

P-05-743 End the Exotic Pet Trade in Wales – Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Committee, 25.04.17

Dear Mr Hedges,

Many thanks for forwarding the reply you received from Lesley Griffiths AC/AM, dated April 10 2017, in reference to the consideration of my petition to end the sale of exotic pets in Wales (P-05-743), and to the specific questions sent in relation to such for the consideration of your committee. I am delighted that there will be a further discussion on May 9.

I was very pleased to read that a 'short discussion paper' on the issue of exotic pets was presented to the AHWF group, and that, as a result, the group is to be addressed by experts. Although I do not have any further details of the expertise concerned, I trust that the welfare needs of exotic, wild animals kept as domestic pets will be paramount to their concerns and interests. It is also of great encouragement that RSPCA Cymru's important campaign to ban the keeping of all primates as pets is receiving the attention of the Wales Executive.

At this time, I am grateful for this opportunity to direct your committee's attention to the following.

Ms Griffiths states that a paper on the exotic pet trade has been presented to the Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework (AHWF) group. Please see below the Government Implementation Plan 2016-17 concerning the Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework (AHWF) which gives a commitment to review the Welsh Government's Codes of Practice as published under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. This includes considering whether additional Codes of Practice are required for other species. I have attached a copy of the link for ease of reference: <http://gov.wales/docs/drah/publications/160804-animal-health-welfare-framework-2016-implementation-plan-en.pdf>

It is my understanding that the Framework Group is due to meet with a reptile specialist in a forthcoming meeting. In addition, the Chief Veterinary Officer for Wales (CVO) has historically added this topic to the agenda of a UK CVO meeting to commence a UK-wide discussion.

Whilst the AHWF briefing makes it clear that the Welsh Government can begin the process to revise the Animal Welfare Codes of Practice, no specific timescales are given. Also, there does not appear to have been any progress to tighten the rules, despite the Welsh Government having had devolved powers over budgets for the

Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) since 2011. APHA are an executive arm of the Department for Environment and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) who are very specific in their Code of Practice on implementing the Animal Welfare Act 2006 – you will find the link

here: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/218679/primate-cop.pdf

It should be possible to tighten the licensing process to ensure exotic pets are not housed with other animals and are kept in conditions appropriate to their natural habitat, i.e. diet, temperature, bedding etc. Also, banning the import of exotic pets, thereby allowing these animals only to be traded within their existing country, would have the long-term impact of significantly reducing the industry in the UK, as well as sending out the clear message that such a trade, wherever perpetrated, is detrimental to the animals concerned and their environment. By tightening the guidelines we could, potentially, significantly reduce the number of exotic pets in Britain and thereby combat the industry domestically and abroad.

I would therefore ask that the following questions, as yet unaddressed in the latest correspondence from Ms Lesley Griffiths, AC/AM, Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, be foremost in the committee members' minds when considering the fate of my petition:

Will the Minister be undertaking a review of animal welfare, including the welfare of exotic pets?

What discussions have taken place between the Chief Veterinary Officer on behalf of the Minister and her counterparts in Scotland and England regarding the welfare of exotic pets?

What discussions have taken place between the Welsh and Scottish Governments on the Scottish Government's review of the trade in exotic pets? What would plans for a similar review in Wales be dependent on?

What proposals does the Minister have to regulate the sale of exotic animals?

What were the outcomes of the meeting between the Minister's officials and RSPCA Cymru on the matter of the keeping of primates as pets?

It may be of interest to you that 21 of 22 local authorities in Wales replied to my request for information regarding the number of licenses issued to businesses selling exotic pets (not including on the web). I can therefore report that there are

134 such licensed premises in Wales. Although I do not have the figures for the numbers of animals involved – that is, reptiles, birds, mammals and fish – it is clear that many thousands are being kept and traded. This situation – the capture, breeding, transportation, sale and care of wild animals, unsuited to lives as domestic pets in a northern climate – continues to need urgent redress.

As mentioned by Ms Griffiths in her letter to you, she is aware of the current review of the trade in exotic pets instigated by the Scottish Government. This was in response to the successful campaign launched by the charity One Kind and supported by the RSPCA, PDSA, Captured Animals Protection Society, Four Paws, Wild Futures, and Born Free Foundation amongst others. I am sure that a similar campaign here in Wales would attract an identical level of support. As I write, The Assembly is in receipt of a briefing document from RSPCA Cymru highlighting the unsuitability of keeping primates as pets, and calling for a ban on the practice. A meeting with RSPCA Cymru to discuss its concerns has since taken place.

At the very least, I am asking that the petition to end the exotic pet trade in Wales be considered for further actioning on the grounds that a wider debate of the welfare issues occasioned by it are long overdue. I would urge that there be no complacency on the part of the committee, or concerned members thereof, as many thousands of captured wild, and domestically bred, animals are enduring unnatural and cruel lives in shops and domestic homes throughout the country, today and everyday.

I further ask the committee that short of asking The Assembly to debate a total end to the trade in exotic pets that it, at least, consider the introduction of a Positive List System. This would permit the keeping of an exotic pet only if its suitability to life in private ownership were incontrovertibly assessed by such a system using clear, transparent and evidence based criteria collated on species conservation, the dangers of invasive disease, ease of good husbandry – including proof of appropriate knowledge of needs and care – and the clear availability of care guidelines, and enforcement measures.

For your convenience I include the notification from the Scottish Government about the review instigated by The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, Richard Lochhead:

<http://news.scotland.gov.uk/News/Review-of-exotic-pet-trade-15ea.aspx>

Thank you for your kind attention.

Sincerely, and faithfully yours,

David Sedley