**Support for England’s zoo licence holders during the coronavirus Pandemic.**

The coronavirus pandemic has had a huge impact across zoos and aquariums. These organisations are committed to a sustainable future for all species and provide top quality care for some of the most unique and endangered species on the planet. However, the lockdown earlier this year and ongoing restrictions has had a significant impact on all aspects of zoo operations and their very survival.

* Countless international and domestic conservation efforts have been cancelled or delayed - the ongoing survival of species are at stake.
* Specialist conservation, education and animal care professionals have been lost owing to widespread redundancies
* This year has already seen the loss of four zoo licence holders in England.

**Zoo Animals Fund (ZAF)**

Government has recognised the unique character of zoos and aquariums has necessitated intervention in this crisis. This first came in the form of the £14m Zoo Support Fund. However, despite recognition from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury that “[zoos] are vital for education, protecting endangered species and conservation work”, the limited funding was only made available to cover animal welfare in extreme circumstances. The Zoo Support Fund was designed with a six week reserves policy meaning that the vast majority of zoos were excluded.

The funding from the Zoo Support Fund was “expanded and rolled over” into the £100m Zoo Animals Fund (ZAF). ZAF follows the model of the Zoo Support Fund but with an expansion of the animal care costs on which grants could be spent, an expansion of the six week reserves eligibility criterion to twelve weeks reserves and the new ability to apply and be informed of achieving eligibility for the Fund in advance of meeting that twelve weeks reserves. **This continues to be deeply inappropriate for a sector with moral and legal obligations towards animal care, conservation and education.**

The twelve week criterion is deeply inappropriate for the following reasons:

i) **The 12-week requirement does not allow adequate planning time for organisations responsible for living animals.** Planning and implementing contingencies and closures, including rehoming animals, takes much longer than this timeframe. One of our members, Living Coasts, permanently closed its doors in June, but it has taken them five months to rehome their relatively small animal collection. The ability to apply in advance of reaching 12 weeks of reserves is welcomed, but alone is not sufficient to give the majority of zoos the ability to utilise this scheme. Because of the complexity of animal care, combined with the limited scope of funding available to individual zoos due to state aid limit, they would take exhaustive actions, including drastic cuts, redundancies and permanent closure of sites, before reaching this point. Needless to say, these survival measures are taking a huge impact on zoos and aquariums and are undermining the long-term security of the sector.

ii) **The 12-week requirement, combined with the ZAF’s state aid limit, has unintended consequences for the zoo and aquarium landscape in the UK**. It inadvertently distorts the sector to the disadvantage of those medium-sized and large zoos with extensive conservation, education and other operations of significant benefit to society, who continue to suffer financially without support from the Zoo Animals Fund. Ultimately, this will have a negative impact on UK and international conservation and on the character of the zoo sector.

iii) **It does not take into account the financial governance and frameworks of most zoos.** This includes the issue of ‘going concern’ and trustees’ charitable requirements. This is a significant barrier for a number of zoos from accessing the fund.

Time is running out, as applications to the Zoo Animals Fund have to be received by November 16th. BIAZA and other zoo industry leaders have raised these concerns from the design stage of the fund and there is increasing frustration that our concerns are not being addressed.

**As it stands, BIAZA understands that less than 3% of the total funding has currently been spent, despite the dire challenges facing the sector.** Larger charitable zoos are particularly ill-served by the existing fund. This is clear evidence the Zoo Animals Fund does not serve the sector and must be changed.

BIAZA is now calling for:

* **Urgent reform to the eligibility criterion to remove the 12-week reserves condition and replace it with a criterion based on % revenue loss.**
* **Funding within this envelope should be ring-fenced into 2021. This should be for a new scheme with an expanded scope that reflects the broader requirements of the zoo licensing system.**
* **Clarity around efforts to support major zoos which have been excluded from support.**

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| **Zoo Support Fund** | **Zoo Animals Fund** | **What zoos need** |
| Licence holders with six weeks reserves left could apply | Licence holders with six weeks reserves left could apply | Criteria based on %revenue loss and operating costs at each zoo. |
| Licence holders could apply when reaching six weeks reserves. | Licence holders can apply in advance. Requiring licence holders to forecast amid ongoing uncertainty. | Licence holders should be able to apply in advance, with a lengthy application time to support licence holders as they attempt to forecast amid ongoing uncertainty. |
| Grants awarded up to £100,000 | Grants up to £730,000 | Grants based on operating costs at zoos. |
| Grants could only be spent on animal welfare costs – which was defined in a very limited way. | Grants can only be spent on animal welfare costs – the definition of which was expanded. | Grants should be spent to reflect the full legal obligations of zoo licence holders, including conservation, education and research as well as animal welfare costs. |

**What can you do?**

Parliamentarians, particularly the APPG for Zoos and Aquariums, have been highly effective at securing the unprecedented action of Government. Defra ministers have been made aware of these issues, however action is urgently needed.

BIAZA recognises the issue lies across Government departments. Given how quickly time is running out and the urgency of providing clarity to animal carers, we believe resolving the Zoo Animals Fund should be put to the Secretary of State, Chief Secretary to the Treasury and even the Prime Minister.

It is not in the Government’s or anyone’s interest to see a loss of zoos. This would be hugely unpopular with the public. It undermines the shared vision for a better environment. And it could mean the extinction of whole species who only survive in UK zoos.

**BIAZA suggests:**

* **Writing to the Secretary of State, Treasury and the Prime Minister.**
* **Personal lobbying of the relevant Ministers**
* **Supporting this EDM:** [**https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/57491/government-funding-for-zoos-and-aquariums**](https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/57491/government-funding-for-zoos-and-aquariums)
* **Raising this issue through Parliamentary questions (including written and oral questions). BIAZA would be happy to draft these.**

*BIAZA would be happy to talk over any queries or concerns you may have, or if you have any suggestions for how we might take our asks forward. Please contact Andy Hall at andy.hall@biaza.org.uk or 07394388645*