



**HUMANE SOCIETY  
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# **THE CASE FOR A BAN ON THE UK FUR TRADE**





**MORE THAN 100 MILLION ANIMALS DIE FOR THEIR FUR EACH YEAR, THE MAJORITY SUFFERING IN TINY BATTERY CAGES.**

## FUR FARMING: NOT IN BRITAIN'S BACKYARD

The fur trade is responsible for the suffering and death of more than 100 million animals each year, covering a range of species including fox, chinchilla, mink, raccoon dogs and rabbits. The majority of this fur, around 85%, is produced by intensively farming animals in battery-cage systems, the remainder is from wild animals caught in traps.

Fur farming was banned by Acts of Parliament in England and Wales in 2000, and Scotland and Northern Ireland in 2002.<sup>1</sup> The UK bans were advanced on the grounds that farming and killing animals specifically for their fur is unethical, and at odds with public morality. The UK Minister, in introducing the Bill, described fur farming as 'not consistent with a proper value and respect for animal life.'<sup>2</sup> 1. This commendable sentiment marked the first fur farming ban in the world, setting a precedent that to date 12 countries have followed.<sup>3</sup>

The decision for a ban was informed by years of evidence gathering and deliberation, including the influential opinion of the UK's Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC), which found that fur farms could not satisfy some of the most basic needs of the (wild) animals kept in them, in particular freedom to display normal patterns of behaviour. FAWC refused to issue guidelines, on the basis that it was not possible to safeguard the welfare of animals kept on fur farms.<sup>4</sup>

## THE UK FUR TRADE: OUTSOURCING ANIMAL SUFFERING

Despite the UK's clear ethical stand against the fur trade, HMRC reports show that since banning fur farming the UK has imported more than £670 million of animal fur from animals farmed and trapped overseas.<sup>5</sup> The top five countries exporting fur to the UK are (in order) Italy, France, Poland, China and Russia, although we strongly suspect that the trade in animal fur from China is significantly higher than that which is reported, since a considerable amount of cheap, real fur-containing items carrying labels 'made in China/PRC' are sold as fake fur.

Animal welfare conditions on fur farms in overseas trading nations are as bad as – or worse than – the fur farms we banned here in the UK. The 'best' conditions an animal on a fur farm can expect are to:

- be kept for its whole life in a wire floored cage hundreds of thousands of times smaller than its natural territory;
- be denied its most basic behavioural needs such as hunting and, in the case of mink, swimming, and exist without any meaningful stimulation;
- endure the stress of being kept in unnatural social groups, e.g. mink are naturally solitary animals
- be killed by gassing or electrocution.

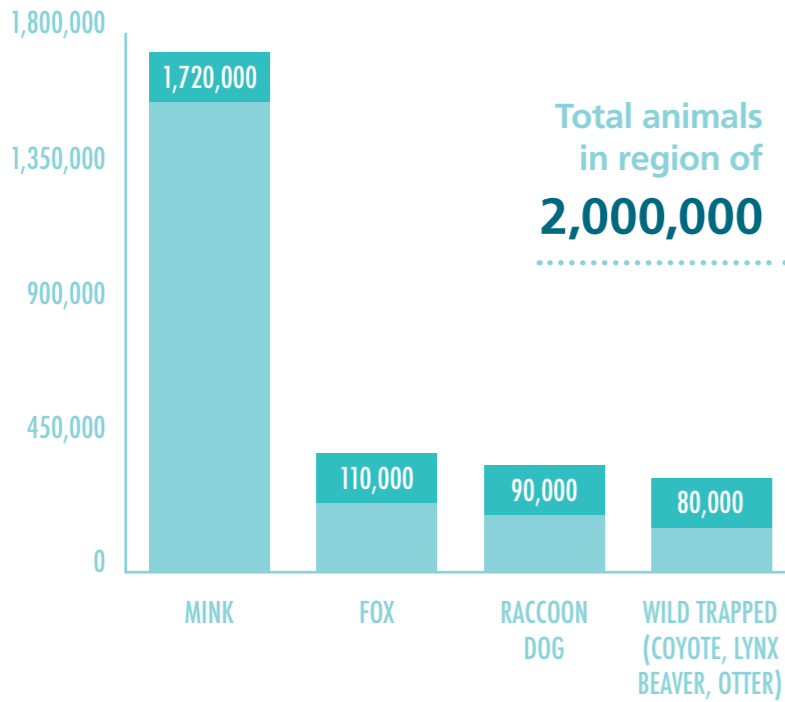
The worst conditions, which have been extensively documented in numerous investigations in many countries, lead animals to experience and suffer:

