Fur Farming (Prohibition) Bill

Bill 13 of 1998-99

Fur farming may be considered a trade in animals much like any other. Animal welfare organisations, however, claim that it is inherently wrong to keep wild animals in cages and kill them for what is essentially a luxury product.

The Fur Farming (Prohibition) Bill seeks to make it illegal to keep animals for the sole or primary reason of killing them for their pelt.

The industry argue that prohibition for purely moral reasons is a dangerous precedent to set and that they are willing to improve welfare standards if required.

The scientific evidence for animal welfare in fur farms remains in its infancy. There is solid evidence of shortcomings in the current standards of welfare and that some methods of killing fur bearing animals are inhumane. There is, however, little support for the claim that it would be impossible to provide good welfare for captive mink. Neither is there clear information as to whether such welfare would make the farming of animals for their fur uneconomic.

Stephen McGinness

SCIENCE AND ENVIRONMENT

Patsy Hughes

SOCIAL AND GENERAL STATISTICS

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Summary of main points

Welfare of mink on fur farms is of concern to many people.

The welfare requirements of mink on farms requires definition, or be proved impossible to satisfy.

Prohibiting fur farming in the UK is unlikely to result in a net welfare gain for mink.

The Fur Farming (Prohibition) Bill does not seek to prevent the wearing or trade of fur garments just the husbandry associated with their manufacture.
I Fur Farming

Fur farming usually involves the raising of either mink or fox for their skins. The use of animal skins for clothing has been human practice for thousands of years but now there is a growing concern that the raising of animals merely to utilise their skin for luxury goods is wrong.

A. Facts about the Industry in the UK

The number of mink and fur farms in the UK have declined over the past few years. Details are, however, difficult to obtain due to the need for security. These establishments are prime targets for animal liberation groups. There are currently 13 fur farms in the UK (all in England), run by 11 licensed farmers. These farms produce approximately 100,000 pelts per year and contain an estimated 130,000 mink. UK farms exclusively raise mink; there are no fox farms presently in this country.

By county, the remaining fur farms are distributed as follows;

| Fur farms by County, England 1996-1999 |
|-----------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Cornwall        | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      |
| Dorset          | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      |
| Hampshire       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      |
| Isle of Wight   | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      |
| Lancashire      | 5      | 6      | 6      | 5      |
| Northumberland  | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      |
| Staffordshire   | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      |
| South Yorkshire | 0      | 1      | 1      | 1      |
| West Yorkshire  | 2      | 2      | 2      | 1      |
| England         | 13     | 15     | 15     | 13     |

As at various dates, latest 25 January 1999

Sources: HC Deb 1 June 1998 c72w; 2 July 1997 c195w; 2 February 1997 c655w; 25 January 1999 c690w; 21 March 1996 c312w
According to a PQ answered last year,\(^1\) imports of mink furskins to the UK fell during the late 1980s but are now rising again. The pattern for exports is rather less clear;

**UK mink trade**

Looking in more detail at the total value of exports and imports for 1997, it is clear that while the UK imports a high number of raw skins, our exports (next page) are accounted for almost entirely by dressed or tanned skins;\(^2\)

**Value of UK mink imports 1997, whole furskins**

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\(^1\) HC Deb 12 January 1998 c 30W  
\(^2\) HM Customs & Excise Business Monitor MA20 *Overseas Trade Statistics of the UK with the World*
UK imports and exports by destination

The UK exported over 1.6 million whole mink furskins in 1997. The bulk of these were dressed or tanned skins, with raw mink skins making up only around 4% of this total (some 63,000 whole raw furskins). The million and a half dressed or tanned skins exported in 1997 were sent to the following destinations:

**UK mink exports by destination, 1997**
**whole skins, dressed or tanned**

Total exports 1,550,000 dressed/tanned pelts  
(plus 63,000 raw skins not shown in chart)

Total imports roughly match total exports; the UK imported over 1.7 million mink skins in 1997, over a million from destinations within the EU. Raw skins come, predictably, from the world's biggest producers (overleaf);
While dressed skins come mainly from Italy and Hong Kong;

Dressed/tanned whole mink skins, imports 1997

B. Brief History of the Industry in the UK

Mink were first introduced to the UK, by fur farmers, in 1929. The industry grew over the next 40 years until there were over 600 farms in the UK as a whole. It was in the early 1980s that the campaign against the wearing of fur gained a high profile. By 1982 there were only 68 farms in the UK and in 1989 the animal welfare organisations hailed
the closure of the Hudson's Bay Company auction house, where much of the fur trading within the UK took place.

