

P-05-901 Ban the Sale of Real Fur in Wales

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Research Briefing:

Petition number: P-05-901

Petition title: Ban the Sale of Real Fur in Wales

Text of petition: Farming animals for fur has been banned in the UK for over 16 years due to the cruelty involved. However, fur products are still legally imported from countries with little or no animal welfare laws.

Many animals are trapped in the wild using steel jaw leghold traps and have been known to chew off their own limbs in a frantic attempt to escape. Animals are also bred on fur farms usually in horrendous cramped conditions leading to severe mental trauma, skin sores and diseases.

Animals endure extreme pain and suffering, whether they are bred on fur farms or trapped in the wild. The fur industry is totally unethical, unnecessary and inhumane.

We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to ban the sale and import of real animal fur.

Background

There are no official statistics showing the number of animals killed for the fur trade. The [Humane Society International \(HSI\)](#) (which gave oral evidence to the EFRA Committee's 2018 [inquiry into the Fur Trade in the UK](#)) provides some [statistics on its website](#). It estimates that each year around one hundred million animals are bred and killed on intensive fur farms worldwide, specifically to supply the fashion industry:

- China (2014 stats): 60 million mink; 13 million foxes; and 14 million raccoon dogs were bred and killed on fur farms;
- European Union (*no date available*): 42.6 million mink; 2.7 million foxes; 155,000 raccoon dogs; and 206,000 chinchilla were killed for fur in the EU;

- Rabbits are also killed for fur in large but unknown numbers (likely hundreds of millions) in Europe and China; and
- In 2015, more than 4 million animals were killed for their fur in North America.

HSI say that, in addition to fur farming, large numbers of animals are trapped and killed for their fur in the wild. Most fur from wild-trapped animals comes from the USA, Canada and Russia. A number of countries have [banned fur farming](#).

Regulations and Guidance

In the EU, it is legal to import and sell fur from a range of species such as fox, rabbit, mink, coyote, racoon dog and chinchilla. EU regulations ban trade in fur from [domestic cats, dogs](#) or [commercial seal hunts](#).

EU Regulations

There are a number of EU Regulations related to fur importation, animal welfare of animals bred for fur, and animal slaughter.

[EU Council Regulation \(EEC\) No 3254/91](#) prohibits the importation of furs and fur products from some wild animal species originating in countries where they are caught by leg-hold traps or trapping methods that do not meet international standards of humane trapping. The control covers 13 species of fur-bearing animals and applies to their raw fur and products made from it. It does not apply to animals born and bred in captivity. Species include: badger, beaver, lynx, raccoon, otter and wolf.

[Directive 98/58/EC](#) is in place in the EU to ensure that animals bred for their fur are treated humanely. The rules include housing, freedom of movement, feeding and watering requirements, and staff qualifications. Special recommendations cover requirements for mink, ferret, fox and chinchilla, amongst others.

[Directive 93/119/EC](#) seeks to minimise the pain and suffering of animals during slaughter through the use of proper, approved stunning and killing methods.

UK Government Guidance

The UK Government has published [guidance on importing animal furs and skins into the UK](#).

According to the UK Government guidance, there are a number of animal fur goods that are exempt from UK import controls. These include:

- finished goods for personal and private use only;

- finished goods covered by a procedure for temporary admission and not for sale in the EU but intended for re-export; and
- pelts and goods manufactured in the EU and being reintroduced into the EU following a processing procedure – proof must be given that they were processed from pelts or goods previously exported from the EU.

The guidance contains a list of permitted animal fur imports by country.

Several UK government departments have responsibility for ensuring that work to ensure that animal fur and animal skins are imported legally. The UK Border Agency (UKBA) aims to ensure all imports of furs and fur and skin products are imported legally, and the Department for the Environment, Fisheries and Rural Affairs (Defra) has policy responsibility for controls on furs and fur and skin products and for policy implementation.

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)

The [Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora](#) (CITES) is an international agreement between governments. Its aim is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. CITES is an international agreement to which States and regional economic integration organisations adhere voluntarily. States that have agreed to be bound by the Convention are known as Parties. Although CITES is legally binding on the Parties – in other words they have to implement the Convention – it does not take the place of national laws. Rather it provides a framework to be respected by each Party, which has to adopt its own domestic legislation to ensure that CITES is implemented at the national level. The UK has been a Party to CITES since 1976.

