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Animal Concern Advice Line (ACAL) is a recognised Scottish charity: No. SC030982.
Animal Concern Advice Line was established in 2001 to take on the charitable work of Animal
Concern which was founded as the Scottish Anti-Vivisection Society in 1876.
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Ms Nicola Sturgeon MSP
The First Minister
Scottish Government
St. Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh EH1 3DG

Dear First Minister,

On the 22nd of May I asked you for information on the payment of £2M and the loan of a further £500,000 from the Scottish Government to Edinburgh Zoo (RZSS) for the building of a new enclosure for the Giant Pandas which the Zoo leases from the Chinese Government for US\$1M per year.

On 19th June I received a reply from Ms Rowena Roche of the Scottish Government Directorate of Health Finance. Ms Roche refused my FOI request on the grounds of cost. I requested a review of that decision and on 5th September I received a response from Ms Katherine Hart of the Scottish Government Healthcare Quality and Improvement Directorate who had decided “... **whilst some material should be released to you, a number of exemptions should be applied.**”

As a result of the above rulings the few pieces of information which have been released to me do little to inform me of why the Scottish Government decided to give Edinburgh Zoo £2M and lend them a further £0.5M of public money to fund a commercial project which the Zoo entered into in a bid to increase revenue.

In one email it was stated that Edinburgh Zoo had raised an objection to the housing development adjacent to the zoo near the panda enclosure on the grounds that development work “.... **would be too noisy and disruptive to the pandas and it would adversely impact on their breeding programme.**”

In another email I found a statement claiming you had made the laudable decision that “... ***the welfare of the pandas should be the priority***”.

This suggests to me that the information you were given, and on which you based your decision to grant Edinburgh Zoo a donation of £2M plus a further loan of £500,000, was less than accurate.

I don't believe Edinburgh Zoo were making the welfare of the Giant Pandas their priority. Their priority was their very expensive but potentially lucrative panda breeding programme. Edinburgh Zoo desperately needs a baby panda to increase visitor numbers and help pay the US\$10,000,000 lease agreement they have with China. In addition to the \$10,000,000 lease the Zoo have also incurred huge costs in providing feed and specialist veterinary care, including artificial insemination procedures, for the two Giant Pandas.

Ironically the artificial insemination procedures, which include general anaesthesia, are probably a far bigger risk to the welfare of the Giant Pandas than any noise from a nearby building site.

When the Giant Pandas were first leased to Edinburgh Zoo your office assured me that, apart from the welcoming ceremony at Edinburgh Airport, no public money would be involved. I am extremely disappointed that £2M of public money has now been spent on this commercial and political exploitation of animals.

Yours sincerely,

John F. Robins,
Secretary of Animal Concern Advice Line.