



Animal Welfare.
Worldwide.

THE FRIGHTENING REALITY OF THE FUR INDUSTRY



Cruelty, COVID-19 and changing times
– it is time to end the UK's contribution
to the cruel global fur trade

About FOUR PAWS

FOUR PAWS is the global animal welfare organisation for animals under direct human influence, which reveals animal suffering, rescues animals in need and protects them through our sanctuaries and campaigns. Founded in 1988 in Vienna by Heli Dugler and friends, the organisation advocates for a world where humans treat animals with respect, empathy and understanding.

FOUR PAWS' campaigns and animal welfare projects focus on animals who are abused for the fashion industry, companion animals including stray dogs and cats, farm animals, and wild animals – such as bears, big cats and orangutans – kept in inappropriate conditions, and those animals who suffer in disaster and conflict zones. With offices in Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Kosovo, the Netherlands, Switzerland, South Africa, Thailand, Ukraine, the UK, the USA and Vietnam, as well as sanctuaries for rescued animals in 12 countries, FOUR PAWS provides rapid help and long-term solutions for animals. www.four-paws.org.uk

FOUR PAWS has achieved many lasting improvements for animals used within the textiles industry. In recent years this includes:

- Working with the European bedding industry to lead a successful industry-wide transition away from the down of live-plucked and force-fed ducks and geese.
- Continued support of the highly successful Fur Free Retailer programme, an international initiative of the Fur Free Alliance with over 1,500 brands and retailers who stand united in their commitment against fur. FOUR PAWS UK is a UK representative of the Fur Free Retailer programme, connecting brands to the global programme.
- Successful work towards regulations to end fur farming in EU countries such as Austria and Germany, and supporting the 'Stop Deadly Fur' global campaign.
- Launching the 'Wear it Kind' animal-friendly fashion campaign, with actions supported by over 1,000,000 people internationally.
- Publishing our 'Brands against Mulesing' list and securing commitments from more than 45 brands to phase out mulesed wool from their supply chains.

Our vision is a world where humans treat animals with respect, empathy and understanding.

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FOREWORD

As we publish this report, 20 years ago, on 1 January 2003, the Fur Farming (Prohibition) Act 2000 came into force in the UK, and the last remaining fur farms were shut down for good. The UK had finally recognised that the keeping of wild animals to be farmed for their fur was both unethical and abhorrently cruel and no longer wanted a part in the trade. However, 20 years on, despite the UK's strong and unequivocal ethical stand against fur, we are now outsourcing our cruelty overseas and exercising a double standard by continuing to allow the import and sale of fur in the UK.

Globally, the fur industry is responsible for farming, trapping in the wild, and killing over 100 million animals. In addition to the inherent cruelty within the trade, fur farming is linked to environmental degradation and poses a grave health risk to humans too, with multiple confirmed outbreaks of COVID-19 on fur farms worldwide.

These issues are widely reported and acknowledged by experts and Governments around the world, and by the general public too. Not only do 77% of the British public support an import and sales ban, but over one million people have signed the #FurFreeBritain petition.

We now need Government action to end our association with this cruel and high-risk trade once and for all.

Globally, the UK is also lagging behind and propping up a dying industry. In 2021, Israel became the world's first country to prohibit the sale of fur and in 2019 the US state of California outlawed the sale and manufacturing of new clothing and accessories made from fur.

And it's not just Governments taking action. From the runways to the high street, the fashion industry has been leading the way for decades, with retailers and consumers alike shunning fur and the cruel, exploitative trade. Just late last year, Frasers Group, who own leading British brands including Sports Direct and House of Fraser, became the latest company to take matters into their own hands when they agreed to stop selling fur.

As we mark two decades since fur farming was banned, it is high time we fully address our role in what is left of the cruel fur trade and stop importing and exporting cruelty for good.

By implementing a nationwide ban on the import and sale of fur, we can help save the lives of millions of animals who are needlessly killed for this abhorrent trade.

So let's make 2023 the year we finally achieve a Fur Free Britain.

Sonul Badiani-Hammett
FOUR PAWS UK Country Director



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The fur industry inflicts horrific suffering on animals around the world. It is estimated that 100 million animals are killed annually on fur farms and by trapping in the wild,¹ a figure since impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. The fur industry is also linked to environmental degradation and serious human health risks, with COVID-19 outbreaks confirmed on numerous fur farms worldwide.

Animal Suffering and Threats to Wildlife

Fur production is dependent on one of the worst abuses inflicted on animals – industrialised farming. On fur farms across the world, millions of animals are imprisoned for life in tiny, barren and filthy cages. These animals are then slaughtered in grisly ways, including being skinned alive.²

Fur trapping accounts for around 5% of fur produced,³ and it is equally horrific in terms of animal suffering. Animals might be trapped for days before they are cruelly slaughtered, with many non-target animals also trapped and killed through this process, including endangered species.⁴

The fur industry propagates the perception of wild animal parts as luxury items, which in turn promotes demand for wildlife trading. Further, after escaping fur farms, introduced species such as raccoon dogs (*Nyctereutes procyonoides*) and American mink (*Neovison vison*) have established stable populations in various countries, with detrimental effects on biodiversity and the environment.⁵

Compounding this, there are alarming issues in relation to zoonotic diseases and the wildlife trade, with COVID-19 ravaging mink farms in Europe and North America,⁶ causing further animal suffering and public health risks.

Consumer Sentiment

Fur is, arguably, one of the least consumer-supported animal-derived textiles still in use today. In February 2022, a YouGov poll by Humane Society International/UK found that 73% of British public who were surveyed

backed a ban on fur imports, among whom 59% of Conservative voters at the last election strongly support a ban, up almost 20% since a 2018 poll.⁷

Further, thousands of British and international fashion brands are now enacting policies to assure that their supply chains are fur free.

There is strong opposition worldwide to fur,⁸ with many countries, states and cities having banned the sale of fur, and momentum is building.⁹

Within the UK, this is most prominent in London and Manchester, with local councils such as Islington Borough Council and Oldham Council having banned the sale of fur on council-owned land or local markets. Islington's business chief, Councillor Asima Shaikh, told the Islington Gazette: "While we have no reason to believe that illegally farmed fur is used in any products sold in our street markets, we think it is important that the council works hard to tackle this cruel and awful trade."¹⁰

Industry Insights

Investigations into the production of fur have been damning, revealing abysmal conditions and routine abuse of animals by workers in the fur industry,¹¹ with charges laid in several instances.¹²

Independent scientists have debunked the voluntary certification system the fur industry has contrived,¹³ along with any claims of sustainability.¹⁴ The fur industry has been penalised several times for false advertising in relation to spurious claims of 'good' welfare and of being environmentally friendly,¹⁵ while the environmental impacts and toxicity of fur and its production have been uncovered by numerous studies and investigations.¹⁶

In 2020 there was opposition from within the fur industry itself, with the former CEO of the British Fur Trade Association denouncing the industry and advocating for a ban.¹⁷



Fur Production, Deception and the UK's Contribution

Most fur is produced in China, Europe and North America, with China now the primary producer and consumer of fur.¹⁸ It is essential to note that although there are regulations in Europe and the USA, the horrendous treatment of animals exploited for their fur, such as extreme confinement and terrible killing methods, is similar irrespective of region. Further, regulations set very low minimum standards, which still allow for lifetime imprisonment of animals and brutal killing methods such as electrocution.