A further blow to the fur industry was the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC), an advisory body to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, condemning fur farming and refusing to issue guidelines for the welfare of animals kept for such a purpose. The FAWC instructed the industry to conduct more research into the issue before they would consider the matter once more. After 1989 there was a steady decline in the number of fur farms in the UK as demonstrated in the graph and table below:

**Fur farms in UK 1989-1999**

The number of licensed fur farms has fallen over the past decade by four fifths, from 61 in 1989 to 13 today, five of which are in Lancashire.

**Licensed mink fur factory farms, UK 1989-1999**

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N Ireland</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>None in Wales</td>
<td>None in Wales</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK TOTAL</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As at various dates, latest 25 January 1999
Sources: *HC Deb 1 June 1998 c72w; 2 July 1997 c195w; 2 February 1997 c655w; 21 March 1996 c312w; 23 July 1993 c450w; 1 May 1995 c54w; 3 May 1995 c252w; 3 May 1995 c220w; 25 January 1999 c690w*

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3 “Furs firm to quit Britain after 300 years”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 19 June 1989
In 1993 the animal welfare organisation Lynx was taken to court for libel when they labelled a fur farm “a hell-hole.” Lynx lost the case and was fined, paying both £100,000 costs and £40,000 damages. This resulted in the closure of the organisation but it was essentially re-founded in the Respect for Animals organisation. Opinion polls support the view that fur farming was, and is, unpopular with results of 76% of those polled against the existence of fur farms in the UK.

**RSPCA/MORI fur polls 1996-1999**

Which, if any, of the items of clothing made from real fur on this list would you ever wear?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>June 1997</th>
<th>February 1999</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full length coat made of real fur</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A jacket made of real fur</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An item of clothing with real fur trim, collar or cuffs</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None- I would never wear real fur</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any fur item</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Columns sum to more than 100% because more than one answer was allowed.

To what extent do you agree with the statement 'There should be a ban on the farming of animals for their fur'?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Tend to agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Tend to disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
<th>AGREE</th>
<th>DISAGREE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug/Sep 1996</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1997</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1999</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages may not sum due to rounding

Source: RSPCA.

The election of Labour to power in the 1997 election seemed to suggest that the end of fur farming in the UK was nigh as its abolition had been one of the party’s commitments. However, before any legislation was passed, the Mink Keeping Order 1992, which allowed the keeping of mink for the purposes of fur, was due for renewal. The original

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5 Roger Tredre, “Why fur coats are an on-off thing”, *The Independent*, 22 January 1993
order was for five years and whilst animal welfare organisations realised it was probably not an option to abolish the practice at that time they were dismayed that Labour renewed the order, even if it was just for three years.

The fur trade seemed to be undergoing a revival. In 1997 the Council of Europe passed guidelines to the Convention on the Protection of Animals Kept for Farming Purposes\(^7\) which set international standards for the keeping of fur bearing animals. This allowed many of the practices being carried out on fur farms to continue, such as the keeping of animals in cages and their slaughter using cooled and filtered exhaust gases.\(^8\) A more high profile indication that fur might be coming back into acceptability was that supermodels, who had backed a campaign against the wearing of fur, began to model fur garments on the catwalk once more.\(^9\)

This comeback was disputed by Respect for Animals who have embarked once more on advertising campaigns against the wearing of fur.\(^10\)

The following table demonstrates the dramatic decline in the market for fur in the UK.

**UK fur sales**

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<tr>
<td>£ millions</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 1996/7 figures are UK manufacturer sales, clothing and accessories excluding hats and headgear
UK net supply (after imports/exports) are slightly lower but round to the same
Sources: Product Sales and Trade ONS Series PRQ13
WSPA

\(^7\) http://www.coe.fr/eng/legaltxt/87e.htm
\(^8\) Danny Penman, “The British want to shut down mink farms. The Council of Europe just draws the line at tearing out their fur while they’re still alive”, *The Observer*, 1 June 1997
\(^10\) “Fur trade ‘comeback’ held at bay”, *Financial Times*, 13 January 1998
C. Fur Farming in other countries

The world's biggest mink producer is Denmark:

