

Debate Pack

7 July 2022
CDP 0138 | 2022

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E-petition 602285, relating to the use of real bearskin hats by the Queen's Guard

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1 Background

A debate has been scheduled in Westminster Hall at 4.30pm on Monday 11 July 2022 on e-petition 602285, relating to the use of real bearskin hats by the Queen's Guard. The subject for the debate has been nominated by the Petitions Committee and the debate will be opened by Martyn Day MP.

1.1 The petition and Government response

The petition, '[Replace the real bearskins used for the Queen's Guard's caps with faux fur](#)' closed on 6 July 2022 and was started by the pop star and TV personality, Alesha Dixon, and received 106,361 signatures.

The petition said:

“There is no excuse for the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to continue to effectively fund the slaughter of bears for ceremonial headgear since an indistinguishable alternative has been produced, which is waterproof, and mimics real bear fur in appearance and performance.

According to PETA, it takes the skin of at least one bear to make a single cap. There are concerns that some of the bears whose fur is used for this headgear are shot several times by hunters and can endure slow, painful deaths.

It is unconscionable to continue to spend taxpayers' money (£1 million in the last seven years) on a product that 93% of British people refuse to wear. The MoD is not exempt from the ethical standards of the rest of society. For this national symbol to endure in a way that embodies modern society, it must be replaced with faux fur.”

In its [response](#), the Government said it had “no plans to end the use of bearskins” and bears were never “hunted to order” but were “by-products of a licensed cull by the Canadian authorities to manage the wild bear population.”

In an [answer to a written question](#) in February 2022, the Government said that ceremonial caps need to perform successfully in “five areas: water absorption, penetration, appearance, drying rate and compression” and in addition to this “any new fabric would have to gain user approval for shape and comfort for a parade length of duty.” The Government said none of the four artificial furs tested since 2015 have met the necessary standard.

Commenting on the man-made fabric manufactured by [Ecopel](#) that was passed to an independent testing house by PETA, the government said that their analysis of the fabric showed it only passed one requirement:

The analysis concluded that the fabric only met one of the five basic requirements necessary to be considered as a viable alternative for ceremonial caps. While it met the basic standard for water penetration, it showed unacceptable rates of water shedding and performed poorly on the visual assessment. Results for the artificial fur's drying rate and compression were not presented.¹

1.2

Black bear harvesting in Canada

The American black bear (*Ursus Americanus*) population in Canada is not considered threatened and is legally [harvested](#) (as referred to by the Canadian Government) predominately through hunting. Both hunting and trapping [black bears](#) in Canada is a legal activity. [Black bears may also be culled](#) as a final resort when individual bears come into conflict with humans. Hunting and trapping is regulated at provincial level in Canada, with different licencing approaches in each province / territory.

The [Canadian Government concluded](#) in 2012 that export of legally obtained black bear, primarily hunting trophies, was non-detrimental:

Black bear is harvested as a both a game animal species (all range jurisdictions) and a furbearer species (British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Nova Scotia) under the authorization of hunting/trapping permits or licences in accordance with their respective Wildlife Acts. The predominant method of harvest is hunting and Canadian export is primarily hunting trophies.

[...]

Jurisdictions report stable or increasing populations and no acute widespread threats to the species have been identified.

[Under CITES](#) (Convention on International Trade on Endangered Species) an export permit is required for American black bear hides and fur, as they are listed in Appendix II of the convention.² The reason for listing was their similarity to other threatened bear species which raised [enforcement concerns of the illegal trade in bear parts](#), primarily [gall bladders](#) which are used in traditional medicine.

Hunting and trapping

The rules are different in every province but generally they only allow one or two bears per licence holder per year, and licences are usually only available to residents. This is the case in [Ontario](#) and [New Brunswick](#), where each

¹ PQ 121824 [[on Queen's Guards: Uniforms](#)] 9 February 2022

² Appendix II includes species not necessarily threatened with extinction, but in which trade must be controlled in order to avoid utilization incompatible with their survival.

hunter can apply for a licence that permits them to shoot up to two bears per hunting season. Some provinces, but not all, have restrictions on hunting bears with cubs. For example, in Ontario, [shooting of cubs or female bears](#) accompanied by a cub is not allowed in the spring season. In [British Columbia](#) it is illegal to hunt a Black Bear less than 2 years old or any bear in its company. It also has a maximum of 2 bears licence holder per year. [Alberta](#) has a spring and fall season, but it is illegal to hunt a black bear under a year old or any female with it. However, [aging a live bear](#) in the wild is not straightforward.