Since 2003, the UK has imported more than £800 million of animal fur from countries including China, Finland, France and Poland, equating to approximately 20 million animals being killed.¹⁹ British fur imports often include less expensive fur items, such as trims on clothing, accessories, souvenirs and children's toys,²⁰ a portion of which have been found to be mislabelled as 'faux' when they are in fact real fur.²¹

Investigations have exposed the sale of mislabelled fur products across the UK, deceiving British consumers and highlighting an alarming lack of transparency and traceability in fur supply chains. The investigations into products from Fat Face²² and Boohoo²³ found that real fur items were deliberately mislabelled as 'faux', or as being from a different species than that revealed by DNA tests. In the UK, it is an offence for traders to give false information about the characteristics of goods, with regulations enforced by Trading Standards Officers employed by local authorities. However, multiple instances have been documented where retailers, on becoming aware of fake faux fur being sold in their establishments, did not contact Trading Standards.²⁴

Indeed, deceptive labelling is a worldwide problem,²⁵ and it has been found that products are deliberately mislabelled when exported to countries where there is local opposition to fur.²⁶

In the UK, there is currently an absence of overarching laws on fur sales and use. It is essential that the UK leads the way by enacting bans on the import and sale of fur, accompanied by information standards on labelling and testing mechanisms.

Fur Farming: A Threat to Human Health

Central to standard fur industry practice is the requirement for masses of animals, who are genetically similar, to be housed in intense confinement. As a result of poor hygiene and irregular cleaning, cages are filthy, and animals exhibit great distress through manic behaviour/psychosis, open wounds, self-mutilation and even cannibalism.²⁷

The animals are highly stressed in these prison-like and unhygienic conditions and are then mass-slaughtered or transported and traded within animal markets. This creates an ideal environment for a zoonosis (an infectious disease that has jumped from a non-human animal to humans) to emerge and propagate.

Unsurprisingly, SARS-CoV-2, which causes COVID-19, has spread through over 450 fur farms, at the time of publication, as two of the main fur species, mink and raccoon dog, can become infected with and transmit COVID-19.²⁸ People have become infected with SARS-CoV-2 by mink, and mutations of the virus's spike proteins, which potentially risk undermining the efficacy of vaccines, have occurred on fur farms.²⁹ Additionally, foxes can become infected with and transmit SARS-CoV.³⁰

Therefore, fur farms pose a risk of becoming a reservoir for spillover into populations in the wild, and of undermining the effectiveness of vaccines.³¹ Species such as raccoon dogs on Chinese fur farms are even considered possible intermediate hosts³² that drove the development of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, and various experts have called for an end to fur production.³³ Fur farming also poses the risk of other zoonotic diseases such as rabies³⁴ or influenza A.³⁵

Fur trapping, another practice in the industry, also creates risk as it involves close contact with wild animals and habitat interference as hunters encroach into the wilderness to hunt animals. Further, habitat destruction is a major factor in the spread of zoonoses.³⁶

Many countries and states across the world, such as Israel and California, have banned fur sales due to these serious concerns. The UK is falling behind and must cease its support of the cruel and dangerous fur industry by banning fur imports and sales. The harm against animals, the deception of consumers, the risk for zoonotic diseases and the environmental devastation more than justifies the UK banning imports and sales of products from this cruel industry for good.

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- ⁹ Fur Free Alliance, <https://www.furfreealliance.com/fur-bans/>.
- ¹⁰ Islington Gazette <https://www.islingtongazette.co.uk/news/21227052.town-hall-bans-sale-supply-fur-islington-markets/>
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- ¹² Investigations are undertaken by non-profits, so they are not indicative of the scale of the problem. A few examples: SPCA Montreal, <https://www.sPCA.com/en/monteregie-fur-farmer-found-guilty-of-animal-cruelty/>; Last Chance for Animals, <https://www.lcanimal.org/index.php/investigations/investigations-in-the-field/millbank-fur-farm>.
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- ¹⁴ Bijleveld, Korteland and Sevenster, The environmental impact of mink fur production, 2011.
- ¹⁵ For instance, Advertising Standards Authority, <https://www.asa.org.uk/rulings/European-Fur-Breeders-Association-A11-164462.html>; Press Release Faux Fur Institute, https://www.24presse.com/fur_industry_s_advertising_declared_misleading-9920787.html.
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1. INTRODUCTION

Over recent years, a staggering 100 million animals were slaughtered annually to create fur fashion items.³⁷ Farmed species include mink, raccoon dogs, foxes, rabbits and chinchillas. The number of animals farmed and trapped has been reduced due to the COVID-19 pandemic, however, the industry is still harming vast numbers of animals and posing a zoonotic risk.

Fur farms are located in China, Europe and North America, with China being the biggest producer, exporter, and consumer of fur,³⁸ while fur trapping is popular in the USA, Canada and Russia.

Cruelty is inherent throughout the trade, from the moment the animals are born or captured to when they are slaughtered. On fur farms, millions of animals are imprisoned in unsanitary and abysmal conditions, crammed inside wire mesh cages for life, while fur trapping practices and hunting result in prolonged suffering and indiscriminate killing of many species. In addition to this systematic suffering, investigations have revealed that cruelty and abuse inflicted on animals by human workers is routine.³⁹

75% of all emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic; for example, COVID-19, Ebola, SARS, Zika virus and bird flu were all transmitted to people by animals, a key factor being exploitation of animals and extreme forms of captivity, such as live markets or farming.⁴⁰

The current COVID-19 crisis has shown that animal trading and the abuse of animals carries colossal global consequences.

While China is one of the known hotspots for zoonotic diseases due to wet markets and wildlife trade, the large-scale outbreaks of COVID-19 on mink farms in Europe and North America demonstrate that the risk fur farming brings to humans is global.⁴¹

Fur farms, like other factory farms and animal markets, employ the same practices that lead to the emergence and spread of zoonotic diseases.⁴² This is evidenced by COVID-19 ravaging mink farms in Europe and North America. Other species exploited for fur, such as raccoon dogs, are also able to become infected with and transmit the virus,⁴³ while foxes can become infected with SARS-CoV-1.⁴⁴ American mink on fur farms are highly susceptible to the SARS-CoV-2 virus.⁴⁵

Due to the stressful conditions within fur farms, animals' immune systems become compromised, making them susceptible to disease. In addition, the killing methods used are unhygienic as well as horrific.

