

# P-05-969 Emergency funding for zoos and aquariums

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 07 July 2020  
Petitions Committee | 07 Gorffennaf 2020

Reference: RS20/12937-1

**Petition Number:** P-05-969

**Petition title:** Ask the Senedd to reconsider their decision not to support Zoos & Aquariums with emergency funding.

**Text of petition:** As a result of lost income due to emergency closures due to Covid-19 zoos and aquariums including the Welsh Mountain Zoo in Colwyn Bay are facing a funding crisis. The Senedd has decided not to provide emergency funding to support them. This threatens the conservation work, educational opportunities and tourism income into the area. We ask the Senedd to reconsider their decision and provide this vital support.

## 1. Background

There are 30 registered and licensed zoos in Wales.

Zoos have not been required to close in Wales under the *Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (Wales) Regulations 2020*, as amended. However they have closed because, as the Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales, Ken Skates, explained 'they would simply not be able to generate the footfall, and



therefore be able to generate the income, to make it financially viable to open right now’.

There is **not** a dedicated Welsh Government fund to support zoos and aquariums during the coronavirus pandemic. However, the Welsh Government has said that zoos and aquariums are eligible for other schemes such as the Economic Resilience Fund (detailed in ‘Welsh Government action below’).

The petitioner uses the Welsh Mountain Zoo in Colwyn Bay as an example of a zoo which is in financial difficulty following lockdown as its income is reliant on visitors. The zoo closed to visitors on 22 March, though zoo staff are continuing to care for the animals.

The Welsh Mountain Zoo has set up a donations page. At the time of writing it has raised £233,921. The page states:

...with 140 species to care for and reduced running costs still in excess of £118,000 per month, the National Zoological Society of Wales (our Charity), really does need your support.

The BBC reported that Borth zoo has warned that as a result of closure, it may be required to rehome or euthanise its animals. The article states that ‘many staff have been furloughed and, while the zoo did receive a business relief grant of £25,000, that money has now nearly run out.’ It goes on to say ‘it costs £3,000 a week to run the zoo and she [the zoo owner] is disappointed that while the Westminster government has announced a fund to help zoos in England, there is no similar support in Wales.’

On 4 May, the UK Government launched a £14 million financial support fund for zoos and aquariums in England. This funding aims to help zoos cover costs relating to animal keeping such as feed, heating and security. Establishments covered by the Zoo Licensing Act 1981 are able to bid for a portion of the funding. Individual grant awards are capped at £100,000. The press release also stated:

There are a number of support schemes already available to zoos, including business rates relief, the business interruption loan scheme and the job retention scheme. This is additional to other available relief such as VAT deferral.

The Welsh Government did not receive any Barnett consequential from this announcement.

The Scottish Government **announced** support for zoos on 16 June:

This reopening date [29 June] has been announced alongside an emergency funding support package worth £2.6 million. The funding will be split into £1.6 million for grants and £1 million for loans and will be made available to zoos and aquariums across the country for preserving animal welfare.

## 2. Welsh Government action

The issue of funding for Welsh zoos during the pandemic was **raised in Plenary by Darren Millar MS, on 13 May**. The Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths, said:

At the current time, we haven't committed to a zoo scheme because zoos were able to apply for funding from the economic resilience scheme, which, as you appreciate, is unique to Wales. So, that funding was there right from the beginning, really, for zoos. But what we did do back probably about three or four weeks ago now—I think it was around 24 April—officials wrote to all the zoos in Wales with details of the existing schemes from which they would be eligible for funding. But we also issued a questionnaire alongside that correspondence so that we could identify what key animal welfare concerns were out there with the zoos. As you say, there are some very large zoos; I'm very well aware of the Welsh Mountain Zoo in your constituency, and some are very small, so I think it was really important to get a feeling from all of them about what the issues were.

I also wanted to see if there were any funding gaps that were out there that we needed to look at. At the current time, about 17 [...] responses had been received. That included from two animal exhibits, so they're not licensed zoos, so it was about 15. Most have indicated that they've been able to access the funding that was already available, and either they've received or they've applied for the funding from various Government schemes. We then wrote again to them all giving them a further update, I think probably at the beginning of this week. So, we will obviously keep a close eye on it but, at the moment, I'm not bringing forward a specific scheme because I don't think there is the need for that at the moment. But obviously, animal health and welfare are very important, so we'll keep it under review.

The Welsh Government's £500 million Economic Resilience Fund, which is now in its second phase, [is re-opening for applications at the end of June](#). The Welsh Government states:

The fund offers further financial support in dealing with coronavirus crisis and will be vital in helping organisations manage cash flow pressures. It has been designed to address gaps not currently met by schemes already announced by the UK government, Welsh Government and Development Bank of Wales. This is a unique additional funding stream for Wales.

[On 10 June](#) in response to a question from Janet Finch-Saunders MS, [Ken Skates told Plenary](#) that the Welsh Government has made eight offers of support to zoos in Wales via the Economic Resilience Fund.

Other economic support schemes which zoos and aquariums may be eligible for, such as business rate relief, are detailed in a [Senedd Research blog post](#).

On 10 June Ken Skates detailed the support provided to the Welsh Mountain Zoo:

Now the Welsh Mountain Zoo is one of those to have benefited from the economic resilience fund. It's also benefited from the Development Bank of Wales's COVID-related loan scheme—two schemes that are exclusive to Wales, and that support amounts to £335,000.

He went on to say:

Contrast that—had we got a Barnettised consequential of the UK Government's zoos fund, it would have amounted to just £700,000, which would have been nearly double what has been spent on just one single zoo in Wales. That demonstrates why we can say confidently that zoos in Wales have been better protected through this pandemic than elsewhere.

### 3. Welsh Parliament action

Other Senedd Committees have not addressed this issue. The questions raised in Plenary by Members are detailed above.

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