Hunting with hounds is also allowed in some areas. Trapping of black bears also takes place in Canada and is a licenced activity. For example, [in British Columbia](#), where trappers pay a royalty fee of 3% of the value of each pelt, a wide range of animals are trapped:

...some 3,500 trappers actively manage 17 types of furbearing animals, following standards, legislation and regulation developed by the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development. About half of the province's trappers are Aboriginal.

Stakeholder views

According to the [Fur Institute of Canada](#) around 5% of the Canadian black bear population (20,000) bears are harvested every year. It sets out the benefits of hunting as follows:

A regulated harvest of black bears provides substantial economic and social/cultural benefits to local residents across Canada. More importantly, in the many areas where humans and black bears live in close proximity, a greater number of black bears are classified as 'nuisance', and must be controlled under government authorization. Regulating the density and distribution of bears contributes to safeguarding human welfare and property and helps to ensure crop, livestock and property protection.

It is also critical of international campaigns against black bear harvesting stating that it is incorrect that "the hunting of black bears would stop if there were no market for bear pelts".

[Bear Conservation](#), a UK charity, sets out its concerns about spring hunting of bears as follows:

Worryingly, a number of countries, states and provinces allow hunting in the spring, when bears are newly emerged from hibernation, typically in a weakened state and hungry. In addition, new-born cubs and yearlings will still be dependent upon their mothers during the period when these hunts take place. Of all hunting practices this is probably the most concerning and Bear Conservation would like to see the cancellation of spring hunts by those national and regional governments that still authorise and promote them.

Its website also sets out its [concerns](#) about the risk of mistakenly shooting females with cubs, hunting over bait, hunting with dogs, and snares and

traps. It calls for hunting to be very strictly regulated, with a ban on spring hunts.

PETA, which is campaigning for the use of faux fur by the MoD in its bearskin hats, has set out its [concerns about bear hunting in Canada](#), in particular the hunting of mothers with cubs and the numbers of bears injured but not killed:

The hats are made from the fur of black bears killed in Canada, and in some provinces, there are no restrictions on shooting mother bears who have nursing cubs, which leads to the eradication of entire families, as the cubs are orphaned and left to die. The MoD has claimed that these bears are shot as part of a licensed cull, yet PETA has found no evidence that any Canadian province has run any official black bear-culling programs.

Recreational hunters are granted tags to kill the bears, and some even use bows and arrows to do so. The bears are often shot but not killed immediately. As many as one bear in seven will escape wounded and die slowly from blood loss or starvation.

2

Press and media articles

The following is a selection of press and media articles relevant to this debate.

Please note: the Library is not responsible for either the views or accuracy of external content.

[Dame Vera Lynn – ‘The Forces’ Sweetheart’ – spoke in favour of replacing the Army’s bearskin caps with faux fur. Now, her daughter is doing the same](#)

Peta UK

Margarita Sachkova

20 June 2022

[Simon Pegg And Alesha Dixon Campaign Against Queen’s Guard Bearskin Caps](#)

Plant Based News.Net

8 April 2022

[Government claims ‘faux fur’ not good enough to replace Buckingham Palace guard bearskin hats](#)

Independent

Jon Stone

8 March 2022

[The Bearskin: Everything you need to know](#)

Forces.net

James Wharton

11 June 2021

[Army will keep iconic bearskin hats worn by Queen's Guard after MoD rejected fake version proposed by animal rights group Peta amid calls for total ban on real fur sales](#)

Mail online

James Gant

13 December 2021

[UK Guards: Unbearable cruelty](#)

The Fur-Bearers

12 April 2012

3

PQs

Fur: Import and Sale

14 Jun 2022 | 822 c1468

Asked by: Lord Bellingham

My Lords, can the Minister assure the House that if a ban is brought in, there will be an exemption for military bearskins, which are part of a very important ceremonial tradition going back nearly 300 years, so long as the black bear fur is humanely and sustainably harvested?