Thousands of animals can be held on one site, and in some places in Europe and China, there is also cross-species contact, facilitating the 'mixing' of viruses. This refers to when animals become infected with several viruses from humans and other animals, and they become a 'mixing vessel' for viruses to combine.⁴⁶

In addition to animal cruelty concerns, fur production is environmentally devastating, and the fur items themselves can contain toxic levels of chemicals harmful to human health.⁴⁷ Independent scientists have debunked the voluntary certification system the fur industry has contrived, along with any claims of sustainability.⁴⁸ Further, the fur industry has been penalised several times for false advertising in relation to spurious claims of 'good' welfare and environmental sustainability.⁴⁹

There is rising opposition to the use of fur and fur sales in the UK, with multiple local councils taking action. In 2019, Islington Council in London banned the sale and supply of fur on all council-owned land, including in street markets held within the borough.¹⁰ The support for the FOUR PAWS UK and Humane Society International/UK petition calling for a #FurFreeBritain is further evidence of the increasing opposition to fur within the UK, with over one million signatures collected by the movement so far.

Many countries, both within and outside Europe, have instituted fur farming bans.⁵⁰ Similarly, cities in the USA introduced fur sales bans, which led to the first US state ban in California.^{51, 52} Israel became the world's first country to prohibit the sales of fur, with the ban becoming effective by the end of 2021.⁵³ More countries and states continue to join the movement to ban fur, with a recent acceleration due to COVID-19 spreading through farms.⁵⁴

The UK imports millions of pounds' worth of real fur and faux fur products each year. Pre-COVID data from 2017 indicate that the UK was importing over £643 million worth of fur and fur products in a single year, two-thirds of which were exports from EU countries.⁵⁵ Since COVID-19 was first reported in 2020, the UK has imported over £60 million worth of fur, despite the health risks associated with COVID-19 outbreaks on fur farms.⁵⁶

There are limited laws in the UK governing the use of fur such as customs regulations that prohibit the import, export and marketing of dog and cat fur or seal skins.^{113, 114} Additionally, retained Regulation (EEC) No 3254/91 prohibits the import of raw furs and fur products from 13 fur-bearing wild animal species

originating in countries where they are trapped by leg-hold traps or other methods that do not meet international standards of humane trapping. The Regulation does not, however, apply to animals born and bred in captivity.⁵⁷

A nationwide prohibition on fur products is the solution for ending our detrimental contribution to this cruel industry.

COVID-19 has clearly demonstrated the urgent need for us to address the relationship between humans, animals and the natural environment. We know that this disease emerged from animals, but it was not the first zoonotic disease outbreak that had impacted the lives of humans, and nor is it likely to be the last, unless we change the way we treat animals.⁵⁸ As a global community, committed to pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, we must apply the precautionary principle and globally ban practices such as fur farming that increase the risk of zoonotic disease emergence and spread.

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⁵² Fish and Game Code California Division 3 2023, Division 4 3039.

⁵³ Ban on animal fur sales! Minister of Environmental Protection Gila Gamliel signs regulations forbidding trade in usage of furs for fashion industry in Israel, June 2021, https://www.gov.il/en/departments/news/fur_trade_is_prohibited

⁵⁴ FOUR PAWS Map.

⁵⁵ <https://www.uktradeinfo.com/trade-data/ots-custom-table/>

⁵⁶ UK Trade Information <https://www.uktradeinfo.com/trade-data/ots-custom-table/>

⁵⁷ Council Regulation (EEC) No 3254/91, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/importing-animal-furs-skins-and-fish#import-controls-on-furs-and-products-from-animals-caught-in-leg-hold-traps>. Council Regulation (as implemented in UK legislation) is at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/eur/1991/3254/contents>

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2. THE INHERENT CRUELTY WITHIN FUR

The global fur trade is responsible for slaughtering approximately 100 million animals every year. Around 95% of these animals are killed within industrial fur farming systems, with the remaining 5% trapped in the wild.

Fur Farms

Animals on fur farms are imprisoned in tiny, barren, metal-wire cages for the entirety of their lives. The most common species of animals farmed for their fur include mink, raccoon dogs, foxes, rabbits (as a by-product of meat production as well as fur breeds) and chinchillas.

Animals suffer from trauma and various health issues, from weak bones to tooth decay.⁵⁹ The rearing systems on fur farms are usually standardised, with cages often hung in long rows around half a metre above the ground. Due to the wire mesh underfoot, the animals' sensitive paws are often injured from constantly standing on hard wire. Excrement and urine

fall through the mesh floor so that the animals' fur remains unsoiled, and collects beneath their cages. With their exceptional sense of smell, the animals are permanently exposed to an unbearable stench, with no opportunity to bathe or engage in any other natural behaviours.

As a result of poor hygiene and irregular cleaning, cages are filthy, and animals exhibit great distress through manic behaviour/psychosis, open wounds, self-mutilation and even cannibalism.⁶⁰ There are high rates of infant deaths and infanticide, and animals are denied veterinary care, as is evidenced by animals with serious untreated injuries and dead animals left in cages with their cell mates.

Animals farmed for fur never leave their cage throughout their entire lives, until they are slaughtered.

Breeding for pelt size has also caused significant welfare issues, resulting in obesity, diminished mobility and gastrointestinal problems.⁶¹

In Finland, the selective breeding of super-sized polar foxes has resulted in massively obese animals, with males weighing 20kg or more while in nature such

Selective breeding of foxes predisposed to lose skin and intentional overfeeding for obesity on a fur farm in Finland.

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foxes usually weigh 3–4kg. Welfare problems related to obesity, such as foot deformities and abnormal locomotion, are observed frequently on blue fox farms.⁶²

In addition to the cruel confinement inflicted on animals by the industry, investigations have revealed horrendous abuse and slaughtering practices.⁶³

Acts of cruelty perpetrated by workers have been routinely uncovered on fur farms, and killing methods are terribly cruel – with animals electrocuted anally or vaginally, strangled, gassed, beaten or crushed to death, or skinned alive. Investigations have documented skinned animals still moving and blinking their eyes.⁶⁴

Compounding this is the fact that animals used for fur are wild animals, who have undergone minimal domestication and are not accustomed to co-existing with humans, causing further stress in an already traumatic environment.⁶⁵

The minimum standards relating to fur farming and trapping in Europe and North America suffer from fatal flaws, and there is improper oversight and enforcement.⁶⁶ But even if these minimum standards were enforced, they would not come close to ensuring good welfare.

For instance, cage sizes are often little more than the length of the animal's own body, barely allowing animals to move, while trapping regulations allow for an array of cruel traps to be used.

Fur-Trapping

Animals trapped for fur are estimated to number in the range of 3–5 million, primarily from North America and Russia.⁶⁷ A wide range of species are trapped, including beaver, bobcat, coyote, fox, lynx, muskrat, and raccoon.⁶⁸

Various traps are used, including leg-hold traps, body gripping traps and snares, which can result in animals dying slowly by being crushed, strangled or by drowning.⁶⁹ Animals caught in traps can also die slowly from exposure, dehydration, starvation, predation, or injury due to mutilating or chewing off their own trapped limbs. If they survive the trap, they are killed by trappers who will strangle, beat, or stomp them to death.⁷⁰ The exact scale of suffering is unknown due to poor monitoring and reporting.

