



**HUMANE SOCIETY
INTERNATIONAL**
UNITED KINGDOM

FUR FREE BRITAIN CAMPAIGN POLITICAL BRIEF

THE CASE FOR BANNING FUR IMPORTS AND SALES ACROSS THE UK



Each year tens of millions of animals, such as foxes, mink and raccoon dogs, are cruelly exploited and brutally killed around the world — all for the sake of a frivolous fashion product no-one needs.

THE UK'S ROLE IN THE GLOBAL FUR TRADE

Despite fur farming being banned across the UK since 2002, HMRC reports UK imports of around £30-£40 million of fur each year—**we estimate this equates to around one million animals being killed to be traded in the UK annually.** By continuing to allow the sale of fur, the UK is outsourcing overseas the very same animal cruelty and suffering we rightly banned here nearly two decades ago. If the UK believes that fur farming is too cruel to be allowed here then, logically, it is too cruel to sell fur here.

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS HUMANE FUR FARMING

The severity of suffering on fur farms is unimaginable. While other segments of animal agriculture, such as the egg industry, are shifting away from intensive farming, the fur trade remains completely reliant on, and unapologetic for, the intensive confinement of animals in cages.

Tens of millions of animals are incarcerated for their whole lives in barren wire cages, typically only slightly larger than the size of the animals themselves, and denied the ability to act out their most basic natural behaviours such as running, digging or, for mink, accessing water for swimming and hunting for food. Once their pelts are ready, at around eight months of age, they are gassed or anally electrocuted. Our investigations repeatedly show that these caged wild animals experience extreme physical and mental suffering, often resorting to self-mutilation and cannibalism.

The 'assurance schemes' of so-called 'high-welfare' fur farming promoted by the fur industry have been repeatedly and extensively proven not to provide animals with a life worth living. As well as putting in place wholly inadequate welfare measures, these voluntary schemes are run, funded and audited by the fur industry and its affiliates. Further, the schemes do not cover all farms, all countries, nor all animals raised for their fur.

CONSUMERS AND RETAILERS DO NOT WANT ANIMAL FUR PRODUCTS

Our Fur Free Britain petition, calling for a ban on fur sales, stands at over 1,250,000 signatures, and counting.

A 2023 poll showed that 77% of UK voters believe that when a type of farming is banned in the UK for being too cruel we should also ban imports of products produced the same way overseas.¹

A 2020 YouGov poll found that the vast majority (93%) of the British public reject wearing real animal fur, while only 3% wear it. The same poll found that the words 79% of people most closely associate with a fashion brand selling fur are "unethical", "outdated", "cruel" and "out of touch".

Almost all UK high street stores are now fur-free, and the Fur Free Retailer programme has over 1,500 brands signed up, highlighting the growing public and corporate distaste for animal fur. An ever-growing list of high-profile luxury retailers and fashion designers have also adopted fur-free policies, including Prada, Gucci, Burberry, Chanel and Versace. Even Canada Goose, once well-known for its coyote fur trimmed coat hoods, has stepped away from using real fur. A ban on fur imports and sales would have a negligible impact on the British fashion sector, or consumers.

The fur industry is in terminal decline but a ban is needed to expedite its cessation in order to protect both animal welfare and public health.

By allowing the sale of animal fur, the UK is complicit in the fur industry's outmoded approach to animal husbandry and welfare.

CASE STUDY

AB 44: CALIFORNIA FUR BAN

In 2023, California became the first US state to ban the cruel and unnecessary fur trade within its borders. Assembly Bill 44 makes it unlawful to sell or manufacture a new fur product in the state, with exemptions for used fur and fur used for religious reasons.

Polling revealed that 71% of Californians supported a ban on the sale of fur products in the state. To date, more than a dozen US cities and towns have adopted similar legislation, with others set to follow suit. In 2021 Israel introduced a ban on the sale of fur and politicians in Switzerland are considering introducing a fur import ban.

The California ban has shut down the second largest fur market in the US. It is an important precedent, offering a model and encouragement for the UK to become the first country to enact a full ban on fur imports and sales.



In addition to causing immense animal suffering, fur production is resource intensive, environmentally damaging, and poses a serious zoonotic disease public health risk.

FUR FARMING IS A THREAT TO PUBLIC HEALTH

Hundreds of outbreaks of SARS-CoV-2 and Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) on fur farms in recent years have highlighted the threat this industry poses to public health. SARS-CoV-2 has been shown to transmit to and mutate between farmed mink, with many instances of the virus being passed from farmed mink to humans. Although millions of animals were killed and fur farming was shut down in several countries due to public health concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic, the practice has been allowed to continue.

Scientists have also raised the alarm about outbreaks of HPAI on fur farms in Spain and Finland where around 500,000 animals, including mink, foxes, raccoon dogs and sable, have been ordered to be killed on public health grounds. Leading UK-based virologists have warned that fur farming should be considered in the same risk level category as the bushmeat trade and live animal markets, all of which increase the likelihood of future pandemics. They are calling on governments to consider the mounting evidence suggesting that fur farming be eliminated in the interest of pandemic preparedness³.

