data from Wales which indicated an average journey distance of 100km (up to 150km).
 - ❖ Said that UK data was probably better, and showed an average journey of 165km (up to 785km), a travelling distance of 3000km per season.
 - ❖ Told the meeting that the average journey time was 2 hrs (up to 15 hrs), with an average of 52 loading/unloading events per season.
 - ❖ Continued by saying that animals were given an average of just seven days to recover from such events, sometimes as little as 2 days, and that studies had shown that transport effects persisted for 6 days in circus tigers accustomed to transport.
 - ❖ Stated that the size of the beast wagon, as restricted by EC Directive, was 16.5m x 2.5m, i.e. 42 sq.m, however, because this was an absolute maximum, it could be less if the wagon was sub-divided into compartments.
 - ❖ Added that animals could remain in the wagon for 10-12hrs after arrival at the site.
- **Diet**
 - ❖ Said that diet was potentially a huge problem, and that even in zoos it could be difficult to ensure a constant supply for fresh meat.
- **Barren Conditions**
 - ❖ Said they put restrictions on natural behaviour.
- **Performance and Training**
 - ❖ Argued that performance and training were critical animal welfare issues with regard to circuses, and yet had been excluded from consideration in the report.
- **Inappropriate Social Groups**
 - ❖ Stated that there was a lack of choice regarding housing the animals.

➤ **Winter Quarters**

- ❖ Noted that winter quarters had also been excluded from consideration.
- Said that most people intuitively knew that circuses were not good for animals, and that a MORI poll in 2006 had shown that 76% of people in Wales felt keeping wild animals in circuses was unacceptable, and 70% felt keeping domestic animals in circuses was unacceptable.
- Added that other countries had led the way, and that wild animals in circuses were now banned in Estonia, Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Israel, Costa Rica and Singapore, and that Finland, Sweden, Czech Republic, Denmark and India had banned some species.
- Explained that circuses were part of the AWA secondary legislation considerations and that, as part of this process, Defra undertook to manage a Circus Working Group of welfare NGOs and industry. Evidence was submitted, which was then handed to an expert panel: this formed the basis for a report to Defra by Mike Radford, the Chair of the CWG.
- Said that performance and training were omitted from the considerations of this group, as were winter quarters, as were domestic animals.
- Added that Mike Radford produced his report on 20th November 2007, and it was sent to all relevant Ministers in all governments.
- Noted that the scientific panel concluded there was insufficient basis for a ban, and that the report concluded that, besides, Section 12 had no power to impose a ban.
- Told the meeting that the RSPCA was working on a commentary on the report, which would be submitted to APGAW.
- Argued that there were several reasons why the RSPCA had problems with the report and that, in essence, the problems stemmed from the remit handed to the academic group.
- Repeated that critical elements of training and performance and domestic animals were excluded from the very start, and argued that these matters defined a circus, and their exclusion led the review by the academic panel down a dead end.
- Said the panel decided that a meaningful read across could be made from scientific studies of dogs and horses taken to shows, but that this was impossible because domestic animals and performance were excluded from consideration.
- Said that the panel came to the conclusion that only studies on circuses were admissible. However, this left so few that they concluded there was insufficient evidence for a ban.
- Stated that the academic panel found that the two sub-groups had cherry-picked from the available studies, yet the sub-groups were asked to "identify and marshal the scientific evidence which it judged best advanced its case".
- Said the report states the panel was asked to "consider any evidence... to support a ban in relation to a particular non-domesticated species", but argued that banning is a decision for politicians, taking into account scientific opinion, not a decision for the panel.
- Noted that the panel was given no guidance on the level of evidence required to make a parliamentary decision, which differed greatly from that required by a scientist.
- Argued that, if the panel had been asked instead to assess evidence that a species' welfare needs can be met in a circus – overwhelming support, none, or somewhere in between – then they would have been placed in a position to make a much more valuable contribution to the process.
- Suggested that the panel went beyond their terms of reference by putting forward recommendations for regulations, despite saying there was no evidence for a ban.
- Added that the panel had recommended adopting ACP and PAWSI guidelines, but these guidelines were not based on scientific evidence.
- Said it was unclear whether the panel considered all studies of equal quality, nor whether they contributed their own expertise and knowledge along with the submissions in front of them.
- Said the panel concluded there was little evidence that the health of circus animals was any better or worse than animals in other captive situations, but that they did not specify which captive situations they meant, and they excluded read across from other captive situations.
- Said the panel had concluded that the general health of circus animals is good, whilst admitting the study from which this conclusion was derived was unsystematic.
- Argued that it was difficult to understand the consistency of standards applied.