Importantly, there are no official numbers for non-target animals as there is either no requirement to report or insufficient monitoring. It has been estimated that between 3 and 10 animals might be caught for every intended species – these animals are referred to as 'trash animals' by trappers.⁷¹



Coyote caught in a fur trap. © Fur Free Alliance

In accordance with the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981,⁷² self-locking snares are banned in England and Wales while free-running snares are still permitted.

In theory, it is illegal to snare animals such as badgers, pine martens and otters. However, in 2012 a UK Government study found that only one-quarter of the animals caught in free-running snares were the intended target (i.e., foxes).⁷³ Three-quarters of the animals caught included hares, badgers, family pets and deer.

In addition to the animal suffering caused through snaring in the UK, we are importing fur from animals who might have been caught using even more cruel traps. Retained Regulation (EEC) No 3254/91 prohibits the import of furs and fur products from certain wild animal species if they are caught by leg-hold traps or methods that do not meet international standards of humane trapping. These species can, however, be imported if certification that confirms that they originated in an approved source country is provided. This conflicting legislation puts the burden of responsibility on the UK Border Force to distinguish the source of the fur and relies on transparency from

the exporter as to how the animal was killed, making control and enforcement of retained Regulation No 3254/91 difficult.

The Rising Opposition to Fur

Countries and states have been responding to growing public opposition by enacting bans on both fur farming and the sale of fur as the most effective means to bring this cruel industry to an end.

Fur farming has been prohibited in Austria, Croatia, the Netherlands, Slovenia and the UK. Meanwhile, many other countries are phasing out fur farming, such as Belgium, the Czech Republic, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Luxembourg, Norway, Serbia, Slovakia and the Republic of Macedonia.⁷⁴

Recently; Estonia, Italy, France, Malta and Ireland have announced a ban on fur farming. Switzerland and Germany both adopted stricter regulations, rendering breeding unprofitable. Similarly, Sweden eliminated fox and chinchilla production in this way, and Denmark prohibited the breeding of foxes on animal welfare grounds.

In the USA, major cities have instituted bans on fur sales,⁷⁵ with other cities such as New York City following suit and introducing similar bills.⁷⁶ California became the first US state to ban fur,⁷⁷ and more states are following in their footsteps, including Connecticut, Hawaii, Oregon, Massachusetts and Rhode Island.⁷⁸

Notably, Israel became the first country in the world to ban the sale of fur for fashion in 2021.⁷⁹ All these examples can serve as models for the UK.

There is also growing opposition within the fur trade itself. In 2020, the former CEO of the British Fur Trade Association, Mike Moser, spoke out against fur and joined calls for a Fur Free Britain, while Copenhagen Fur, the world's largest fur auction house, is set to close in the next couple of years due to a combination of rising opposition and COVID-19 outbreaks on farms.⁸⁰

The fur industry has engaged in a long-running campaign to destigmatise fur by moving away from fur coats to affordable fur trims and accessories, which are often dyed to appear very different from the natural appearance of the animal's fur, whilst also matching the look of faux fur products.

⁵⁹ EU Commission, The Welfare of Animals Kept for Fur Production a Report of the Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare 2001.

⁶⁰ Pickett and Harris, The case against fur factory farming: A scientific review of animal welfare standards and 'WelFur', 2015; Jespersen et al., Anatomical distribution and gross pathology of wounds in necropsied farmed mink (*Neovison vison*) from June and October, *Acta Vet Scand*, 2016, 58:6.

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⁶² Mustonen et al., Skeletal pathology of farm-reared obese juvenile blue foxes (*Vulpes lagopus*), *J Vet Anat*, 2017, 10:51-74.

⁶³ Fur Free NYC, Fur Industry Lies, <https://www.furfree NYC.com/blog/fur-industry-lies>.

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⁶⁵ Pickett and Harris, The case against fur factory farming: A scientific review of animal welfare standards and 'WelFur', 2015.

⁶⁶ Fur Free Alliance, <https://www.furfreealliance.com/trapping/>.

⁶⁷ ACTAsia, China's fur trade and its position in the global fur industry, July 2019.

⁶⁸ The Canadian Encyclopedia, Fur Trapping, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/fur-trapping>.

⁶⁹ The Fur-Bearers, The Association for the Protection of Fur-Bearing Animals, <https://thefurbearers.com/our-work/make-fur-history/trapping/trapping-and-wildlife/types-of-traps/>.

⁷⁰ PETA, Fur Trapping <https://www.peta.org/issues/animals-used-for-clothing/fur/fur-trapping/#:~:text=To%20kill%20the%20animals%20without,crippled%20or%20killed%20by%20traps>.

⁷¹ American Veterinary Medical Association Animal Welfare Division, Literature Review on the Welfare Implications of Leghold Trap Use in Conservation and Research, 2008.

⁷² Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69>

⁷³ League Against Cruel Sports, <https://www.league.org.uk/what-we-do/shooting/snares/>

⁷⁴ Fur Free Alliance, <https://www.furfreealliance.com/fur-bans/>.

⁷⁵ For instance, Health Code San Francisco Article 1D Animal Fur Products.

⁷⁶ The New York City Council, <https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=3903503&GUID=EBE55293-8737-4620-945A-308ADC3A23DC&Options=&Search=>.

⁷⁷ Fish and Game Code California Division 3 2023, Division 4 3039, <https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/codesTOCSelected.xhtml?tocCode=FGC>.

⁷⁸ For instance: Connecticut General Assembly, Proposed H.B. No. 5031, <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2021/TOB/H/PDF/2021HB-05031-R00-HB.PDF>; Hawaii State Legislature, SB969 SD2 HD2, https://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/measure_indiv.aspx?billtype=SB&billnumber=969.

⁷⁹ NPR, <https://www.npr.org/2021/06/14/1006279660/israel-has-become-the-first-country-to-ban-the-sale-of-fur-clothing>.

⁸⁰ Humane Society International, <https://www.hsi.org/news-media/worlds-largest-fur-auction-house-to-close-as-eu-warns-mink-mutations-of-covid-19-could-make-vaccines-ineffective/>.



*Raccoon dog on a fur farm in Finland.
© FOUR PAWS | Fred Dott*

3. FUR, ZOO NOTIC DISEASES AND THE CORONAVIRUS CONTAGION

The fur industry not only poses risks to animals, but it also poses serious risks to human and public health, most recently demonstrated with COVID-19 spreading across fur farms in Europe and North America.⁸¹ There are concerns that animals susceptible to the virus can become reservoirs for the virus and interfere with the effectiveness of vaccines.⁸²

The majority of previous disease outbreaks originated from intensive animal rearing and trading and, once again, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed how animal trading can have devastating global consequences.⁸³

Given these grave risks and the scale of suffering, it is essential that we adhere to the

precautionary principle and ban the import and sale of fur in the UK, thereby removing the UK's contribution to the cruel global fur trade and the associated risks to public health.