Answered by: Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park

My noble friend will understand that I cannot go into the details of what legislation might look like, other than to say that there would be a consultation process and there would almost certainly be exemptions—for example, for religious and cultural reasons. We certainly would not want to prohibit the use of second-hand fur or the repurposing of old products. I can tell my noble friend that Defra policy officials are currently engaging in discussions with the Ministry of Defence on the issue he just raised, and those conversations are ongoing.

Queen's Guards: Uniforms

25 Feb 2022 | 122702

Asked by: Kirsten Oswald

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 8 December 2021 to Question 85327, on Queen's Guards: Uniforms, when his Department last conducted a procurement exercise for ceremonial caps for use by the Queen's Guard; and whether that exercise invited suppliers to offer faux fur as an alternative to real bearskin.

Answering member: Jeremy Quin | Ministry of Defence

The most recent contract for the Queen's Guards ceremonial caps commenced in August 2018. Suppliers were not invited to offer any alternative options as there are currently no faux fur alternatives that meet the Army's requirements for these caps.

In 2021, a new contract to supply The Kings Troop Busbys was placed. The Busby is a smaller and lighter cap than the Queen's Guards ceremonial caps. The only requirement for the Busbys made from artificial fabric, is that the material has the appropriate weather resistance needed; for it to not change any of its colour characteristics when exposed to light and water.

Hunting Trophies

22 Feb 2022 | 819 c121

Asked by: Viscount Hanworth

Can the Minister explain why the MoD continues to sanction the slaughter of Canadian brown bears to produce ceremonial headgear for our soldiers when there are perfectly viable alternatives?

Answering member: Lord Benyon

My Lords, I am not an expert on this, but I understand that the bearskin is a product of a heritage cull which has to take place in certain parts of the world and is not an endangered species import.

Queen's Guards: Uniforms

21 Feb 2022 | 122706

Asked by: Kirsten Oswald

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 8 December 2021 to Question 85327 on Queen's Guards: Uniforms, how much his Department has spent in total on (a) procuring the bearskin ceremonial caps worn by the Queen's Guard and (b) seeking to develop a faux fur alternative for use in the making those caps in the last seven years.

Answering member: Jeremy Quin | Ministry of Defence

The below table outlines the Department's spending on Queen's Guards ceremonial caps over the past seven years:

Bearskins purchased by the MOD

Calendar Year	Cost
2015	£149,379
2016	£240,382
2017	£201,071
2018	£76,206
2019	£127,440
2020	£145,000
2021	£39,330

Since 2015, there have been four synthetic fur test results analysed.

Where appropriate the Ministry of Defence uses faux fur alternatives, providing they meet the specific user requirements. Currently, artificial fur

does not meet the necessary requirements or perform to the standard expected of fabric to be used for the Queen's Guards ceremonial caps.

Queen's Guards: Uniforms

21 Feb 2022 | 121824

Asked by: Rachael Maskell

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps his Department is taking to develop a suitable replacement for the real bear fur currently used to make the Queen's Guards ceremonial caps.

Answering member: Jeremy Quin | Ministry of Defence

There is currently no faux fur alternatives that meet the required standard for the Queen's Guards ceremonial caps. Bears are never hunted to order for use by the Ministry of Defence (MOD). Our suppliers source pelts made available by the Canadian authorities following a licensed cull as part of a programme to manage the wild bear population. Where appropriate the MOD uses faux fur alternatives for ceremonial wear, providing they meet the specific user requirements.

In order for an alternative fabric to be considered for use in the ceremonial caps, it would need successfully to perform in the following five areas: water absorption, penetration, appearance, drying rate and compression. In addition to passing initial laboratory tests, any new fabric would have to gain user approval for shape and comfort for a parade length of duty. This would assess whether the fabric could maintain its shape over time and whether it is comfortable and safe for the user. For example ensuring any waterproof backing is breathable and whether the alternative fabric is waterproof after the shaping, sewing and perforation during production. Consideration would also be given to its sustainability compared to the current natural fur fabric.

There have been four synthetic furs tested since 2015. The artificial fur tested in 2018 failed in all five areas. Tests conducted in 2019 and 2020 on another two samples showed that, while the water penetration was reduced, it still did not meet the necessary standard. It also performed poorly in the remaining areas. The most recent test results, provided by PETA, have also been analysed. The analysis concluded that the fabric only met one of the five basic requirements necessary to be considered as a viable alternative for ceremonial caps. While it met the basic standard for water penetration, it showed unacceptable rates of water shedding and performed poorly on the visual assessment. Results for the artificial fur's drying rate and compression were not presented.

