

DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Performing wild animals in travelling circuses

12 July 2012

Minister of State for Agriculture and Food (James Paice)

On 1 March 2012, the Government set out its approach to the use of performing wild animals in travelling circuses in England.

The Government has said it will pursue a ban on ethical grounds on wild animals performing in circuses. Today we are announcing that we are working on draft legislation which will set out the exact details of that ban.

We have said before that getting primary legislation right on such an emotive issue as this will take time, and we expect to be able to publish draft legislation for pre-legislative scrutiny later this session.

We are laying draft regulations today to introduce a new licensing scheme that will protect the welfare of such animals while they are in use in travelling circuses.

The regulations will be made under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. They will safeguard the welfare of wild animals in travelling circuses and ensure that they receive regular welfare inspections.

In line with the 1 March statement, it is our intent that the regulations are in force from the start of the 2013 touring season.

The public consultation on the licensing proposals closed on 25 April 2012. The analysis of responses and Government response has been published on Defra's website.

During the eight week period of public consultation, Defra officials carried out further engagement with the circus industry, veterinary bodies and other interested parties.

A period of "road-testing" of the draft welfare standards was undertaken. Road-testing involved multiple visits to circus sites by a Defra veterinary team to test the welfare standards alongside the public consultation. Findings have been used to refine the standards.

236 formal responses to the consultation were received. Responses were generally supportive and the overarching conclusion is that our proposed licensing regime would be robust and workable, subject to careful consideration of the detailed points of feedback received. The analysis of responses and Government response sets out in detail how feedback has been used to improve the package.

The main provisions of the regulations include:

- A requirement that any travelling circus in England that includes wild animals first obtains a licence from Defra;
- That a licence can only be obtained on payment of an administrative fee and circuses will also be liable for the cost of inspections;
- A requirement of an initial inspection before a licence can be issued;
- Provision for further inspections;
- That licences can be suspended or revoked; and
- Detailed licensing conditions covering all aspects of welfare in a travelling circus which must be met and adhered to.

In addition to the core welfare standards which are included in the Schedule of the Regulations, detailed guidance on welfare standards will be revised and updated over the summer period, and take full account of feedback from the consultation.

In line with the 1 March Statement, formal inspections would be undertaken by Government-appointed vets before a licence may be issued or renewed. If a licence were issued, compliance checks would be carried out during the period of a licence, including a combination of announced and unannounced visits both to winter quarters and to tour sites.

In conclusion, the new regulations will protect the welfare of wild animals in travelling circuses in the intervening period before a ban can be brought into effect. We expect to publish draft legislation for a ban as soon as parliamentary time allows.