Fur Farming and Danger of Disease

The main species farmed for fur, mink and raccoon dogs, can carry and transmit COVID-19 to humans.⁸⁴ SARS-CoV-2, which causes COVID-19, has rapidly spread through fur farms in Europe and North America. Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden have all had outbreaks on numerous mink fur farms,⁸⁵ leading to mass culls.

In the Netherlands, nearly three million mink were culled,⁸⁶ and the Government officially announced the shutting down of fur farming.⁸⁷ In Denmark, the whole population of farmed mink – at least 17 million

animals – was culled to stop the spread of infections,⁸⁸ and COVID-19 outbreaks in Spain led to almost 100,000 mink being culled.⁸⁹

There were further reports of outbreaks in Greece, Canada and Poland, affecting both mink and employees,⁹⁰ as well as outbreaks in France, Lithuania⁹¹ and Latvia,⁹² the presence of mink-mutated strains in Denmark, the Netherlands, the Faroe Islands, Russia, South Africa and Switzerland, and outbreaks in the USA across the major fur-farming regions Utah,⁹³ Michigan, Wisconsin⁹⁴ and Oregon.⁹⁵

COVID-19 has also emerged within the fur industry in China, which is the second biggest producer of mink and potentially the largest fur farming region.⁹⁶

Recent research has revealed that raccoon dogs, of which approximately 15 million are killed each year, primarily in China,⁹⁷ can also become infected and

Piles of faeces under mink cages at a fur farm in Sweden.
© Jo-Anne McArthur | Djurrattsalliansen | We Animals Media



transmit the virus. Unlike mink, raccoon dogs show few to no symptoms for the entirety of their illness, so infection can spread almost entirely undetected.⁹⁸

Further, raccoon dogs have been found to carry and transmit SARS-CoV-1,⁹⁹ and foxes can also become infected with SARS-CoV-1.¹⁰⁰

Farming thousands of members of the same species in intensive confinement means that disease can readily spread through a population as has occurred with the COVID-19 outbreaks on fur farms.¹⁰¹ Farming different species also creates risk, as it results in cross-species infection, mutation and mixing.

Within fur farming, several species are sometimes farmed together. A study in Finland found that mixed farms had a higher risk for fur animal epidemic necrotic pyoderma (FENP) than farms with only mink or only foxes.¹⁰²

While it is clear several factors need to be present to result in pathogen spillover and widespread transmission¹⁰³ the practices of industrialised farming create the necessary conditions that give rise to pandemics.¹⁰⁴ The major risk factors include¹⁰⁵:

- Devastation of the environment and interference with habitats, increasing exposure to wild animals and diseases.
- Transportation of animals across distances and borders.
- High volumes of animals contained in unsanitary conditions, which compromises their immune systems, causing animals to become ill and shed pathogens.
- Masses of animals, whether the same or different species, housed in close proximity to each other and humans.
- High numbers of people working in close proximity to each other and animals.
- Unhygienic slaughter practices and storage of carcasses.

Environments, such as fur farms, which include the above factors are ideal places for viruses to immediately spread between thousands of animals, mutate and 'mix'. 'Mixing' refers to when animals become infected with several viruses from humans and other animals, and they become a 'mixing vessel' for viruses to recombine,¹⁰⁶ resulting in new pathogens, such as avian influenza A viruses and swine flu.¹⁰⁷

In the USA and Europe, wild-ranging American mink have been infected with the SARS-CoV-2 virus near fur farms; thus, such farms may also pose disease risks to wildlife populations, which could then develop into an ineradicable reservoir for the virus.¹⁰⁸

The fur industry in China is of particular concern given the pollution the industry generates and because China is considered a 'hotspot' for emerging zoonotic diseases and as a result of harbouring abundant wildlife, a growing population with greater land use, and overexploitation.¹⁰⁹

Further, harmful chemicals used to prevent fur from rotting in the dressing process can render workers more susceptible to infection.¹¹⁰

FOUR PAWS, alongside leading international scientific experts in the field, has produced an eye opening report, 'How to Prevent the Next Pandemic?', highlighting the stark evidence linking health, animal welfare and pandemics.¹¹¹

According to the 29 international experts from disciplines such as virology, human and veterinary medicine, and climate research who contributed to the report, nothing less than a 'paradigm shift' is needed in how humankind treats animals in the future, to enable the prevention of future pandemics.¹¹¹

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⁸³ United Nations Environment Programme and International Livestock Research Institute, Preventing the Next Pandemic: Zoonotic diseases and how to break the chain of transmission, 2020.

⁸⁴ Oude Munnink et al., Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 on mink farms between humans and mink and back to humans, *Science*, 2021, 371:172-177.

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⁸⁷ Dutch Government, <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/actueel/nieuws/2020/08/31/nieuwe-besmetting-covid-19-bij-nertsenbedrijf>.

⁸⁸ NBCNews, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/animal-news/here-s-why-denmark-culled-17-million-minks-now-plans-n1249610>.

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⁹¹ European Food Safety Authority et al., Monitoring of SARS-CoV-2 infection in mustelids, *EFSA Journal*, 2021, 19:6459.

⁹² Covid-19 has been found in nine dead mink in SIA "Baltic Devon Mink" fur farm, <https://www.pvd.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/sia-baltic-devon-mink-kazokzveru-audzeta-devinam-mirusam-udelem-konstatets-covid-19>.

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⁹⁴ Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Michigan, https://www.michigan.gov/mdard/-/media/Project/Websites/mdard/documents/annual-reports/aid/2020_aid_annual_report.pdf; Department of Agriculture Wisconsin, https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/News_Media/TaylorCountyMinkTestPositiveCoronavirus.aspx.

⁹⁵ American Veterinary Medical Association, <https://www.avma.org/javma-news/2021-06-01/oregon-mulls-ban-mink-farms-covid-threat>.

⁹⁶ ACTAsia, China's fur trade and its position in the global fur industry, July 2019.

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⁹⁸ Freuling et al., Susceptibility of raccoon dogs for experimental SARS-CoV-2 infection, *Emerg Infect Dis* 2020, 26:2982-2985.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

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Hat and gloves with fur appliqués showing the difficulty of to identify real fur from faux fur.
© FOUR PAWS

4. LIMITED LAWS AND LABELLING LIES

There are limited laws across the UK that specifically govern the use and sale of fur, except for legislation that regulates dog, cat and seal fur.

In the UK, the import, export and marketing of dog and cat fur is prohibited, other than for educational and taxidermy purposes.¹¹² The commercial import and marketing of all seal skins is also prohibited, with exemptions in place for products that are a result of traditional hunts by indigenous communities or products that are exclusively for the personal use of travellers.¹¹³

There are also no tracing or testing mechanisms in place at customs to ascertain the source of fur, and whether fur is real or faux.

Limited Protection from Deceptive Labelling

Improved labelling and interest in transparency is growing, and awareness about animal welfare continues to rise.

