19 February 2025

The Rt Hon Steve Reed MP
Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

And By Email: defra.helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk and steve.reed.mp@parliament.uk
cc: Baroness Hayman of Ullock, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
ps.baroness.hayman@defra.gov.uk

Dear Secretary of State

Re: Request for Government action on Animals (Low-Welfare Activities Abroad) Act

This is an open letter written on behalf of members and supporters of the 'Low-Welfare Act Coalition', a collaboration of animal charities supportive of the laudable aims of the Animals (Low-Welfare Activities Abroad) Act 2023 ("**the 2023 Act**"). As you will be aware, the 2023 Act seeks to ban the advertising and sale of activities involving animals overseas that would be illegal if those activities were happening in the UK.

We hope to be able to maintain confidence in this government's commitment to bringing this important Act into effect in order to encourage higher animal welfare standards abroad. We note this government's previous strong support for the Act when in opposition, and we emphasise the potentially tragic consequences of not implementing the Act.

We **strongly urge you to take swift and positive action to give effect to the Act, and by doing so demonstrate** that this government is aligned with the public on matters of animal welfare.

The 2023 Act is overwhelmingly popular with the public, and was strongly supported by this government when in Opposition

As you know, the UK is a nation of animal lovers. During the Act's third reading, Opposition Front Bencher Alex Sobel MP noted in Labour's response to the then-Bill (emphasis added):

> "The fact that more than 1 million people signed a petition to urge the Government to protect the Asian elephant from the unimaginable cruelty it faces at the hands of the tourist trade shows that there is most definitely an appetite for this Bill. I know that other Members will, like me, have been inundated by correspondence from constituents on this and other similar animal conservation issues, so we know the public are with us."

That remains the case, as confirmed by our independent polling which consistently demonstrates overwhelming public support, most recently that 79% of all voters support the 2023 Act, and 55% of all voters consider it to be a high or very high priority for government action (polling in October 2024).

The 2023 Act was also strongly supported by this government when it was in Opposition. As Mr Sobel MP explained:

> "Riding elephants, running with wild animals and swimming with dolphins all are part of the human spirit that seeks new thrills, but the wildlife tourism industry is responsible for the exploitation of hundreds of thousands of animals each year: dolphins are forced to live in cramped conditions; big cats are drugged and have their claws pulled off; and elephants are violently mistreated, as we have heard. This problem is an international one, but our citizens and companies are centrally involved with advertising, promoting and selling experiences, usually to unknowing consumers; UK travel companies are complicit in this cruelty, and there are so many examples of cruelty arising from this practice."

Such was the consensus of support for the 2023 Act in Parliament that it passed its third reading without a vote, and every reading in both Houses without division or amendment.

We also remind you of your specific election promise to introduce the "biggest boost for animal welfare in a generation", which you contrasted with the previous government's approach to animal

welfare. No doubt many members of the public will have valued this promise, and voted for this government accordingly.

Lack of action on implementation

It is now approaching 18 months since the 2023 Act became law. Whilst we appreciate the government's busy agenda, we have received no indication that its implementation is a priority for this government. Implementation is a tangible way for government to enact its promise. We urge you to seize this opportunity and prioritise implementation.

We are particularly concerned by indications from your department that, far from implementing the 2023 Act, priority may be given to "non legislative routes to influence behaviour change."

The compulsion of legislation was and remains required in this area precisely because non-legislative measures, such as unmonitored and unregulated voluntary codes put forward by the travel industry, have consistently proved ineffectual in reducing the suffering of animals as part of holiday packages advertised in the UK.

It would be regrettable were government to be influenced by lobbying from within the travel industry, when it should be focussed on helping to improve basic animal welfare standards abroad in accordance with the public's clear wishes.

The implications of not implementing the 2023 Act

The ongoing effect on animals of low-welfare activities was succinctly described by Mr Sobel MP on behalf of Labour as the 2023 Act passed through Parliament, as quoted above. Animals continue to suffer as a part of numerous 'experiences' that are still being advertised in the UK today. We are sure you would agree that this situation is unacceptable.

