

Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London SW1A 3JR

Telephone 08459 335577
Email helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk
Website www.defra.gov.uk



Dr Caroline Lucas MEP
Suite 58
The Hop Exchange
24 Southwark Street
London SE1 1TY

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From Jeff Rooker
Minister for Sustainable Farming and Food, and Animal Welfare

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dr Caroline Lucas".

WILD ANIMALS IN CIRCUSES

Thank you for your letter of 21 January to Jonathan Shaw about banning the use of wild animals in circuses. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

Mike Radford's Report on wild animals in circuses concluded that, on welfare grounds, a complete ban on wild animals in circuses could not be legally justified. Under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, Section 12 (1) Regulations can only be made for the purpose of promoting the welfare of animals. The conclusions of the Wild Animals in Travelling Circuses Report indicate that it is currently not possible to say that travelling circuses cannot meet the welfare needs of wild animals. We therefore do not have sufficient evidence for saying that a ban is necessary to meet welfare concerns so it would not be possible to do this through secondary legislation under the Act.

Nevertheless, it would be possible to make regulations to ensure that sound welfare standards are maintained to promote the welfare of animals used in travelling circuses. I have therefore approved a feasibility study to look at the possibility of introducing a regulatory system for the use of wild animal acts in circuses to ensure that our future policy is evidence based and that all possibilities have been explored. I expect to be presented with an Impact Assessment in early Spring of this year. The preparation of this document will involve Defra officials, veterinarians and Zoo Licensing Inspectors. The Impact Assessment will reflect the concerns of industry and welfare organisations.

I realise the strength of feelings that exist regarding this issue and it is essential that any decision we come to takes full account of the views of those who both support and oppose the use of wild animal acts in circuses.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jeff Rooker".

JEFF ROOKER