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Animal Concern Advice Line (ACAL) is a recognised Scottish charity: No. SC030982.

Animal Concern Advice Line was established in 2001 to take on the charitable work of Animal Concern which was founded as the Scottish Anti-Vivisection Society in 1876.

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To Supporters of ACAL, Animal Concern & Save Our Seals Fund,

Dear Supporter,

One or two things to tell you this morning.

First a bit of bad news.

On Tuesday I attended the Licensing Committee Meeting of Highland Council in Inverness.

Earlier this year, after a two year campaign by Animal Concern Advice Line in support of some excellent local campaigners, the Council revoked the Zoo Licence for the Black Isle Wildlife Park. Conditions at the Park were nothing short of appalling with animals suffering and dying. However the owners decided to re-open the Park as a petting zoo without any exotic animals and applied for a Public Entertainments Licence to allow them to charge entrance fees for this new "attraction".

Amongst the information supplied to me by Highland Council after my initial complaint about the Park was an admission that the owners of the Park, to whom the Council had granted a Zoo License, had to be given advice by the Council vet on what to feed their donkeys and goats. Yes, someone who didn't know how to feed a donkey was given a Zoo Licence. I reckon the owners of the Park should not be in charge of any animals so ACAL objected to the granting of an Entertainments Licence unless the owners came up with a project which involved no animals at all.

The Park owners did not attend the meeting but a woman who has been helping them on a volunteer basis since February this year represented them. This woman appeared to be genuinely concerned about the welfare of the animals and had been working with the Animal Welfare Officer at the Council to bring conditions at the Park up to an acceptable standard. As a result the Council Environmental Health Department had withdrawn their objection to the granting of the Licence.

Despite my pointing out that this well-meaning volunteer has no legal connection with the Park and could be thrown off the property at the whim of the owner, the Council granted the Public Entertainments License.

In my initial complaint to the Council I asked them to ascertain whether or not the terrible

conditions at the Park might be due to the health of the owner and/or financial difficulties. These are often at the root of the type of problems found at this Park. After the meeting on Tuesday I had a chat with the volunteer from the Park and told her that Animal Concern Advice Line gives advice to anyone who asks for it and that she was welcome to contact me at any time. In our conversation it emerged that the new holder of the Public Entertainments Licence at the Black Isle Animal Park has Alzheimer's disease.

If you live in the area perhaps you could visit the Park every now and then? If you see anything that you don't think is right, quietly take notes (and pictures) and send them to me.

You can view Tuesday's meeting on the Highland Council website:
http://highland.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/214586

Last year and again a few weeks ago I brought to your attention the scandal of the pay and pension package the Scottish SPCA was giving their Chief Executive. Stuart Earley was on over £200,000 a year. Much more than the Scottish First Minister, the UK Prime Minister and the CEO of the far larger RSPCA. Mr. Earley has a background of running zoos and an interest in horse racing. I was dismayed to discover that, in his position as SSPCA CEO, he had made a statement supporting the use of the whip by jockeys.

Mr. Earley's pay packet went from being embarrassing to an outright liability as supporters stopped donating and threatened to cut the SSPCA out of their wills. The majority of the hard working SSPCA staff received a far lower percentage increase on their much more modest salaries than Mr. Earley was given on his monstrous remuneration. It would be fair to say there was a degree of disquiet in the rank and file workforce at the SSPCA.

On Tuesday Stuart Earley resigned his post with immediate effect. If you are still an SSPCA Member perhaps you could ask the Trustees what, if anything, was Mr. Earley given by way of an end of employment package?

The SSPCA made much of the improvements introduced during Mr. Earley's reign as CEO. Most noticeable was the introduction of a non-destruction policy for healthy dogs and cats. This is something I asked them to do after I highlighted the fact that healthy dogs were regularly put down at their Milton Animal Welfare Centre to make room to hold stray dogs on behalf of local Councils who paid the SSPCA a fee for providing that service. The SSPCA also reduced the number of casualty wild animals they killed when they opened their new wildlife hospital at Fishcross. Again something we have been asking for over many years though it would have made a lot more sense to have smaller wildlife units around the country.

Before they bring in a new CEO I will give the SSPCA some more free advice. Find out who decided to pay Stuart Earley funny money and get rid of them.

Cap staff wages at circa £75K and give everyone on lower wages an immediate 2% increase to restore their faith in the organisation.

I also strongly reiterate my recommendation that the Scottish SPCA stop doing the job of the police and local and central government agencies unless those authorities pay for the services of the SSPCA. A lot of health care in Scotland is provided by charities but those charities are paid for those services. Apart from the fees they charge for holding stray dogs the SSPCA receives nothing for investigating and prosecuting wildlife crime (the responsibility of Police Scotland) or dealing with domestic animal cruelty and neglect cases (criminal offences and the responsibility of Police Scotland and local authority animal health and welfare officers). On two occasions this year I have reported animal neglect cases to local authorities only to be told to report them to the SSPCA as both councils had “arrangements” by which the SSPCA did that work for them free of charge.

Charity donations should be used to provide for those animals for whom no other agency has a duty of care (wildlife casualties, neutering feral cats, pets whose owners can no longer afford to care for them etc.). Charity donations should not be used to do jobs for which others have legal responsibility. The SSPCA, like Animal Concern Advice Line, might have to put pressure on authorities to do their jobs properly but it is not our place to do that work for them using donations from taxpayers who have already paid for those services.

More on Mr. Earley’s early departure from the Scottish SPCA:

http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/homenews/14836916.Animal_charity_boss_steps_down_after_pay_controversy/

And finally: A few years ago I bumped into a senior civil servant at the Scottish Government and as a result the law of the land was changed. The chap in question thought it was illegal to give goldfish as prizes in Scotland. I asked him where he stayed and informed him that we had persuaded his local authority not to lease land to fairs giving fish as prizes but if the fair was on private land they could give away goldfish or puppies or horses or elephants or whatever else they wanted.

Several months later the Animal Health & Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 was launched by then Government Minister Ross Finnie. Minister Finnie headlined with the news that this new law would ban the giving of goldfish and other live animals as prizes. The civil servant I had spoken to in Edinburgh was in charge of drafting that legislation.

Ten years later England and Wales have yet to follow the Scottish lead and bring in a ban on giving goldfish and other live animals as prizes.

There is a new petition calling on Westminster to catch up with Holyrood on the animals as prizes front. Following the fiasco of the Parliamentary debate which took place this week after 123, people signed the petition calling for a ban on driven grouse shooting (more on that here:

<https://raptorpersecutionscotland.wordpress.com/2016/11/02/dishonourable-members/>) it might be better if I nip down to London and try and bump into the civil servant with responsibility for goldfish in plastic bags. Until I get a chance to do that I’d appreciate it if you would sign the petition to ban goldfish and other live animals being given as prizes in England and Wales. You’ll find it:

<http://www.thepetitionsite.com/en-gb/takeaction/398/540/461/?z00m=28546713&redirectID=2225971491>

Cheers 4 now,

John

PS Take care of your pets over this noisy weekend and if you see anyone misusing fireworks remember that it is a criminal offence and you have a duty to report it to the police on 999. When you report things to the police always ask for an "Incident Number". Note that down and use it to call the police later on 101 and ask them what the outcome of the case was.