Armed Forces: Furs

10 Feb 2022 | 118592

Asked by: Dr Rupa Huq

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent assessment he has made of the potential merits of replacing ceremonial caps made from the skins of bears with ceremonial caps made using faux fur.

Answering member: Jeremy Quin | Ministry of Defence

There is currently no faux fur alternative that meets the required standard for the Queen's Guards ceremonial caps. Bears are never hunted to order for use by the Ministry of Defence. Our suppliers source pelts made available by the Canadian authorities following a licensed cull as part of a programme to manage the wild bear population; Provincial, territorial, federal and international laws provide strict trade regulations to protect against unlawful trade in black bears both within Canada and internationally.

Armed Forces: Uniforms

14 Dec 2021 | 87697

Asked by: Kirsten Oswald

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to end the use of fur in uniforms issued to personnel in the armed forces.

Answering member: Jeremy Quin | Ministry of Defence

Where man-made alternatives to replace natural fur items provide a suitable, affordable and sustainable alternative to animal products these will be used. For example, faux fur is now used for the smaller busby hats worn by the King's Troop. However in some instances, there is currently no viable alternative though the Department will continue to consider options for faux alternatives where available to see if they can meet our criteria.

Armed Forces: Uniforms

06 Jul 2021 | 23123

Asked by: Emily Thornberry

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether the new £11.4 million contract awarded by Leidos Supply Ltd on behalf of his Department to Try & Lilly Ltd for the supply of ceremonial and parade headwear over the next seven years will include the supply of bearskin caps or any other items of headwear featuring real fur.

Answering member: Jeremy Quin | Ministry of Defence

The contract awarded to Try & Lilly Limited to supply Ceremonial and Parade Headwear does not include bearskin, but includes other real fur items as detailed in the following table:

Ceremonial Item Description	Type of Fur
Busby cap - Royal Horse Artillery Officer	Long Haired Black Fox Skin
Busby cap - Royal Engineers and Royal Scots	Rabbit
Hat - Police Constable (Female)	Mixed Fur Felt (Rabbit, Hare & Beaver)
Hat - Royal Navy Tricorne - Officers/Senior Ratings	Rabbit
Hat -Princess Mary's Royal Air Force Nursing Service	Mixed Fur Felt (Rabbit, Hare & Beaver)
Hat - Princess Mary's Royal Air Force Nursing Service - Officer & Warrant Officers	Rabbit
Hat - Princess Mary's Royal Air Force Nursing Service - Group Captain	Rabbit

The use of faux fur products for future requirements remains under review.

Armed Forces: Uniforms

13 Jul 2021 | Ministerial corrections | House of Commons

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Hat -Princess Mary's Royal Air Force Nursing Service	Mixed Fur Felt (Rabbit, Hare & Beaver)

Hat - Princess Mary's Royal Air Force Nursing Service - Officer & Warrant Officers	Rabbit
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Hat - Princess Mary's Royal Air Force Nursing Service - Group Captain	Rabbit
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The use of faux fur products for future requirements remains under review.

4

Early Day Motion

Bearskin caps and the armed forces

EDM 929 (session 2021-22)

Kirsten Oswald

31 January 2022

That this House expresses its concern that the ceremonial bearskin caps worn by members of the armed forces, most notably at the annual Trooping the Colour parade, involve the unnecessary slaughter of black bears; notes that each bearskin ceremonial cap costs the Ministry of Defence over £1,700 and sees no possible excuse for taxpayers' money to be spent on ceremonial caps made from the skins of bears gunned down for their fur when the overwhelming majority of the British public is opposed to the use of real fur in clothing; understands that the faux fur developed by animal rights charity PETA with leading faux furrier ECOPEL would enable the Ministry of Defence to replace the real bearskins with faux fur; welcomes the offer by ECOPEL to provide the Ministry of Defence with faux fur at no cost until 2030, saving many bears from slaughter and also saving the tax payer up to a million pounds; and calls on the Ministry of Defence to recognise that its continued use of real fur is not in line with the UK Government's commitment to have and promote the highest standards of animal welfare and that it is time to switch to faux fur for making these ceremonial caps.

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