



**HUMANE SOCIETY  
INTERNATIONAL**  
UNITED KINGDOM



14 October 2021

The Right Honourable Boris Johnson MP  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London  
SW1A 2AA

cc: Mr Jonathan Black, UK G20 Sherpa, Cabinet Office, 70 Whitehall, London, SW1A 2AS

cc: Rt Hon Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park, Minister of State at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Seacole Building, 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF

Re. Addressing COVID-19 risks posed by fur farming at G20 summit

Dear Prime Minister

On behalf of Humane Society International/UK and FOUR PAWS UK we are writing with regard to the upcoming G20 summit in Rome. In view of the ongoing threat posed to both public health and the global economy by COVID-19, we urge the UK government to take action to eliminate the potential coronavirus reservoirs posed by fur farms.

- Since April 2020, the SARS-CoV-2 virus has been detected on more than 440 mink fur farms across twelve countries in Europe and North America.
- Transmission routes from humans to farmed mink, mink to mink, and also from farmed mink to humans have all been recorded, with spillover transmission to humans reported in the Netherlands, Denmark, Poland, Sweden, and potentially also in the United States<sup>1,2</sup>.
- As a result of public health concerns, around twenty million mink have been culled under governmental order, and mink breeding has been suspended in four countries for the duration of 2021. Further, Denmark has recently announced it will extend its mink keeping ban for another year, until the end of 2022, after advice from its public health body stated that “keeping mink in Denmark after 2021 may pose a health risk to people of unknown size.”<sup>3,4</sup>
- The Tripartite’s GLEWS+ Risk Assessment declared fur farming to be a high risk in Europe in all three areas assessed: the risk of introduction and spread of SARS-CoV-2 within fur farms, the spillover from fur farm to humans and the transmission of SARS-CoV-2 from fur farm animals to susceptible wildlife populations.<sup>5</sup>
- The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) ad hoc Group on COVID-19 and safe trade in animals and animal products has concluded that raw mink skins cannot be considered as a safe commodity for international trade.<sup>6</sup>

**Nonetheless, mink farming continues unabated in the majority of countries where the practice is still legal, the trade in raw mink skins continues globally without restriction, and multiple outbreaks of SARS-CoV-2 continue to be recorded on mink farms.**

Only last week, Spain recorded yet another outbreak of SARS-CoV-2 on a mink farm in Galicia, a region where more than 50% of mink farms have been infected in recent months. In August 2021, Spain's Ministry of Health issued new guidance advising double-vaccinated people who have come into contact with a COVID-19 positive person to undertake mandatory quarantine in cases where transmission from mink is suspected<sup>7</sup>, due to "the risk of possible mutations that are more transmissible associated with minks"<sup>8</sup>.

A scientific paper by Pomorska-Mól et al, published in July 2021, states that "The scale of infection in minks on mink farms is worrying, mainly because of the ability of the virus to pass through a large population of highly susceptible animals, potentially allowing the emergence of new, dangerous mutations and/or the acquisition of new biological properties". In conclusion, the researchers states "minks farms could represent a possibly dangerous, not always recognized, animal reservoir for SARS-CoV-2."<sup>9</sup>

**The question that the UK government and other world leaders should be asking is whether the continued existence of fur farms, which can act as coronavirus reservoirs, poses an acceptable or avoidable risk to public health, as well as to the broader economy?**

There has never been a more urgent need to end the practice fur farming worldwide, an industry that not only treats animals inhumanely for a product no-one needs, but has also been shown to provide an opportunity for zoonotic spillover of COVID-19 from farmed mink to humans, create conditions for a potential animal reservoir of COVID-19, and may also be the breeding ground for future outbreaks of new emerging diseases.

**Fur farming is a ticking time bomb, it is time to act to end this cruel and deadly industry for good.**

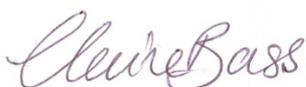
To that end, we call on the UK government to raise our concerns ahead of the Summit and to negotiate a commitment by the G20 leaders to take action to eliminate the practice of fur farming as one of the strategies needed to bring the COVID-19 pandemic to an end.

We and our partners in the Fur Free Alliance have gathered more that 750,000 signatures on our international ["Stop Deadly Fur" petition](#).

Together, we urge G20 leaders at the Rome summit to heed the OIE findings and, as a matter of urgency, support an immediate halt to all global trade in raw mink skins and make a commitment to assist countries around the globe to phase-out the industrialised farming of animals for their fur at the earliest possible opportunity.

We attach a [White Paper on Fur Farming, COVID-19 and Zoonotic Disease Risks](#) which provides a detailed analysis of outbreaks of SARS-CoV-2 on fur farms in Europe and North America.<sup>10</sup> We trust it is of interest, we would be pleased to have a phone or video call with your teams to discuss it further.

Yours sincerely



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<sup>1</sup> CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/animals.html> & OIE: <https://www.oie.int/app/uploads/2021/06/en-oie-guidance-farmed-animals-.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Surveillance of infectious diseases in animals and humans in Sweden 2020. <https://www.sva.se/media/8d93fbc7f66d298/surveillance-of-infectious-diseases-in-animals-and-humans-in-sweden-2020.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.altinget.dk/artikel/ssi-fastholder-vurdering-der-er-stadig-en-sundhedsrisiko-ved-minkavl-i-danmark>

<sup>4</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/tris/en/search/?trisaaction=search.detail&year=2021&num=639&mlang=en&CFID=3377979&CFTOKEN=41380270ae69edfb-72243980-08FE-227A-84F4BD0EAFB9E0C7>

<sup>5</sup> SARS-CoV-2 in animals used for fur farming: GLEWS+ risk assessment, 20 January 2021. World Health Organization, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations & World Organisation for Animal Health. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-fur-farming-risk-assessment-2021.1>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.oie.int/app/uploads/2021/04/a-ahg-report-covid19-dec2020-feb2021.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.mscbs.gob.es/profesionales/saludPublica/ccayes/alertasActual/nCov/documentos/COVID19\\_Estrategia\\_vigilancia\\_y\\_control\\_e\\_indicadores.pdf](https://www.mscbs.gob.es/profesionales/saludPublica/ccayes/alertasActual/nCov/documentos/COVID19_Estrategia_vigilancia_y_control_e_indicadores.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.publico.es/sociedad/sanidad-vincula-vision-mutaciones-covid-19-supercontagiosas-personas.html>

<sup>9</sup> Review: SARS-CoV-2 infection in farmed minks – an overview of current knowledge on occurrence, disease and epidemiology <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1751731121001142#b0055>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.hsi.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/White-paper-on-fur-production-and-zoonotic-disease-FINAL-8Oct2021.pdf>