The Consumer Rights Act 2015 is a UK law that protects consumers and their rights when purchasing goods and services.¹¹⁴ This legislation sets out the basic rules that govern how consumers buy items, how businesses sell them, and what should happen when goods are faulty or when dealings with sellers are deceptive.

Mislabeled fur products relate to deceptive conduct and unfair practices that deceive consumers into purchasing products. The Consumer Protection (Amendment) Regulations 2014 makes it an offence for traders to give false information about the characteristics of goods and should be enforced by Trading Standards Officers employed by local authorities.¹¹⁵

Mislabelling of products also relates to product safety due to the harmful chemicals used in real fur, which is then deceptively sold as faux fur. The heavy dyes and chemical treatment can also prevent items being identified through microscopy and DNA testing.

While brands have been found to sell mislabelled items, most of the incorrectly labelled products are from innumerable cheap, overseas brands, making traceability arduous at best. Issuing fines to brands or shopkeepers will not stem this practice. It needs to be stopped at its source and fur items should be prohibited from entering the market.

Despite there being some import prohibitions on fur derived from animal species that are categorised as endangered under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), such as tigers and certain fur seals,¹¹⁶ animals used by the fur industry, such as mink, foxes and raccoon dogs, are offered no protection under CITES or British wildlife protection laws, and their fur can legally be imported into the UK.

In response to rising consumer concerns, and the lack of traceability and standards, many brands are taking responsibility themselves by banning fur from their supply chains altogether.

At the time of publication, 1,572 British and global brands had taken the Fur Free Retailer pledge not to sell fur.

Corporate advancement

Public opposition to the fur trade is strong, with over three quarters (77%) of UK voters wanting to see the Government ban fur imports.¹¹⁷ Fur has become increasingly unpopular, and this evolution in consumer behaviour has directly impacted the fashion industry and prompted brands and retailers to take action and abandon fur. At the time of publication, 1572 British and global brands had taken the Fur Free Retailer pledge not to sell fur.¹¹⁸

In 2022, high end brands like Moncler and Dolce&Gabbana pledged to go fur free and remove all animal fur from their products, adding their voice to the growing fashion movement against fur. Copenhagen Fashion Week also announced plans to ban fur from catwalks during this high-profile event.

In the UK, Frasers Group, known for House of Fraser, Sports Direct and Jack Wills, also committed to end the sale of fur from their stores, after years of campaigning from animal welfare organisations, including FOUR PAWS UK.

These brands are demonstrating that, from the runway to the high street, industry and consumers alike are shunning cruelty for fashion and the fur industry is dying.

¹¹² UK Government https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5b7aa981e5274a44c94670ef/SI_with_Watermark.pdf

¹¹³ UK Government <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/seal-product-trade-in-great-britain/trade-of-seal-products-in-great-britain-england-scotland-and-wales>

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¹¹⁶ Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species in Flora and Fauna Appendices I, II and III.

¹¹⁷ Humane Society International <https://www.hsi.org/news-media/over-three-quarters-77-of-uk-voters-want-to-see-the-government-ban-fur-imports/>

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5. FALSEHOODS OF THE FUR INDUSTRY

There has been growing opposition to the fur trade for decades and an increasing number of brands are going fur free.¹¹⁹ In response, the fur industry has pursued a campaign to remove the stigma attached to fur – changing its products and trends from fur coats to other clothing items and accessories.¹²⁰

Further, the industry has been expanding operations in China in the wake of opposition in Europe leading to fur bans.¹²¹ The industry has also attempted a voluntary 'welfare' accreditation scheme in Europe. Unsurprisingly, this scheme has been debunked. Compounding these factors are the detrimental environmental impacts of fur, and any claims to the contrary have been discredited.

Futile Welfare Certifications

Cruelty is entrenched into all aspects of the fur industry, from the animals' housing conditions to the slaughter practices, rendering welfare certification or regulation futile.

Battery cages, in particular, are increasingly recognised as grossly damaging to animal welfare. Almost two decades ago, the EU Commission's scientific committee on animal health and welfare criticised the conditions on fur farms.¹²²

Attempts at welfare certification are disingenuous, as cruelty is ingrained in the industry, and the voluntary certification attempted in Europe does not even begin to address the fundamental aspects of animal welfare, such as freedom to move and freedom from suffering.¹²³

In the voluntary 'Welfur' certification, only one housing system is allowed – the intensive cage system, precisely the system that has been routinely criticised as responsible for great suffering. Further,

Arctic fox pelts
© FOUR PAWS





Aerial view of fur farms in Nova Scotia
© Jo-Anne McArthur | #MakeFurHistory | We Animals Media

it does not address major welfare issues, such as the unacceptable reality that the animals abused for fur are wild, undomesticated species who are forced to live in wire cages for life – systems that are clearly unable to meet their natural behaviour needs or instincts.

'Welfur' is a voluntary self-regulation programme, where the industry commissions a company to carry out audits, and there are proven financial ties between those auditing companies and the fur industry.¹²⁴ Predictably, an independent assessment by scientists found that 'Welfur' cannot deliver a welfare guarantee for animals.¹²⁵

When Germany and Sweden implemented stricter welfare standards such as increased cages sizes and additional swimming basins for mink, and implemented more frequent and unannounced inspections, fur farming ceased to be profitable for many farmers.¹²⁶ Since Germany introduced new legislation in 2017, the last remaining mink farms were closed by 2019, despite being given a five-year transition period.⁹

Systems in which animal abuse is inherent cannot be reformed,¹²⁷ and undercover footage continually reveals the dismal conditions and violations of even minimal standards in Europe and North America.¹²⁸

Environmental Destruction

Claims that fur is sustainable have been debunked and the fur industry has been penalised several times for misleading advertisements making claims of sustainability.¹²⁹

Fur begins to decompose once it is stripped from the animal, and harsh chemicals are used to stop the putrefying process. This is known as fur 'dressing' and is similar to leather tanning.

A whole host of hazardous and carcinogenic chemicals are used in fur production and maintenance – from known carcinogens such as formaldehyde and chromium VI,¹³⁰ which can also damage the human nervous system and the kidneys,¹³¹ to various other chemicals that can affect hormones and the respiratory system.¹³²

These chemicals are hazardous to workers, the environment and consumers, with several studies conducted in Europe and China reporting toxic levels of chemicals in fur garments for both adults and children.¹³³

Similarly, studies that have addressed the environmental impact of the fur industry refute claims that fur is 'green' or preferable to other textiles.¹³⁴

Fur is far more damaging to the environment in comparison to other textiles, including synthetics.¹³⁵

Fur farms release significant amounts of animal manure into local waterways, contributing to nitrogen and phosphorus pollution¹³⁶ and eutrophication.¹³⁷

Fur farming also contributes to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from animal feed and waste, and because fur production consumes significant quantities of energy and releases GHGs during production.

