

DR. CAROLINE LUCAS

Green Party
for the South East of England

Rt Hon Jonathan Shaw MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Defra
Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London SW1P 3JR

January 21st 2008

Dear Jonathan,

I understand that DEFRA's Circus Working Group report has judged that there is insufficient scientific evidence to justify a ban on captive animals in circuses and am writing to urge you to reconsider your position on this matter.

The Working Group did not investigate aspects of circus life that have a considerable impact on animal welfare, including the training of animals. Nor did members visit circuses directly, so as to judge at first hand whether the claims of circus owners or animal welfare campaigners are more accurate. There is a lack of peer reviewed scientific research into the impact of circus life on wild animals, yet plenty of evidence exists that highlights the cruelty of transporting animals in cramped conditions, forcing them to perform or keeping them in living quarters that require them to be chained or locked up for many months of the year.

Whilst I would argue that the Working Group did not fulfil its remit as best it could, it is also important to note that DEFRA does not need scientific evidence to introduce a ban. Given that the majority of circuses are now human-only following consumer pressure and more than 200 councils have banned animal acts from their land, it is clear that there is popular support for a ban. Furthermore, the European Commission's attempts to overthrow Austria's ban on wild animals in circuses has been thwarted, so there appears to be no basis in EU law to hold back from a ban.

I appreciate that the Animal Welfare Act that comes into force this year does impose some conditions on circuses but share the concerns of many animal welfare campaigns that the wording of the legislation, alongside the difficulties involved with enforcement, will not prevent most wild animals being used by circuses. Under these circumstances I believe it is imperative for the government to take decisive action and support a full ban immediately.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Caroline Lucas - Green Party MEP for South East England.