In addition, there is also a very real human cost to animal suffering. Since the Act received Royal Assent, news continues to emerge of repeated tragedies involving tourists at facilities at which wild animals are exploited, most recently the death of a tourist at an elephant camp in Thailand, a camp which is still being advertised as a holiday destination in the UK.

Save The Asian Elephants' records show that over 1,000 people have suffered catastrophic injuries, and another 800 fatalities, from abused captive elephants in tourism. Elephants are of course not the only wild animals that are routinely mistreated for the purposes of so-called 'animal experiences.'

Conclusion: the need for an urgent course correction

As you will be aware, the 2023 Act is designed to prevent the advertising for sale in England and Northern Ireland of low-welfare activities that would be illegal in the UK. It identifies as an offence the keeping of an animal in conditions or subjecting an animal to treatment (whether before, during or after the activity) that would constitute an offence if carried out here.

In order for the 2023 Act to have effect, the Secretary of State must make "Activity Regulations" setting out the proscribed activities.

The Activity Regulations should now be made as a matter of urgency, covering the full range of activities that would constitute offences in the UK, in order to fully reflect the spirit of the 2023 Act. We have already provided details of those activities we recommend for inclusion in the regulations.

As we have already noted, in the run-up to the General Election you promised that your government would introduce the "biggest boost for animal welfare in a generation." We were heartened by that commitment. Now is the time to deliver meaningful and popular change, before another tragedy occurs.

We urge you to commit to making the required Activity Regulations without delay, and we stand ready to assist.

Yours sincerely

Save The Asian Elephants
Born Free Foundation
World Animal Protection UK
Action Against Fox Hunting
Action for Elephants UK
Karl Ammann – conservationist, wildlife photographer, author and film producer, TIME Magazine Hero of the Environment
Anglican Society for the Welfare of Animals
Animal Ahimsa
Animal Aid
Animal Defenders International
Animal Defense Partnership
Animal Friends Jogja (AFJ) (Indonesia)
Animal Interfaith Alliance
Animal Kingdom Foundation Inc (Philippines)
Animal Protection Agency
Animals Asia
Rt Rev John Arnold, Roman Catholic Bishop of Salford
Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville
Lord Black of Brentwood FRSA
Blue Cross of India
Boon Lott's Elephant Sanctuary (Thailand)
Born Free Foundation
Rory Cantwell – animal advocate, campaigner and film maker
Sarah Carr – Co-ordinator, World Animal Day & CEO, Naturewatch Foundation
Catholic Action for Animals
Lek Saengduean Chailert – Woman Hero of Global Conservation, holder of Legion d'Honneur of France
Barbara Chaitoff – one millionth signatory to Save The Asian Elephants' petition to government to implement the Animals (Low-Welfare Activities Abroad) Act
Rev Samantha Chandler – Anglican Vicar
Cheetah Conservation Fund UK
Christian Vegetarians and Vegans UK
Professor David Clough – Professor in Theology and Applied Sciences, University of Aberdeen
Compassion in World Farming
Compassion Unlimited Plus Action (CUPA)
Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation
Corbett Foundation (India)
Helen Costigan – sister of Andrea Taylor (victim of fatal attack by brutalised tourism elephant)
David Cowdrey FRGS – conservationist
Giles Crown – lawyer and ambassador for Save The Asian Elephants
Crustacean Compassion

