

BRIEFING NOTES FOR MPS: ANIMAL WELFARE (KEPT ANIMALS) BILL - ZOOS

SUMMARY

- Born Free welcomes the changes to the definition of zoos within the Zoo Licensing Act (ZLA) outlined in Schedule 5 of the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill 2021, which removes the exemption for circuses.
- Conservation measures need to be defined in consultation with **all** stakeholders and ensure that only measures which benefit animals in the wild are included. These must be robust, meaningful and transparent.
- It must be made mandatory either within this Bill or the upcoming reform of the Secretary of States Standards of Modern Zoo Practise for zoos to contribute:
 - (i) A specified minimum proportion of their revenue to species conservation in the wild, and
 - (ii) Towards a Zoo Insurance Bond to ensure contingencies are in place for the care and welfare of animals at a zoo which is forced to close in order to avoid a repeat of the issues seen within the industry as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- We are extremely concerned that the proposed changes to the Zoo Licensing Act revoke the mandatory requirement for Local Authorities to issue a Zoo Closure Direction under s.16B.



Photo: George Logan



Born Free opposes the exploitation of wild animals in zoos and aquaria. Since 1984, Born Free has challenged the zoo industry within Great Britain and abroad, including by investigating and exposing animal welfare standards and questioning the commitment of zoos to conservation. We work to change public attitudes, inform decision-makers and give captive wild animals a voice.

Whilst the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill covers a number of important issues, this briefing focuses on the reforms specifically relating to British zoos and aquariums.

CONSERVATION

The removal of the current conservation contribution requirements for zoos, through the repeal of the five 'Conservation measures' in section 1A of the Zoo Licensing Act (ZLA), of which zoos are only currently required to fulfil one, must be replaced by robust, meaningful and transparent conservation requirements. It is vital that 'conservation measures' are clearly defined and only include activities which have a direct and measurable benefit to animals in the wild. The zoo industry's current definition of what constitutes a conservation measure is too broad and enables zoos to satisfy the current requirements without making meaningful contributions. Born Free's research has revealed the following:

- Of 200 British zoos, only 37% were adjudged to be contributing towards the reintroduction of species to the wild in their most recent zoo inspection report
- Analysis of stocklists from 233 British zoos has uncovered that that only 23.5% of species held are classified as 'threatened' species on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)'s Red List
- The majority of species housed – 62.5% - are categorised as 'Least Concern' (lowest threat category)

[Researchers](#) have previously stated that if zoos are committed to conserving species in danger of extinction, *"they must reduce the number of species they maintain that do not need help,"* however the above figures and previous [Born Free research](#) highlight a lack of meaningful progress towards that objective. Conserving species and their habitats in the wild, including through reintroductions, should be at the forefront of any conservation action. The zoo industry's attempts to water down future conservation standards suggests a reluctance within the industry to move away from being entertainment attractions and live up to their self-proclaimed status as centres of conservation.

We also seek reassurance that measures will be taken to ensure conservation requirements do not lapse in any interim period between the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill receiving Royal Assent, and the implementation of the proposed Amendments to Section 9.

ZOO FINANCES

The zoo industry continues to claim that zoos and aquariums globally contribute more than \$350 million annually to species conservation in the wild. However, this figure is based on a 10-year-old [report](#), which did not discriminate between the money zoos spend on the animals they house, and money spent on animals in the wild. Recent [research](#) conducted by Born Free has highlighted that the larger charitable zoos within Great Britain:

- Contribute on average just 4.2% of their annual income to conservation in the wild;
- Allocate on average just 6.6% of the money received from admission sales to conserving animals in the wild; and



- Are financially ill-prepared for long-term closure as experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic, holding on average less than three months' financial reserves.
We fear these figures will be even lower for smaller zoos.

The development of meaningful criteria for financial contributions required of zoos to support conservation in the wild, including a minimum financial commitment by zoos representing a proportion of the income generated via the operations of the zoo (excluding grants from external bodies), should be encouraged and will ensure all zoos are contributing equally in relation to their size. The zoo industry mistakes criticism regarding conservation expenditure as a lack of understanding by external organisations. However, the zoo industry frequently contradicts itself, by on the one hand highlighting that [financial expenditure](#) should not be the sole determinant of conservation success, while continually emphasising how much [money](#) they spend on conservation each year. It is therefore vital that zoos are mandated to contribute an appropriate minimum level of financial support towards conservation projects, but also that the conservation impacts of these projects are assessed during the zoo inspection process.

REVOKING ZOO LICENSING ACT SECTION 16B

We are extremely concerned that the proposed changes to the ZLA revoke the mandatory requirement for Local Authorities to issue a Zoo Closure Direction under s.16B. This effectively removes the power under the Act to shut down failing zoos and leaves it to the discretion of already conflicted Local Authorities. Any attempts to improve the standards of zoos through increasing their conservation contributions and through the upcoming reform of the Secretary of State's Standards of Modern Zoo Practice could be undermined by removing the power within the ZLA to close failing zoos, and ultimately could result in prolonged animal suffering.

We thank you for taking an interest in this very important section of the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill and hope that you will consider raising the points highlighted in this briefing during the Committee stage of the Bill.

CONCLUSION

You can help by:

1. Pushing for conservation measures to be clearly defined and that any future conservation measures required of zoos must benefit animals in the wild.
2. Highlighting that the majority of species housed in British zoos are not 'threatened', and that far more needs to be done if zoos are to live up to their claim to be centres of conservation, emphasising the importance that any future conservation measures are robust, meaningful and transparent.
3. Calling for a minimum financial contribution by all zoos to support conservation in the wild, and the introduction of a Zoo Insurance Bond so that financial contingencies are in place to care for animals in the event of a zoo's closure.
4. Stressing the importance of s.16B in the ZLA to ensure failing zoos can be shut down and calling for its reinstatement within legislation.

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