

Wild Animals and Circuses (Wales) Bill

WEDNESDAY 15 JULY 2020

STAGE FOUR CONSIDERATION - PLENARY DEBATE

Key Points:

- RSPCA Cymru urges Members of the Senedd to vote in favour of the Wild Animals and Circuses (Wales) Bill on Wednesday (15 July) as it reaches the conclusion of its legislative journey through the Welsh Parliament.
- Wild Animals and Circuses (Wales) Bill will make it an offence for operators of travelling circuses in Wales to perform with, or exhibit wild animals for entertainment purposes - a legislative change long discussed and overdue. Its passing would mark the conclusion of many years of RSPCA campaigning on this issue - backed by strong public support.
- Travelling circus life is severely detrimental to the quality of life for those wild animals. Confinement, stressful transportation, forced training and abnormal social groupings are all a grim reality for the animals - highlighting why this outdated spectacle needs to be banned and policy brought in line with societal norms and values.
- Wales must not fall behind on key animal welfare issues - nor become a sanctuary for the use of wild animals in travelling circuses. The practice is banned in all other nations of Great Britain; and Wales is set to join 45 other countries, nations or states globally to have acted.
- A clear strength of public feeling against wild animals being exhibited in circuses exists. Polling has consistently shown that the public in Wales favour a ban on their use, with 74 percent supporting a ban in 2015¹ and 97 percent of respondents to the Welsh Government's consultation on the matter backing a ban in 2018.²
- To date, cross-party support for this Bill has been clear. RSPCA Cymru urges all Members to make a final pledge to those animals that will undoubtedly suffer if this practice is allowed to continue in Wales - by voting in favour of the Bill at stage four, and consigning this practice to the history books once and for all.

Introduction

The Wild Animals and Circuses (Wales) Bill is a hugely welcome piece of legislation. It is a relatively short Bill which essentially 'makes it an offence for a wild animal to be used in a travelling circus'. The Welsh Government have said they are bringing forward the ban on "ethical grounds"³ - but the RSPCA believes the introduction of the legislation will have clear animal welfare benefits.

¹ Polling has shown that 74% support a ban on wild animals performing in circuses. Figure from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1,036 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 19-22 August 2015. The survey was carried out online. These figures have been weighted and are representative of all Welsh adults (aged 18+).

² Welsh Government Written Statement: [summary of responses to the consultation on the draft Wild Animals in Travelling Circuses \(Wales\) Bill](#), 30 January 2019

³ Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee, 18 July 2019

Indeed, RSPCA Cymru has long led the campaign against the use of wild animals in circuses, highlighting the detrimental impact this has on the welfare of the animals and raising concerns about what this tells future generations in Wales about how society treats our fellow living creatures. It is therefore paramount that such a ban is introduced to protect these animals, and to ensure that Wales remains a leader both within the UK and further afield on animal welfare issues. Accordingly, the RSPCA urges Members from across the Senedd to support this Bill in this final legislative vote, making Welsh law yet kinder and more compassionate to animals.

What does the Bill do?

The Wild Animals and Circuses (Wales) Bill makes it an offence for the operator of a circus to use wild animals in a travelling circus; where use means that animal is performed or exhibited:

- The operator means the owner of the travelling circus or the individual that has overall responsibility for the travelling circus.
- A wild animal is one not commonly domesticated in the British Islands.
- A travelling circus is defined as a circus which travels from one place to another, for the purpose of providing entertainment.

The Bill - which will come into force as of 1 December 2020 - confers powers on Inspectors appointed by Welsh Government Ministers or local authorities to enforce the law. Enforcement powers include: powers of entry; inspection; search; and seizure of evidence, including the taking of a sample from an animal - but not the seizure of any animals.

RSPCA Cymru believes the Bill is very clear in its set objectives - and will largely meet these. Nevertheless, it is important the effectiveness of the legislation is monitored. While they may not perform or be exhibited, circuses will still be able to travel with and train wild animals. It is important the ongoing animal welfare impact of this is monitored - in addition to the efficacy of powers of enforcement and punishment provisions.

Why is a ban needed?