Dogs on the Streets (DOTS)
Professor Cathy Dwyer - Director of Jeanne Marchig International Centre for Animal Welfare Education at Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, Edinburgh
Peter Egan – actor and animal welfare campaigner
Egypt Equine Aid
The Elephant Soul
Environmental and Animal Rights Consultants (Pakistan)
Ethix Digital
Sir Ranulph Fiennes OBE, Bt. – polar explorer and conservationist
FOAL Group
Dr Bruce Fogle MBE DVM MRCVS – Veterinarian, author, animal welfare campaigner
Gillian Forrester PhD, SFHEA – Professor of Comparative Cognition, School of Psychology, University of Sussex
Baroness Foster of Oxton DBE
Freedom For Animals
The Gandhi Foundation
Dr Marion Garnett – CEO of Thinking of Animals CIC, organiser of Ealing Animals Fair
Gentle Giants
Ricky Gervais – comedian, actor, writer, director
The Lord (Zac) Goldsmith of Richmond Park
Revd Professor Martin Henig – ethicist, academic and Anglican clergyman
Richie Hobday – actor, film producer, animal welfare campaigner
Baroness Hodgson of Abinger
Humane Society International UK
Indian Vegetarian Society
Institute of Promotional Marketing
International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW)
Stanley Johnson – conservationist and author
Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb
Baroness Jones of Whitchurch
Dr S Chinny Krishna - Former Vice Chairman - Animal Welfare Board of India, Ministry of Env & Forests; Cofounder - Blue Cross of India; Settlor Trustee - Federation of Indian Animal Protection organisations
Satish Kumar – Indian British former Jain monk, peace pilgrim, founder of Resurgence Trust
Professor Phyllis Lee – Emeritus Professor of Psychology, Faculty of Natural Sciences, University of Stirling
Rula Lenska – actress and campaigner
The Lord Lexden OBE
Dame Joanna Lumley DBE FRGS – actress, TV presenter and producer, activist
Evanna Lynch – film, TV and stage actress (Luna Lovegood in Harry Potter series), animal welfare and vegan activist
Alexander Macmillan, 2nd Earl of Stockton
Clara Mancini – Professor of Animal-Computer Interaction, The Open University
Marine Connection
Fr Terry Martin – Priest, author, animal welfare campaigner
Wendy Morgan – actress and campaigner
Naturewatch Foundation
Dr Christina Nellist PhD – theologian, former Visiting Research Fellow at Winchester University
The Lord Oates
OneKind
Pan-Orthodox Concern for Animals

Partido Animalista (PACMA)
People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA)
Philippine Animal Welfare Society
Protect All Wildlife
Quaker Concern for Animals
Rabbit Welfare Association and Fund
Radio Maria England
Ian Redmond OBE – wildlife biologist, Head of Conservation - Ecoflix and Ambassador for UN's Convention on Migratory Species
Carol Royle – actress and animal activist
Dr Richard D Ryder – conservationist, author, animal rights advocate, past Chairman of RSPCA
Samayu (India)
SARX – Christian animal advocacy charity
Save Elephant Foundation and Elephant Nature Park (Thailand)
Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
Jenny Seagrove – actress and owner of the Mane Chance Sanctuary
Shellfish Network
Sintesia Animalia (Indonesia)
St Pierre School (in the Parliamentary constituency of the late Sir David Amess MP, major participants in the Children's Parliament of Westminster)
Peter Stevenson OBE – lawyer and animal welfare campaigner
Linda, Countess of Stockton
Ingrid Tarrant – journalist
Dr Madhulal Valliyatte – Asian elephant specialist, conservationist and veterinary consultant
Vervet Monkey Foundation (South Africa)
Rick Wakeman CBE – musician, composer, activist
Dr Clifford Warwick PGDip(MedSci) PhD CBiol CSci EurProBiol FRSB – biologist and medical scientist
Whale and Dolphin Conservation
Ann Widdecombe DSG – politician, author, TV personality
Wild Futures
Jay and Katja Wilde – UK's leading organic vegan farmers, stars of "73 Cows"
Wildlife Alliance (Cambodia)
World Animal Justice

Correspondence to: Duncan McNair, CEO – Save The Asian Elephants and Joint Co-ordinator of the Low-Welfare Act Coalition DuncanMcNair@stae.org