



GOVERNMENT OF GIBRALTAR
Ministry for Environment and Tourism
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PRESS RELEASE

No. 286/2008

Date: 25th November 2008

“GIBRALTAR BARBARY MACAQUES : Government corrects IPPL statements, repeats its publicly stated policy (which is thus not a secret), condemns GSLP for jumping on even false bandwagons that damage Gibraltar internationally, and says that it will continue to cull apes, in accordance with expert advice, as and when necessary to protect human health, safety and quality of life”.

The Government regrets that the GSLP Opposition should blind itself to the consequences and seek to make party political capital at Gibraltar's expense by continuing to give bad publicity to Gibraltar over Gibraltar's Ape Management Plan on the basis of incorrect statements by outsiders. The detrimental effects of such publicity can clearly be seen in media reports such as a recent article calling on Spaniards to boycott visits to Gibraltar.

The Government policy on managing the size of the Barbary Macaques population has been publicly stated on more than one occasion and is based on the advice it receives from GONHS who are contracted to the Government to manage the Rock Apes and the Gibraltar Veterinary Clinic who are contracted to provide veterinary expertise. This advice is clearly reflected in a Media Statement issued by GONHS recently which inter alia says:

- Removal of surplus animals, including culling of selected animals, is a necessary management tool as long as it is done humanely and after careful study and consideration.
- GONHS is not in favour of large culls, but the removal of entire splinter groups will be necessary on occasion.

This was also the policy of MOD until it handed over custody and welfare of the Macaques to the GSLP Government on 1st June 1992 and it continues to be Government policy today.

In March 1993, 6 months after the GSLP took over the management of the Rock Apes the then Minister for Tourism, Joe Pilcher, stated in the House of Assembly in answer to a Parliamentary Question that there were “about 80 animals at the moment” when speaking about the size of the Macaques population. Up to then the numbers in a pack had not been allowed to increase above 40 because the advice had always been that a pack will split if the numbers increase beyond 40 – 50. Regrettably, the GSLP chose to ignore this advice, allowed the numbers to increase unchecked and when they left Government in 1996 there was an estimated ape population of approximately 275 in six packs. This drastic uncontrolled increase in the Macaques population is fundamental to the problems being experienced nowadays.

Despite the allegations being made to the contrary, the Government's Macaques Population Management policy is based on the advice it receives from those contracted to carry out this policy i.e. GONHS and the Gibraltar Veterinary Clinic. In summary, this policy is:

- (a) an ongoing programme of contraception of female monkeys to control population growth.

- (b) relocation to the Upper Rock Nature Reserve of monkeys that take up permanent residence in or near built up areas of human population.
- (c) exportation, financed by the Government and on conditions acceptable to it, to a suitable destination and a willing recipient.
- (d) as a last resort, euthanising selected animals within the Management Programme.

The Government initially welcomed the offer of assistance for exportation made last April during the visit to Gibraltar of the IPPL's Helen Thirlway and waited for this to materialise. However, the IPPL's actions subsequent to that visit were disappointing and did not meet the Government's expectations of goodwill and co-operation.

Firstly, the IPPL's website published an international petition containing a Description/History which is one sided, completely ignores Gibraltar's position and policy as explained to Ms Thirlway, contains leading, emotive and inaccurate statements, and is clearly an embarrassment to Gibraltar.

Secondly, the IPPL sent GONHS, as the Government's Contractor for Macaque Management, a proposal for the exportation of 20 monkeys to the Netherlands. Unlike previous occasions when Gibraltar has exported Macaques and there have never been preconditions stipulated, the IPPL proposal is tantamount to a contract containing terms which Government cannot accept as preconditions to such exportation taking place. The contents of this proposal were communicated verbally by GONHS to Government. Because of GONHS explanation to Government of the contents, the proposal was not formally received or considered by Government and GONHS was told to ask IPPL to revise their proposal principally by the removal of pre-conditions. There has been no direct contact between the IPPL and Government on this proposal and no discussions or negotiations have taken place. It is therefore inaccurate for the IPPL to claim that "the proposal had been approved as a first draft".

The Government reiterates its willingness to work with any animal welfare group in respect of the exportation of Gibraltar Macaques and confirms that it is a Government priority to achieve such exportation. The Government also reiterates that it is not prepared to allow the IPPL or any other entity to set preconditions before co-operating in such an exportation when these preconditions are, in effect, an interference with the autonomy of the Government, and thus of Gibraltar.

The Government further reiterates that it has responsibilities and obligations in respect of the Human population of Gibraltar which are certainly not less important than those in respect of monkeys. In the relatively small size of Gibraltar, the proximity to humans of monkeys, which roam freely and are essentially wild animals, when the monkeys take up residence in or near built up areas presents challenges to human health, safety and peace of mind which the Government cannot ignore. When this happens, considerable inconvenience and health and safety hazards arise for human beings. Windows have to be kept permanently closed as monkeys regularly intrude into homes, cars, and even snatch shopping bags or open kitchen cupboards. As well as the natural fear caused, especially in younger children, the element of Public Health hazard cannot be ignored as these monkeys sometimes excrete faecal pathogens that can potentially be a risk to human health and their bites can cause physical injury. The Government will therefore continue to authorise selective culling in accordance with the long established policy.

In summary, the Government encourages the Opposition to stop fanning the flames of adverse international publicity as this is not in the best interests of Gibraltar particularly when it is based on false facts and is thus undeserved. The Government also encourages the IPPL to desist from inaccurate public statements and to propose realistic arrangements that are capable of being acceptable to a government for exportation of monkeys from the country, in order to reduce the size of the Gibraltar Macaque population and avoid further splitting of existing troops and the consequential vicious circle of monkey population management.