- stereotypical behaviours indicative of poor psychological well-being;
- cannibalism and infanticide;
- untreated wounds, deformities and injuries, including those caused by cage-mates and the wire cage itself;
- animals who have been selectively bred to grow to unnaturally large sizes, carrying excessive folds of skin, which 'yield' more fur. The so-called 'monster foxes' on farms in Finland can barely move, see or breathe;
- being brutally beaten and stamped to death, and sometimes even skinned alive.

Alternatively, wild animals are caught in maiming traps for hours or even days before they're put out of their misery. Typical traps used by the fur trade include the leg-hold trap, which was banned in the UK in 1954.

## SCALE OF THE UK'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE GLOBAL FUR TRADE:

A PROVISIONAL ESTIMATE OF THE NUMBER OF ANIMAL SKINS IMPORTED INTO THE UK (2016)



Over 135 million animals are reported to have been killed for their fur globally in 2015, the top three species being mink (97.7 million), fox (17.4 million), and raccoon dog (16.3 million). 5 million animals were reported wild caught for the fur trade, including coyote, lynx, beaver and otter. In 2016 the value of fur imported into the UK was £55.6 million. Applying the above species proportions for the most significantly traded species, combined with average pelt prices taken from European and the north American fur auction houses, we have produced an indication of the scale of furskins (whole animal furs) being imported into UK annually. This estimate is heavily caveated with the significant assumptions that UK imports are a microcosm of global trade proportions by species, and that average prices obtained from Europe and north American are broadly reflective of trade from Asia and other parts of the world.

## CAGED CRUELTY

In the UK, and around the world, the animal agriculture sector is consciously moving on from the 'cage-age', banning battery cages for chickens and other intensive confinement systems such as sow stalls. The fur trade, by comparison, appears entirely immune to the now unequivocal scientific evidence that such systems are inherently inhumane, and attempts to deflect criticisms with marketing propaganda masquerading as 'welfare assurance' schemes. Such schemes do not provide the animals in their care with 'a life worth living' and, frequently, are shown in investigations not to be enforced (see briefing paper 2).



be defined as 'humane', pointing out that killing traps should render an animal insensible to pain instantaneously, or within a few seconds, and that the Agreement instead sets a maximum time to insensibility of 5 minutes. The Committee also rejected the approval of drowning traps for beavers as 'humane'.

The EU ratified the agreement in 1998 with intent to enter into force in 2008 but to date no European countries are known to have implemented the agreement into national legislation. A proposed EU Directive to promote the harmonised implementation of the Agreement was rejected at its first Parliamentary reading with the reason that '...the proposal was not based on the latest available science.'<sup>6</sup>

Supported by widespread veterinary opinion we continue to conclude that the welfare provisions of the AIHTS are insufficient and it is not an appropriate mechanism by which to assure the welfare of wild-caught animals.

## Welfare of wild-trapped animals in the fur trade

The 1997 Agreement on International Humane Trapping Standards (AIHTS) was brokered in 1997 in response to the EU's proposed trade embargo on fur from wild animals caught using leg-hold traps. It applies only to a list of species commonly caught in the wild for their fur. At the time of the negotiation of the Agreement, the Scientific and Veterinary Committee of the European Commission commented that the standards indicated in the text could not



While animal agriculture is moving away from the 'cage-age', the fur trade refuses to acknowledge that the intensive confinement of animals is now morally indefensible.



## THE OPPORTUNITY FOR A FUR FREE BRITAIN

Current EU law already bans trade in fur from domestic cats and dogs, and fur from commercial seal slaughter,<sup>7</sup> and we welcome Minister of State for Defra George Eustice's statement that: "after we leave the EU the Government plans to retain the current regulations banning the import of cat and dog fur and products, and the regulations concerning seal skins and products."<sup>8</sup>

But opinion polls show that the majority of the British public oppose all fur regardless of species. For example, only 9% of people consider it acceptable to buy and sell cat fur in the UK, while the exact same small percentage considers it acceptable to buy and sell chinchilla fur; at present one is legal and one is not<sup>9</sup>. Brexit could give the government the freedom to reflect the public's distaste for all fur and eliminate the inequitable and illogical protections for some species and not others.