It is estimated that to produce a fur coat from farmed animals demands over 15 times as much energy as that needed to produce a synthetic fur garment.¹³⁸

For each kilogram of factory-farmed mink fur, almost 150 kilograms of carbon dioxide is produced, which is over five times more than other energy-intensive textiles such as wool.¹³⁹

Mink Farm in Poland
© FOUR PAWS



Even when the so-called longevity of fur coats is factored in, it still does not result in a lesser environmental impact in comparison to faux fur.¹⁴⁰ There is also a significant environmental impact from maintaining fur garments, such as their storage,¹⁴¹ further countering the so-called benefits of longevity. Advertisements claiming that fur is environmentally friendly or is produced under good welfare standards have been prohibited in several countries.¹⁴²

Great strides are being made to improve the sustainability of a wide range of materials and develop new ones, from plant-based fibres through to synthetics.¹⁴³ There are both new technologies and new eco fibres being developed or already entering the market with potential for widespread use. But there are no such viable options for fur because factors such as feed, manure and dressing of fur, and the associated pollution, cannot be eliminated.

Introduced Species

Animals escaping from fur farms have resulted in populations of introduced species, and more cruelty when those introduced species are then culled.¹⁴⁴

Spain specifically enacted laws to prevent mink escaping, and prohibited any new farms being built due to the American mink being declared a serious threat to biodiversity as an invasive alien species.¹⁴⁵

While fur farms continue to exist, however, there is always the danger of escapees causing further damage to the environment into which they escape, as well as the harm to their welfare from attempts to control them.

A Danish study estimated that 80% of free-roaming mink were fur farm escapees,¹⁴⁶ and there have been similar findings in Poland.¹⁴⁷ Other species used in fur farming, such as raccoon dogs, are also on Europe's most invasive species list.¹⁴⁸

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6. THE WILDLIFE TRADE AND THE FUR INDUSTRY

Fur trapping not only harms target animals, but also harms and kills endangered animals.¹⁴⁹ However, because there is an absence of monitoring and reporting requirements, the scale of the problem is unknown.

Although there has not been comprehensive research, and despite a lack of monitoring requirements, the preliminary knowledge we have indicates that it is a widespread problem, as demonstrated by the Fur Trapping Incidents Database.¹⁵⁰ This is also supported by American Veterinary Medical Association research that estimates between 3 and 10 unintended animals might be caught for every individual of the target species.¹⁵¹

Further, animals trapped unintentionally are not included in trapping numbers; as a result, the death toll for animals trapped is higher than currently estimated.

The fur trade has a deplorable record of causing animals to become threatened or extinct; for instance, historically the fur trade was one of the driving factors for the water vole becoming an endangered species in the UK.¹⁵² More recently, the fur trade caused the lynx to become a threatened species.¹⁵³ More generally, hunting various animals for fur has been a major factor in their extinction or endangerment.¹⁵⁴

Water vole, critically endangered
© iStockphoto.com / MikeLane45



Regulation of wildlife and fur

Fur farming and trapping are inexorably cruel, inflicting immense suffering and appalling deaths on animals for the purpose of fashion and textiles.

Any form of regulation essentially sanctions brutal capture, rearing and killing practices. Implementing bans in destination countries like the UK is integral to reducing demand, which is an essential factor for both ending the cruel fur industry and combatting wildlife trade.

Regulating an inherently cruel industry conveys conflicting messages about the acceptability of mistreating animals and trading in wildlife. The distinction between protected species and species that can be traded is easily distorted, particularly as the so-called legal and illegal trades intersect.¹⁵⁵ The animals suffer just the same whether they are allowed to be traded or not.

Bans are also more effective at reducing the threat of zoonotic diseases both due to farming and due to the interference and destruction of habitats caused by taking animals from the wild. It is now well known that intruding into habitats is a major factor behind the emergence and spread of zoonotic disease. Land use change, for intensive agriculture and livestock production, is one of the leading factors in zoonotic disease emergence, by increasing human exposure to wildlife and the diseases they naturally carry.¹⁵⁶



Mink Farm in Poland
© R & D

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7. ENDING FUR SALES IN THE UK: NATIONAL AND LOCAL ACTIONS

Around the world, FOUR PAWS, as part of the global animal protection movement, is calling on governments to ban fur. Many countries and localities have implemented fur farming bans and fur trade bans, serving as models for the UK.

Put simply, trade bans on fur should include both the sale and the use of new fur, to eradicate the outdated and damaging image of fur as fashionable and as a luxury item, whilst also reducing demand and, ultimately, the suffering of animals killed for fur.

In the UK, the work of local councils has been important in advancing motions to investigate and implement bans on fur and exotic species products.

Importantly, there is strong public support on this issue, with over 100,000 supporters signing FOUR PAWS petitions calling on the Government and several fashion brands to take action and stop supporting this cruel trade.¹⁵⁷ From national polling carried out by Focaldata in April 2022, 72% of respondents stated that they would like the Government to pass more laws designed to improve animal welfare and protect animals from cruelty, showing that Animals Matter to British voters.¹⁵⁸

Parliamentary activity

In 2017, FOUR PAWS UK joined founding charity Humane Society International/UK in a coalition calling for a Fur Free Britain.¹⁵⁹ This coalition is working strategically together towards a ban on the sale and import of fur into the UK.

In 2018, the Government responded to e-petition 20088, which garnered over 109,500 signatures, stating that “*Regarding the fur industry, we are working at an international level to agree global animal welfare standards and phase out cruel and inhumane farming and trapping practices.*”¹⁶⁰ This petition prompted a

Westminster Hall debate in June 2018, where 32 cross-party MPs spoke out in support of a fur import ban.¹⁶¹ However, the Government held a staunch position that no ban could advance until the UK had left the EU and the nature of future trading relationships had been established.

Following the UK’s departure from the EU, an Early Day Motion tabled by Tracy Crouch, MP for Chatham and Aylesford, gained the support of 140 cross-party MPs backing our call for a ban.¹⁶² In April 2021, this support was joined by over one million petition signatures from the general public submitted to the then Prime Minister Boris Johnson, stating that “*the UK has the opportunity to act as a global leader in moral standards and that we must close our borders to the cruel, outdated, unnecessary, and dangerous fur trade.*”¹⁶³

In May 2021, the Action Plan for Animal Welfare was launched by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), within which exploration for new action in legislating the fur trade was listed.¹⁶⁴ Shortly after, the Government launched a call for evidence on the UK fur trade, seeking information on both fur sector activity and public opinion to determine whether further action should be taken in relation to the import and sale of fur from overseas.¹⁶⁵ Over 30,000 responses were submitted by the industry, the animal welfare sector and the public, who were reflecting the views of 73% of the British public who want fur banned.¹⁶⁶

More than 100 cross-party MPs and Peers wrote a letter to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Rt Hon George Eustice MP, calling for a fur ban, prompting Parliament’s first fur debate since the UK left the EU, in September 2021.¹⁶⁷ With 18 cross-party MPs in attendance to show support for the ban, Christian Wakeford MP, who called for the debate, stated: “*Following the Government’s call for evidence on the fur trade over the summer, given the strong public and parliamentary support for this measure and noting the Government’s commitment and ambition to be a world leader on animal welfare standards, I ask the Minister to use his response to today’s debate to reassure me and everyone in this room that legislative action to end the UK’s involvement in the global fur trade will be imminently forthcoming.*”¹⁶⁸