House of Commons

On 4 June 2019 the House of Commons [debated banning fur trade in the UK](#). The debate was [based on a petition](#) that had received over 109,000 signatures. Although fur farming was banned across the UK by 2002, fur can still be legally imported under current EU Regulations. Members of Parliament widely supported the proposal for a UK ban, and asked the UK Government to use Brexit as an opportunity to introduce stricter Regulations on fur imports. The then Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, George Eustice responded that the UK market share was too small to justify a trade ban as an efficient means to improve animal welfare.

In 2018, the House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Committee undertook an inquiry into the [Fur Trade in the UK](#). The inquiry looked into:

- The size of the UK fur trade;
- The effectiveness of the current law with regards to animal fur;
- Whether the legislation is sufficiently enforced;
- What improvements could be made to the current labelling of fur products and fake fur products;
- What improvements should be made to the regulation of the fur industry; and
- The opportunities offered by Brexit to change current legislation.

The Committee's key recommendations and conclusions focused on the mis-selling and accidental selling of real fur as fake fur, and the need for retailers to take responsibility for ensuring they are selling items as described. It also said that the current EU labelling regime for fur lacks clarity, and does not specifically identify when a product contains real animal fur. It recommended that the UK Government should hold a public consultation to consider whether to ban the sale and import of fur post-Brexit. It suggested that the Government will have to balance the needs of animal welfare against consumer choice. On the issue of a consultation, the [UK Government said](#):

The Government shares the British public's high regard for animal welfare and, after we leave the EU, the Government plans to retain our current regulations banning the import of fur from domestic cats, dogs or commercial seal hunts.

Fur farming was banned in the UK in 2000. Fur farming is legal in other EU countries, and whilst rules are in place to ensure that animals kept for fur production in the EU are kept, trapped and killed humanely the Government has supported higher animal welfare standards worldwide to phase out fur farming and trapping practices in other parts of the world that are banned here. After EU exit once the UK assumes an independent seat on international bodies such as CITES and OIE we will have an opportunity to promote further our high standards in these international fora.

While the UK is a member of the EU it is not possible to introduce restrictions relating to the fur trade which are inconsistent with the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU and which impair the free movement of goods within the EU single market. There will be an opportunity for government in the future, once we have left the EU and the nature of our future trading relationship has been established, to consider further steps such as a ban on fur imports or a ban on sales. In the interim the government considers that the transparency of information provided to consumers is key.

FURMARK

The Committee has received a letter from the [British Fur Trade Association](#), which sets out the role of the fur trade in driving up animal welfare standards in the UK and internationally, and highlights that implementing a ban would damage animal welfare standards. It sets out that "the fur industry is committed to the highest possible standards around animal welfare,

environmental protection, and sustainability”. It says the industry will shortly launch and roll out FURMARK, an international mark intended to guarantee standards in these areas across the supply chain, including at the point of sale:

The FURMARK certification programmes are based on independent scientific and veterinary advice and best practice: importantly, the verification of each scheme will be conducted by independent third parties [...] With the introduction of FURMARK the five major global auction houses are committed to selling certified farm-raised and wild fur from 2020. Ultimately FURMARK enables retailers, brands and consumers to have complete assurance and confidence when buying natural fur.

Welsh Government action

In her letter to the Committee, the Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths AM, says that banning the sale and import of real animal fur in Wales is a complex matter which includes devolved and non-devolved powers, and is dependent on EU law. She says that any legislation in this area is heavily dependent on the UK’s future relationship with the EU.

She sets out the Welsh Government’s position on the issue:

We currently support the UK Government’s position which states while some fur products may never be legally imported into the UK, national bans are less effective than working at an international level on animal welfare standards.

The Minister outlines international efforts to bring about higher standards, supported by EU rules and regulations around fur imports:

- Regulations including a blanket ban on importing furs from a number of animals, including cats and dogs, as well as most seal skins and products;
- Regulations which ensure any fur imported into the UK comes from animals which have been treated, trapped and killed humanely; and
- The [Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species \(CITES\)](#) which control the fur from endangered species.

She concludes by saying that the UK Government has previously stated it will ensure these controls are not removed once the UK leaves the EU.

National Assembly for Wales action

In February 2017, Paul Davies AM asked the then Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths AM, to [make a statement on the Welsh Government’s position in relation to the selling of animal furs in Wales](#). In response the Cabinet Secretary said:

Fur Farming was banned by the UK Government in England and Wales on ethical grounds in 2000. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) regulates the

import, re-export, sale or movement of endangered wild animals or their parts and aims to ensure international trade in wild animals species does not threaten their survival.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.