**Written evidence submitted by Pan Orthodox Concern for Animals**

I am Dr. Christina Nellist, editor of Pan Orthodox Concern for Animals and an Eastern Orthodox theologian specialising in animal suffering and soteriology.

There is a serious theological matter concerning your intentions re the Grey Squirrel which may infringe upon religious freedom. Christ teaches us to act and act immediately to prevent animal and human suffering. You will find this in Luke 14:5 in the original Greek texts and confirmed by early Church Fathers. Sadly this text is frequently mistranslated in Western bibles as ‘ox or ass’ rather than the original ‘son or ox’. If you continue to implement the recommendations, this committee will be guilty of preventing Christians from fulfilling their Christian duty to follow God’s directions in this matter. I am sure this would not be your intent and ask you to change your position on this matter.

Having taken advice from experts I also wish to make the following comments:

1. Rescue numbers are not significant in terms of the overall grey squirrel population. But they are very significant for humanity’s compassion footprint. For many people whose life circumstances do not allow them to have companion animals grey squirrels become a kind of free-living pet. The thought that these animals, or their young, can no longer be helped by wildlife rescuers is, to these people, completely horrifying. (Please note that a rescue centre that is not allowed to release animals has to stop taking in new ones and has to turn away or kill.)

2. The new measures against grey squirrel rescue are being adopted in the name of helping red squirrels. But red squirrels are not an endangered species. They are plentiful in the rest of the world, wherever the habitat is suitable for them. In Great Britain, however, they declined by the end of the 18th century, before grey squirrels were introduced. It happened because of habitat loss. (So even if we get rid of grey squirrels, it is not a fact that the reds will then thrive). Red squirrels were later reintroduced from Scandinavia - but a different sub-species from the now extinct British one, so they are not exactly native either. The colonies of red squirrels that exist in England today are artificially maintained, with extensive captive breeding, nest boxes and supplementary feeding - like large zoos. It is for the most part a harmless exercise, but only as long as it does not involve cruelty to another species of squirrel!

3. The main way to help the red squirrel, if that is the goal, is to restore the habitat. There are some areas of Scotland, for example, that are suitable for red squirrels, and there they easily out-compete the greys. In other areas the two species co-exist - but the habitat has to be right for the less adaptable red in order for this to happen.

3 - The pox virus is often mentioned in the same context. But the pox is responsible for only a small percentage of red squirrel deaths (nearly half of them die on the roads) and the process of disease transmission is such that they are far more likely to get it from fellow reds via shared feeders than from the greys. Red squirrels suffer from a variety of diseases with skin lesion symptoms, and these have nothing to do with grey squirrels, but may have a lot to do with the artificial maintenance of red squirrels in unnaturally (for them) high densities.

4. Grey squirrels are accused of "costing the economy" various vast sums of money. But we must bear in mind that these are the costs of pointless and cruel culls and also notional losses of the timber industry (where material that has cosmetic damage is calculated as being lost to production altogether, whereas in actual fact it is not taken out of production - what difference does cosmetic damage make for pulp or for construction timber, for example?)

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