We welcome the recent statement by Secretary of State for Environment, Michael Gove, that: "[the] Government is committed to the very highest standards of animal welfare.' coupled with a commitment to "make the United Kingdom a world leader in the care and protection of animals."<sup>10</sup> The UK could realise this ambition by being the first country taking a moral stand against the fur trade, showing that we will not trade in animals or animal products that fail to meet our own national welfare standards. Brexit must be used as an opportunity to protect and enhance animal welfare standards, not outsource cruelty overseas.

“...we do not wish to see produce or animals coming into this country that are not looked after to the same standards that we would expect from our own farmers and producers. Lord Gardiner of Kimble, 24th October, 2017<sup>11</sup>”



## Public support for a fur ban

A February 2018 YouGov poll, commissioned by HSI UK, revealed that more than two thirds (69%) of the British public would support a ban on the import and sale of all animal fur in the UK. Labour voters showed the strongest support, with 78% in favour of a ban, but the poll reveals that a significant majority of Conservative voters (64%) are also supportive of a fur import and sales ban.<sup>12</sup>

Parliamentary petition 200888, calling for a ban on the sale of animal fur in the UK, closed on 23rd March 2018 with 109,549 signatures, and a further 316,285 signatures in support of a ban were delivered to Prime Minister Theresa May on 26th March 2018.<sup>13</sup> In February over 30 high profile celebrities including Dame Judi Dench, Ricky Gervais and Joanna Lumley also wrote publicly to the Prime Minister expressing their support for a fur import and sales ban.<sup>14</sup>

## WTO compliance of a fur import and marketing ban



Since a fur import ban would be a trade-restrictive measure, and therefore subject to World Trade Organisation scrutiny, the UK would be required to prove that it was consistent with obligations under the WTO. Article XX(a) of the GATT provides an exception to the GATT's trading rules for measures that are necessary to protect public morals, as long as such restrictions are not made arbitrarily or

unjustifiably resulting in discrimination amounting to disguised restrictions on the international trade. In a landmark 2014 Panel Report that dealt with the permissibility of the EU ban on the placing on the market of seal products, the WTO recognised that public moral concerns regarding animal welfare are a legitimate reason to justify trade-restrictive measures.

The Article XX chapeau attempts to protect in part against countries using the exception as a means to protect domestic industry. However, a UK fur import ban could not be viewed as a protectionist measure, since the UK has no domestic fur production. The British public's significant moral opposition to the fur trade could be amply demonstrated using opinion polls over several decades, which show consistently high opposition to the fur trade.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Government's written response to Petition 200888, which calls for a ban on the sale of animal fur, states: 'Regarding the fur industry specifically, we are working at an international level to agree global animal welfare standards and phase out cruel and inhumane farming and trapping practices.' In the context of the fur trade, phasing out 'cruel and inhumane farming and trapping practices' is only achievable through the phase out of the industry itself.

The government further states that 'there are regulations that ensure any fur that can be imported into the UK comes from animals that have kept been treated, trapped and killed humanely.' We respectfully observe, supported by a considerable body of evidence, that this is simply

not the case, nor is it possible – given that suffering is pervasive throughout the fur trade – for government to achieve this goal. We believe the UK government can and should go further, taking a strong, symbolic and meaningful stand against the fur trade in line with public beliefs.

Given the scenario of the UK leaving the Single Market and reverting to WTO rules we would recommend that the UK government:

- Ensures that existing fur trade bans for cat, dog and seal fur are transposed into UK law post-Brexit.
- Implements a UK-wide ban on the commercial import, and placing on the market, of all animal fur products, with a reasonable phase out period to allow business using animal fur to transition to alternative materials.

## Trade and industry saying 'no' to animal fur

In 2017 the government of India introduced a ban on the import of mink, fox and chinchilla furskins, and import and sales bans are in place in the cities of Sao Paulo in Brazil, and West Hollywood and Berkeley in the United States.

In March 2018 San Francisco became the largest city to ban the sale and marketing of fur. The city's ban, which will go into effect in January 2019, pending the mayor's approval, states that the "sale of fur products in San Francisco is inconsistent with the City's ethos of treating all living beings, humans and animals alike, with kindness."