- Noted that the panel had concluded it was the quality and not quantity of journey time that was important for health, but that legislation imposed minimum journey times, and the panel themselves had concluded that "all transport will cause some stress".
- Concluded by saying that, although Mike Radford considered there was no power in Section 12 for a ban, others, including RSPCA's lawyers, differed from that opinion.

Item 3: Discussion and Q&A

Lorraine Barrett AM:

- Thanked Mr Atkinson for his presentation and asked the group for questions.

John Campbell (Protect Our Wild Animals):

- Told the meeting that, as a vet, he had covered Blackpool Tower circuses.
- Said it was important to understand journeys as three-fold: loading, the journey itself, and unloading.
- Said that loading and unloading were the most stressful for animals, and that he had seen evidence which suggested that the journey itself was not as bad.
- Asked Rob Atkinson whether the animals were bred in captivity.

Rob Atkinson (RSPCA):

- Replied that they were, apart from one elephant.

John Campbell (Protect Our Wild Animals):

- Responded that it would therefore be difficult to define them as normal or usual.
- Asked whether the animals travelled abroad.

Rob Atkinson (RSPCA):

- Replied that the animals came from all over, often through Ireland.

Chris Draper (Born Free Foundation):

- Said that, in general, the circuses were UK based.

Craig Redmond (Captive Animals' Protection Society):

- Added that circuses had recently been trying to bring in new animals such as elephants, but that these acts had never arrived.

John Campbell (Protect Our Wild Animals):

- Argued that, even if there did not appear to be a problem, there was no reason why circuses should not welcome inspections.
- Asked what parameters were used regarding the figure of a six-day recovery time.

Rob Atkinson (RSPCA):

- Clarified that the panel had not suggested there was no problem with animals in circuses; they had said there was no evidence to support this idea because of restricted studies.
- Said the figure of a six-day recovery period was identified during a study of tigers, but which had not looked at controls.

Lorraine Barrett AM:

- Asked whether studies had done stress tests of animals while they were performing.

Rob Atkinson (RSPCA):

- Replied that they had not.

Suzanne Campbell (Protect Our Wild Animals):

- Said that, regarding how the animals were trained, the circuses were very secretive and it was suspected that they used electric probes.

Lorraine Barrett AM:

- Added that circuses use whips.

Suzanne Campbell (Protect Our Wild Animals):

- Described the training and performances as cruel.

Rob Atkinson (RSPCA):

- Said that the industry had been keen to keep performance and training out of consideration.
- Added that there was little academic merit or funding for studying circus animals because of the small sample sizes.

Philip Jones (International League for the Protection of Horses):

- Asked whether there were 47 animals kept in circuses.

Rob Atkinson (RSPCA):

- Replied that there were 47 wild animals in circuses.

Chris Draper (Born Free Foundation):

- Added that the 47 figure included llamas, but under zoo licensing llamas were considered to be domestic, therefore the figure for wild animals was reduced to 42.

Philip Jones (International League for the Protection of Horses):

- Asked whether the Animal Welfare Act was sufficient to cover domestic animals.

Rob Atkinson (RSPCA):

- Said that domestic animals should never have been excluded from consideration.

Philip Jones (International League for the Protection of Horses):

- Suggested that, if domestic animals had been included, the conclusions of the report would have been different.

Rob Atkinson (RSPCA):

- Noted that even water buffalo were considered to be domestic animals.

Craig Redmond (Captive Animals' Protection Society):

- Said there were 200 animals in UK circuses, of which around 40 were wild, which meant that 160 animals had not been considered in the report.
- Suggested that, even if there was a ban on wild animals in circuses, their numbers would be replaced with domestic animals.