Efforts to enact any measures to end the import and sale of fur in the UK stagnated and the topic remained absent from the 2022 Queen’s Speech.¹⁶⁹ In response,



*Foxes on a fur farm in Finland.
© FOUR PAWS | Fred Dott*

tens of thousands of members of the public wrote to their MP urging them to support a fur ban, and a ban on the import and sale of fur and foie gras had gained over 310,000 signatures at the time of this publication.¹⁷⁰

Furthermore, the Government has still not published the responses from the 2021 Call for Evidence on

the UK fur trade, despite numerous commitments to do so and over 18 months has now passed since it closed on the 28th June 2021. Responses to repeated Parliamentary questions asking when the findings would be published as far back as February 2022 promise “a summary of responses setting out the results and key findings will be published soon.”¹⁷¹

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Fur Free Britain demonstration in 2021. Fur Free Britain is a coalition between FOUR PAWS UK, Humane Society International/UK, Animals Equality, Open Cages, RSPCA, Viva!, Save Me Trust, Animal Aid, The Jane Goodall Institute and PETA UK. © FOUR PAWS

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Fur Free Britain

The UK should institute a nationwide ban on the commercial import, and placing on the market, of all animal fur products, with a reasonable phase-out period to allow businesses that use animal fur to transition to sustainable faux fur alternatives.

Previous Government pledges to “*phase out cruel and inhumane farming and trapping practices*” from the fur industry do not go far enough.¹⁷² To end the cruelty that is pervasive throughout the fur trade, we must put a stop to the industry as a whole.

To ensure that fur products sold in the UK are faux, and to limit the risk of mislabelling, a fur sales and imports ban should also encompass comprehensive labelling standards, testing mechanisms, and rigorous enforcement by UK Border Force and Trading Standards.

Consumer Rights and Customs Regulations

Consumers are protected when purchasing goods that are potentially deceptive in declaring their origin of fur. As an alternative option, the retained Regulation (EC) 1523/2207, which currently prohibits the import, export and placing on the market of dog and cat fur, could be expanded to include all fur-bearing animals.¹⁷³ This should be accompanied by testing mechanisms to ensure that products comply with the law and synthetic products are not mislabelled.

Consistent testing mechanisms applied at customs have an essential role in proper labelling and as part of a ban. Visual checks can help determine whether fur is real or faux, while microscopy and DNA testing can ascertain the species of origin.

The EU discovered that proper testing mechanisms at customs,¹⁷⁴ including the testing of products purchased online,¹⁷⁵ is crucial to enforcement.

As the UK has left the EU Single Market, it's now subject only to World Trade Organization (WTO) rules.

A fur import ban would be a trade restrictive measure. Article XX(a) of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) provides an exception to the GATT's trading rules for measures that are necessary to protect public morals, as long "*as such measures are not applied in a manner which would constitute a means of arbitrary or unjustifiable discrimination between countries where the same conditions prevail, or a disguised restriction on international trade*".¹⁷⁶

As the UK has no domestic fur production due to the Fur Farming (Prohibition) Act 2000,¹⁷⁷ the exemption could not be misconstrued as a means of restricting the domestic industry. However, the British public's significant moral opposition to the fur trade could easily be demonstrated using opinion polls conducted over several years, which show consistently high opposition to the fur trade.^{178, 179}

Reducing Cruelty Through Labelling

Fur sales and imports must be banned to ensure that the UK does not support the cruel fur industry. Alongside this, there should also be clear labelling provisions for all fur products entering the country during any phaseout period, which would entail customs ensuring that all fur products have clear, accurate labels.

Clear labelling would necessitate declaration of:

- the country of origin,
- the specific animal from which the fur is derived,
- whether the animals were farmed in wire cages or non-wire mesh, or caught through trapping, and
- whether those traps are permitted under UK laws.¹⁸⁰

Both the USA¹⁸¹ and Switzerland¹⁸² have clear labelling laws that serve as an example.

Clear labelling, including mandatory declarations of fibre content and country of origin, could be enacted through the Consumer Rights Act 2015,¹⁸³ which protects consumers when they buy goods or services, and enforced by the UK Border Force.

¹⁷² UK Parliament Hansard. Fur Trade. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2018-06-04/debates/8F9B6212-E631-4151-ABA7-AED8560CBBEB/FurTrade#debate-463481>

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9. CONCLUSION

As the global animal welfare organisation, FOUR PAWS is fundamentally opposed to the killing of animals for their fur. As shown in this report, the breeding of animals for their fur, as well as trapping them in the wild, to produce fashion or luxury items is cruel, unethical and unnecessary. The COVID-19 crisis has also highlighted the serious pandemic risks inherent in fur farming, for people and animals.

The past two years have shown that fur farms pose significant threats of zoonotic disease outbreaks, as conditions on fur farms, and fur trapping, create the dangerous and unsanitary conditions ideal for the emergence and spread of zoonoses. COVID-19 has resulted in the culling of millions of animals in the fur trade across fur farms in Europe and North America, and is continuing to spread to new fur farming regions.

This is not a trade that can be regulated or improved to meet public health standards. The fur trade is out of touch with modern consumer expectations, and no longer has a social licence to operate.

The fight to bring this horrendous industry to an end has been fought for decades and is increasingly gaining momentum, with most European countries banning fur farming and more joining the movement. US states and cities are enacting trade bans, and Israel was the first country in the world to ban fur sales. As of 6 January 2023, 1,034,432 European citizens had signed the European Citizens' Initiative calling for an EU-wide ban on the keeping and killing of animals for the sole purpose of fur production and the sale of fur products on the EU market.¹⁸⁴ FOUR PAWS is mobilising its supporters across Europe to act and join the fur free movement. Now that the petition has reached over one million signatures, the European Commission must respond and take action on the proposal.

British consumers have shown public support for an end to the sale of cruel fur products with over three-quarters (77%) calling for a fur import ban.¹¹⁸ This evolution of consumer behaviour has led to fur disappearing from both the highstreets and the catwalks. Hundreds of fashion brands have become Fur Free Retailers and joined the movement to end this trade. But sadly, consumers are still at risk of being misled into purchasing decisions that do not align with

their values, as demonstrated by repeated evidence of the mislabelling of fur products available for purchase within the UK.

20 years have now passed since the UK took a firm ethical stand against the fur industry by banning fur farming across the UK, and yet we continue to exercise a double standard by exporting our cruelty overseas and allowing fur to be imported and sold in the UK.

2023 must be the year the UK Government asserts its position as a global leader in animal welfare and enacts a nationwide ban on the import and sale of fur. For animal welfare, human health, and environmental wellbeing, we must end our association with this cruel and high-risk trade once and for all.

¹⁸⁴ https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative/initiatives/details/2022/000002_en; Leave Fur Behind <https://www.eurogroupforanimals.org/fur-free-europe>;



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