FUR INDUSTRY GREEN-WASHING

The fur industry has invested heavily in a disingenuous campaign to present fur as 'eco-friendly', set against faux fur as a plastic product.

Claims that animal fur is in any way environmentally sound or 'natural' withstand no scrutiny as the carbon footprint of animal fur has been shown to be much higher than other textiles⁴. The intensive farming of carnivorous wild animals has a very large climate footprint; the production of 1kg of mink fur releases 7 times more emissions than are created producing 1kg of beef. A staggering 563kg of meat feed is required to produce just 1kg of mink fur. A cocktail of toxic and carcinogenic chemicals is also used dye the fur and to

stop the fur skin from decomposing as it would do in the wild. Faux fur has rapidly developed in recent years with companies, including DuPont and Ecopel, driving innovation in textile technology by using recycled polyester and plant-based, biodegradable materials. Leading British designers such as Stella McCartney, Jakke and Shrimps are harnessing these new fabrics, putting British faux fur fashion firmly on the global map.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Because real fur can now be produced and sold more cheaply than faux fur, consumers face the problem of 'fake faux fur'. HSI/UK and media partners including Sky News and the BBC have documented hundreds of cases of retailers selling real fur items described as faux fur. This was the subject of an Environment Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Select Committee Inquiry in 2018 and, acting on our evidence, both Trading Standards and the Advertising Standards Authority have taken action, but the problem still exists. Shoppers wanting to avoid the cruelty of animal fur cannot do so with confidence in the UK. A fur sales ban would create greater penalties and disincentive to retailers mis-selling real fur as faux.

UK REGULATORY LANDSCAPE AND GOVERNMENT ACTION SO FAR

The UK was the first country in the world to ban fur farming. The then Labour Government ended the practice in England and Wales in 2000, legislation followed in Scotland and Northern Ireland in 2022. Since then, 20 European countries have followed the example set by the UK and outlawed the practice.

Current UK law bans the trade in domestic cat and dog fur, and fur from commercial seal slaughter, but otherwise allows for the import and sale of animal fur from a range of species. Polling shows that the public hold little distinction between species and find the buying and selling of fur from any animal unacceptable.

The 2018 EFRA Select Committee inquiry into the UK fur trade made a recommendation to the Government to launch a public consultation on a fur import ban.⁵ The then Conservative Government committed to 'explore action' on the UK fur trade and issued a Call for Evidence in May 2021. This received almost 30,000 responses of which over 96% strongly agreed that it is wrong for animals to be killed for their fur. The full findings are yet to be published. A fur import ban was reported to be included in the Government's 'Animals Abroad Bill', which was subsequently rejected by a minority of Cabinet Ministers.

In July 2023 the Government instructed its Animal Welfare Committee to conduct a review into the 'responsible sourcing of fur' during 2024.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE UK GOVERNMENT

1. Publish the findings of Defra's 2021 Call for Evidence on fur;
2. Issue a public consultation on a fur import and sales ban;
3. Introduce (or support) a ban on the import and sale of fur.

A public consultation on a UK fur sales ban could be used to solicit insights on how a fur ban could be most effectively brought into law. It would also allow an informed decision on a reasonable phase out period, which would enable the very small number of businesses reliant on animal fur to transition to alternatives, and it could also help to inform and frame any necessary exemptions (e.g. religious or cultural use, where a humane alternative is not viable).

A FUR IMPORT AND SALES BAN WOULD:

- Eliminate the market for some one million animals farmed for fur each year and remove the UK as a trading hub
- Meet the expectations of more than three-quarters of the public who back a ban
- Send a strong message globally that the public health risks of fur farming are unacceptable
- Recognise fur production as unsustainable, resource intensive and environmentally damaging
- Cement the UK's reputation as a global leader in animal welfare, and set an important precedent that others would undoubtedly follow, as they did after the UK introduced legislation to ban fur farming
- Remove the double standard of having banned fur farming domestically, but allowing fur pelts to be imported from overseas
- Eliminate arbitrary trade restrictions for some species (cats, dogs and seals) and not others
- Help to stop real fur being sold as faux fur, providing greater consumer confidence

¹ <https://dashboard.focaldata.com/public/a1154b0d-f8f8-4378-8c21-a4c19ef770f9>

² https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/5r7ryfdp97/HSI_FurRegulation_200305_w.pdf

³ Mink farming poses risks for future viral pandemics. T Peacock, W Barclay. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS). Vol.120. 19 July 2023. <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2303408120>

⁴ Fur's Dirty Footprint. Humane Society International/UK, June 2023. https://www.hsi.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/HSI_UK-Furs-Dirty-Footprint_Jun23.pdf

⁵ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmenvfru/823/82302.htm>



ABOUT FUR FREE BRITAIN:

Fur Free Britain is a campaign led by animal protection charity Humane Society International/UK and supported by a coalition of respected national animal charities.

For more information please visit FurFreeBritain.uk

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact us via info@hsiuk.org