

Rt. Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Nobel House
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cc: George Eustice MP, Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

EFRA Committee members: Neil Parish MP (Chair), Alan Brown MP, Paul Flynn MP, John Grogan MP, Dr Caroline Johnson MP, Kerry McCarthy MP, Sandy Martin MP, Sheryll Murray MP, David Simpson MP, Angela Smith MP, Julian Sturdy MP.

Petitions Committee members: Helen Jones MP (Chair), Martyn Day MP, Michelle Donelan MP, Steve Double MP, Luke Hall MP, Mike Hill MP, Catherine McKinnell MP, Damien Moore MP, Paul Scully MP, Liz Twist MP, Daniel Zeichner MP.

25th May 2018

Dear Secretary of State

Fur farming and animal welfare concerns

As veterinary surgeons and animal behaviourists we want to express our concern at the severe animal welfare deficiencies inherent to the fur trade. Both public opinion and scientific studies acknowledge that each mammal is a sentient individual. Every dog, cat, horse, fox or any other mammal has an inner emotional life. We understand this through our interactions with both wild and domesticated animals.

More than 100 million animals, including foxes, chinchillas, minks, raccoon dogs and rabbits, are killed for their skin and fur every year, the majority (around 85%) are raised intensively in battery-cage farm systems that fail to satisfy some of their most basic needs, particularly their need to display normal behaviours essential for mental and physical well-being.

Investigations on fur farms worldwide reveal worrying, even distressing evidence of persistently poor welfare conditions. Wild species such as fox and mink retain their basic wild needs regardless of being bred and kept in captivity. It is inaccurate, for example, to refer to an arctic fox bred on a fur farm as a 'domesticated' animal that has different environmental and behavioural needs to its wild relatives.

Wild animals on fur farms live their lives in wire-floored cages thousands of times smaller than their natural territories. They are denied their biological inheritance to exhibit natural behaviours and stimulations such as hunting, digging and swimming. And they can be kept in what is for them unnatural social groups. For example naturally solitary mink are compelled to live in very close proximity to each other. These features of fur farms can inevitably lead to psychological stresses.

Instances of stereotypical behaviour, a sign of compromised psychological well-being, have been well documented on fur farms, as has cannibalism, untreated wounds, foot deformities and eye infections.

We note that over the years the fur industry has developed and promoted various welfare certification schemes. Most schemes require no more than what is locally, legally required. Almost 20 years ago, a Council of Europe Recommendation recognised the inherent welfare problems of battery cage fur farm systems, and urged that housing systems should be developed that allow animals to fulfil their biological needs, for example mink to access water for swimming, and foxes to be able to climb and dig as well as fulfil other 'exploratory, territorial and social behaviour'. None of these natural behaviours are possible to any meaningful extent on typical fur farms, and such a barren and unnaturally limited environment can never be conducive to basic wellbeing. The presence of a single bone or section of plastic tube in an otherwise empty cage does not constitute sufficient or meaningful environmental enrichment.

There is a strong understanding of this in the United Kingdom, which is why it is now over 15 years since we banned fur farming in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, on the grounds that farming and killing animals specifically for their skin and fur is unethical. Evidence today from investigations of fur farms in many European countries and elsewhere including China shows that these welfare concerns outside the United Kingdom remain unresolved. In fact, conditions in overseas fur farms are so inhumane that Humane Society International UK is calling for a ban on fur imports, arguing that their purchase makes us party to the cruelty.

Yours sincerely

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20. Luke Gamble MRCVS, World Veterinary Service CEO
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