Nick Ramsay AM (Con, Monmouth):

- Said that, had he not attended the APGAW meeting, he would have assumed that an actual study had been conducted into animals in circuses.
- Suggested that it might be counter-productive if the report led people to believe such a study had been carried out.

Bethan Jenkins (Plaid, South Wales West):

- Asked whether the ministers had responded.

Claire Lawson (RSPCA):

- Said that they wanted to respond before the minister.

Chris Draper (Born Free Foundation):

- Said there would be no benefit to conducting a further study.

Lorraine Barrett AM:

- Questioned how the case could be made.

Chris Draper (Born Free Foundation):

- Said he strongly disagreed with the findings of the academic panel.
- Added that he thought they should read across from zoos.

Claire Lawson (RSPCA):

- Noted that the law was not always based on science, and was often based on moral values.
- Said they needed to step up the campaign in Wales.

Rob Atkinson (RSPCA):

- Said that the report had been whittled away to leave only what had been possible to agree on.

Philip Jones (International League for the Protection of Horses):

- Asked about the possibility of a further study on circuses.

Chris Draper (Born Free Foundation):

- Said that if such a study was conducted it would ignore the fact that evidence is already available if read-across was permitted.

Suzanne Campbell (Protect Our Wild Animals):

- Said that matters often came back to money and vested interests.
- Noted that three members of the panel were directly involved with circuses and would have been able to water down the conclusions.

Philip Jones (International League for the Protection of Horses):

- Asked if there was evidence to show that circuses were in decline.
- Said that he was aware of four circuses in the country at that time.

Craig Redmond (Captive Animals' Protection Society):

- Clarified that there were four with wild animals, nine overall.

Claire Lawson (RSPCA):

- Said there were more in Germany.

Craig Redmond (Captive Animals' Protection Society):

- Said it was unlikely that overseas circuses would return.

Philip Jones (International League for the Protection of Horses):

- Asked how many circuses there were in the EU.

Craig Redmond (Captive Animals' Protection Society):

- Said that in countries such as Spain and Italy, circuses were part of their culture and there were few campaigns.
- Added that in the UK, however, there had been a massive decline in circuses over the past 20 years.
- Clarified that there was no need to oppose all circuses: only those which use animals.

Philip Jones (International League for the Protection of Horses):

- Asked if there was a way of stopping circuses coming from the EU.

Chris Draper (Born Free Foundation):

- Answered that, because of free trade, it could not be stopped.

Rob Atkinson (RSPCA):

- Noted that, in the US, the power of circuses was much stronger, and had massive backing at congress.

Lorraine Barrett AM:

- Said they needed to decide what to submit to the minister.

Claire Lawson (RSPCA):

- Said she would put together the key points.

Lorraine Barrett AM:

- Asked the meeting to submit any other points to Claire Lawson.

Philip Jones (International League for the Protection of Horses):

- Asked whether the Welsh Assembly Government could make a ban.

Claire Lawson (RSPCA):

- Said the report suggested they could not produce a ban, but that the RSPCA's lawyers disagreed.

Craig Redmond (Captive Animals' Protection Society):

- Asked whether Mike Radford had given his own opinion.

Rob Atkinson (RSPCA):

- Said he had, and that scientific evidence had formed only part of the report.
- Added that he did not believe Mike Radford had been well briefed.

Alain Thomas (Greyhound Rescue Wales):

- Asked whether they would attempt to tackle the problem of domestic animals in circuses.
- Said circuses were a closed community and therefore animals were vulnerable.

Philip Jones (International League for the Protection of Horses):

- Said it would have to be considered.

Claire Lawson (RSPCA):

- Argued that there was less public stomach to ban domestic animals and that, if they were included in bans which stipulated transport rules, it might affect events such as gymkhanas.
- Confirmed that, if they were looking at a straight ban, then there would be less public support and it would set a dangerous precedent.

Item 4: Dates of Future Meetings

Lorraine Barrett AM:

- Agreed that domestic animals were another matter.
- Asked about dates of future meetings.

Claire Lawson (RSPCA):

- Said there would be a meeting at the end of January/beginning of February about trade in animals, and recommended that the group returned to the matter of bovine TB.