2017 and 2018 have seen a succession of high-profile fashion designers adopting fur-free policies, including Gucci, Yoox Net a Porter, Michael Kors and most recently Versace. The vast majority of UK highstreet stores are fur-free and the global Fur Free Retailer<sup>15</sup> programme now has over 850 brands signed up, reflecting the growing public distaste for animal fur. The expanding range of high quality synthetic animal furs means that people whose businesses currently focus on animal fur have the option of transitioning humane, sustainable alternatives.<sup>16</sup>



“ I don't think [using fur is] still modern and that's the reason why we decided not to do that. It's a little bit out-dated. ”

Marco Bizzarri, Gucci's CEO, October 2017

“ I don't want to kill animals to make fashion. It doesn't feel right. ”

Donatella Versace, March 2018

## REFERENCES

- 1 UK: [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/33](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/33); Scotland: [www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2002/10](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2002/10); Northern Ireland: [www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/2002/3151/made](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/2002/3151/made)
- 2 Elliot Morley, Hansard (15 May 2000) (London: HMSO, 2000) Vol. 350, No. 99, p. 76;
- 3 Austria, Netherlands, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovnia, Serbia, Republic of Macedonia, Czech Republic all have full fur farming bans. Belgium, Denmark and Hungary all adopted partial bans and in 2017 Germany enhanced its fur farming regulations (e.g. requiring the availability of water for swimming, for mink) to the point that raising animals for fur on the six remaining mink farms will no longer be viable.
- 4 'Farm Animal Welfare Council Disapproves of Mink and Fox farming', Press Notice, 4 April 1989, p. 1.
- 5 All data taken from HMRC on 13th April 2018. <https://www.uktradeinfo.com/Statistics/BuildYourOwnTables/Pages/Table.aspx> Codes included: 43 - Furskins and artificial fur; articles thereof (with exception of 4304 - Artificial fur and articles thereof (excl. gloves made of leather and artificial fur, footwear and headgear and parts thereof) 650692 - Headgear of furskin, whether or not lined or trimmed (excl. toy and carnival headgear)
- 6 [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/biodiversity/animal\\_welfare/hts/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/biodiversity/animal_welfare/hts/index_en.htm)
- 7 Regulation (EC) No 1523/2007 bans the placing on the market, and the import to or export from the Union, of cat and dog fur and products containing such fur, and Regulation (EC) No 1007/2009 bans the trade in commercial seal products in the European Union.
- 8 Response to Written Question 122038 (Caroline Lucas, 10/02/2018)
- 9 1. YouGov opinion poll commissioned by HSI/UK. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2051 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 9th and 12th September 2016. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+). The poll listed nine species, including domestic dog, mink, seal, fox and rabbit, and asked people whether or not they found it acceptable for fur from these animals to be bought and sold in the UK. Results reveal that less than 10 per cent of people feel it is acceptable to be able to buy and sell products containing domestic dog fur (7 per cent), seal fur (8 per cent), and cat fur (9 per cent), respectively, and indeed such imports are banned by law. But critically the poll also shows similar distaste for fur items from other species that can still be legally sold here - only between 8 and 12 per cent of people said that they found it acceptable to buy or sell fur from foxes (12 per cent), mink (12 per cent), chinchilla (9 per cent), raccoon dogs (8 per cent) and coyotes (8 per cent) (the last of which are not farmed, but wild-trapped). Rabbit fur had the highest approval rating, but is still only acceptable to one in five people despite being one of the most commonly found fur trim items on the high-street.
- 10 Written statement to House of Commons by Michael Gove, 23rd November 2017. <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2017-11-23/HCWS267/>
- 11 <http://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2017-10-24/debates/C8843B8B-C30E-46D1-8E53-3DB4570243BE/AnimalWelfareOffences>  
column 838
- 12 All figures from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1,594 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 1st - 2nd February 2018. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).
- 13 <http://metro.co.uk/2018/03/26/queens-brian-may-delivers-peta-petition-10-downing-street-calling-import-ban-fur-7417999/>
- 14 <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/judi-dench-ricky-gervais-among-12175667>
- 15 <https://furfreeretailer.com/>
- 16 <https://thesustainableangle.org/future-fabrics/>



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