

P-05-970 Ask the Senedd to reconsider their decision not to support Zoos & Aquariums with emergency funding, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 01.07.20

Good afternoon,

Thank you for the update, I look forward to watching the debate.

I would like to submit the following comments. We set up the petition there was still no idea on how long the lockdown would last nor the mechanism for relaxing the lockdown regulations and as such additional information has come to light. I am using the Welsh Mountain Zoo in Colwyn Bay as a case study as they are my geographical closest Zoo or Aquarium affected.

The lockdown struck at exactly the wrong time for the Welsh Mountain Zoo, they estimate a loss in revenue of £712,000 between the beginning of lockdown and the middle of July. This is not factoring in the good weather during this period that would likely have seen a higher number of visitors and therefore income. Whilst the Zoo is open all year round, the business is definitely seasonal and the income during the summer months covers the leaner winter months.

The Zoo have furloughed staff, but it is impossible to provide safe care for animals, some of which are dangerous, without maintaining a skeleton workforce of keepers. Heating and lighting has still been required. Fences, buildings and exhibits have required maintenance and of course animals have needed to be fed. This has left the Zoo with running costs of £120,000 per month. The huge loss of earnings, as well as the remaining high running costs show why the zoo is in such dire financial straights.

The Zoo has received £85,000 from the Economic Resilience Fund which is clearly dwarfed in scale by a single months running costs. A loan of £250,000 has been secured from the Development Bank of Wales; which is simply moving the problem down the road as loans need repaying. Of course the Zoos is grateful for this support however it doesn't solve their problem.

We know that zoos are scheduled for limited reopening. It is reasonable to expect there will need to be safe visitor management that allows for social distancing in the Zoo and this will limit the number of visitors the Zoo can admit and the money they can raise through admissions. The fiscal hardship will continue long after the Zoo can re-open.

Whilst this focusses on the plight of just one zoo the conclusion is stark. Without support this vital part of the tourist industry, a local employer, contributor to education, and conservation body faces the realistic prospect of closure. This would rip the heart out of the community in Colwyn Bay and effect businesses all along the North Wales coast. If you were to contact other zoos, wildlife collections and aquaria you would hear the same sad story. You cannot furlough fish and you cannot work from home as a keeper.

The Westminster government has recognised the importance of zoos, launching a £14 million Zoo Support Fund. I urge the Senedd to find the resources to cushion the impact of Covid-19 for Zoos and Aquaria with a similar support fund. Otherwise the damage done will hinder the recovery for so many sectors in Wales and mean hardship for many for years to come.

Diolch
David Wilkins