- **Grim realities of circus life impact welfare.** The itinerant nature of circuses means that the complex needs of wild animals cannot be adequately met in such an environment. Confinement, constant transportation, forced training and abnormal social groupings are all grim realities associated with circus life - all of which can cause stress and welfare problems for the animals involved and do not educate the public or foster respect for animals.
- **Other UK nations have already acted.** The need for legislation on this matter has been further highlighted by action taken elsewhere in the UK. In England, the Wild Animals in Circuses Act 2019 gained Royal Assent in July 2019, and came into force in January this year; while in Scotland, the Wild Animals in Travelling Circuses (Scotland) Act 2018 implemented a ban on 28 May 2018. Without this law, Wales faces becoming a sanctuary for this practice.
- **Public support.** There is a clear strength of feeling against the issue of wild animals being exhibited in circuses. Polling has consistently shown that the public in Wales favour a ban on the use of wild animals in circuses, with 74 percent support a ban in 2015⁴, and 97 percent of respondents to the Welsh Government's consultation backing a ban in January 2018.⁵
- **A ban makes a huge statement for animals.** While a ban, in reality, will only directly impact a

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⁵ Welsh Government Written Statement: [summary of responses to the consultation on the draft Wild Animals in Travelling Circuses \(Wales\) Bill](#), 30 January 2019

small number of animals - legislating will make a huge statement for animal welfare, emphasising Wales' norms and values as a nation towards animals.

RSPCA Cymru campaign and independent review

- **Decades of campaigning coming to an end.** The introduction of this Bill followed many years of action on this issue by RSPCA Cymru - incorporating numerous consultation responses, scientific papers, briefings, polling, public-facing events, street stalls, campaign actions and more.
- **Thousands back RSPCA petition.** Campaigning work included the presentation on a petition to the National Assembly for Wales. RSPCA Cymru's petition received 7,785 signatures when submitted to the Petitions Committee⁶.
- **Petition secures wide-ranging review.** RSPCA Cymru's petition paved the way for an independent, Welsh Government-commissioned review into the welfare of animals used in travelling circuses by Professor Stephen Harris and colleagues. The review found that the evidence supports a ban on the use of wild animals in travelling circuses - crucially noting that travelling circus life for wild animals 'does not constitute either a good life or life worth living'⁷.

International picture and bans elsewhere







An estimated 45 countries, nations or states have already banned or restricted the use of either all, or some wild animals in circuses⁸. This demonstrates the support of, and precedent for, the Wild Animals and Circuses (Wales) Bill which exists on a global scale.

Austria		Belgium		Bolivia	
Bosnia and Herzegovina		Bulgaria		Colombia	
Costa Rica		Croatia		Cyprus	
Czech Republic		Denmark		Ecuador	
El Salvador		England		Estonia	
Finland		Greece		Guatemala	
Hungary		India		Iran	
Israel		Italy		Latvia	
Lebanon		Luxembourg		Malta	
Mexico		Netherlands		North Macedonia	
Norway		Panama		Paraguay	

⁶ National Assembly for Wales Petitions Committee, P-04-653 Ban the Use of Wild Animals in Circuses in Wales

⁷ Dorning, Harris and Pickett - [The Welfare of wild animals in travelling circuses](#), p.47.

⁸ [Written evidence submitted by Animal Defenders International](#) - UK Parliament Public Bill Committee, Wild Animals in Circuses (No.2) Bill

Peru		Poland		Portugal	
Republic of Ireland		Romania		Scotland	
Serbia		Singapore		Slovakia	
Slovenia		Sweden		Taiwan	

Within Wales, some local authorities have banned the use of wild animals in circuses on land which they control. It was previously thought that as many as ten Welsh local authorities had banned circuses on their land⁹. However, only six Councils in Wales recently confirmed that such localised bans are in place via an Animal Welfare Network for Wales FOI request¹⁰ - further demonstrating the importance of Wales-wide action taken by the Welsh Government.

In Summary

The issue of wild animals being used in circuses is one that RSPCA Cymru has long campaigned on - highlighting how the itinerant nature and conditions of travelling circus life cannot adequately meet the needs of wild animals.

Based on this campaigning, polling and our engagement with Wales' public, it has become clear that a large majority of people support this outdated practice coming to an end. As society's norms and values change there is often a need for policy to follow suit. Members of the Senedd now have the opportunity to highlight their commitment to these animals; by backing a Bill which has large public support, and will outlaw situations which, for too long, has compromised animal welfare in Wales.

RSPCA Cymru urges all Members of the Senedd to make a final commitment to these animals and support this straightforward, yet effective piece of legislation as it concludes its journey through the Welsh Parliament.

⁹ Senedd Research - Wild animals in circuses: Assembly to debate petition, 27 February 2018

¹⁰ Animal Welfare Network for Wales, freedom of information request to all local authorities in Wales - 2019. All except Cardiff had responded.