![Pie chart showing share of world mink production, 1997](chart)

Total production = 26.3 million pelts

The full figures for production by country are shown in the table in the appendix. Total world production of mink stood at over 26 million pelts in 1997, according to figures from the Oslo fur auctions. World production has fallen over the past decade but may now be recovering:

![Line chart showing world mink production 1988-1997](chart)

The most recent overview of fur farming internationally may have been the World Society for the Protection of Animals document, *Fashion Victims*. The above and following details of fur farming are based on information from this document.\(^{11}\)

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Denmark rears mink, fox, and racoon and is the largest producer of mink. The Danish Fur Farming Order deals mainly with the environmental issues related to mink farming, i.e., the noise smell and anti-escape barriers. It does not actually address the issue of animal welfare in any depth. The fur farms have to be licensed by local authorities and are inspected by environmental officers several times per year. Welfare is addressed through the Scandinavian Fur Breeders’ Code of Practice and Guidelines.

Finland rears mink, blue fox, and racoon. Finland is a major producer of fox fur and legislation for farms are governed by decrees which cover most aspects of fur farming. There are decrees which govern cage size and provision of nest boxes. The Finnish Government transposed the Council of Europe recommendations into law in 1992.

France rears mink, fox, racoon, chinchilla and coypu. France had 70 farms in 1990 containing about 550,000 mink. There is no legislation for animal welfare on these farms though requirements exist to protect the environment.

Germany rears mink, fox, chinchilla, and coypu. Germany introduced legislation in the late 1980s which required fox farms to use solid floors and for larger cage sizes. The state of Hessen went further in 1996 by prohibiting the use of cages, requiring animals to have climbing possibilities, access to water basins, hiding places and that only one third of the floor space to be perforated. Currently there are no fur farms in Hessa.

In the rest of Germany, voluntary controls regulate annual inspections of fur farms and farmers require an annual licence from the district veterinary service.
II Political Comment

The prohibition of fur farming became a real issue when Labour won the 1997 General Election as they had made a commitment to the prohibition of the industry during the election. This pledge was re-affirmed in July 1997:

**Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to prohibit the farming of mink for fur; and if he will make a statement.

**Mr. Morley:** I am currently exploring all possible ways forward on how to implement the Government's pre-election pledge to end fur farming as soon as practicable.\(^{12}\)

The current Private Members’ Bill is not the first to be aimed at the prohibition of fur farming. In 1997 Norman Baker put forward a similar Bill under Standing Order 57. Of course, such Bills rarely succeed unless they are totally non-controversial, and the Bill was objected to at second reading.

The Government then made undertakings to improve the welfare of animals kept for the purpose of fur farming, taking regard of the Council of Europe recommendations:

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

1. what proposals he has made for improvement in fur farming husbandry to the Council of Europe; and what recommendations he has made relating to an increase in the present minimum cage dimensions;

2. if, in the current discussions at the Council of Europe on fur farming, he will ensure that only housing systems which meet the biological needs of mink, pine martens and arctic foxes, with particular reference to the provision of a stimulating environment, social contact and swimming water, will meet the statutory minimum standards; and if he will ensure that a timetable will be laid down for the phasing out of all housing for these animals which does not meet such standards.

**Mr. Morley:** The Standing Committee of the European Convention on the Protection of Animals Kept for Farming Purposes is reviewing its 1991 recommendation on the welfare of animals farmed for fur. The text currently under discussion proposes detailed requirements for the welfare of mink, polecat, silver and Arctic fox, coypu and chinchilla. We shall be working to ensure that the outcome of this exercise is the adoption of the highest possible standards consistent with the scientific evidence and expert opinion.

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\(^{12}\) HC Deb 15 July 1997 c 147W
We would support a timetable for the phasing out of all housing for these animals that does not meet the standards adopted by the Council of Europe.\textsuperscript{13}

The first opportunity to keep to the prohibition pledge, however, seemed to arise when the Mink Keeping Order came due for renewal. This legislation allowed the award of licences for the keeping of mink for the purpose of fur farming. The renewal of the Mink Keeping Order was debated in standing committee when several of the issues which may be discussed during Maria Eagle’s Private Members Bill arose.\textsuperscript{14}

The Minister, Mr Morley, began by renewing the Government’s commitment to stopping the practice of farming animals for their fur and stating that primary legislation would be required.

The Government's position on fur farming was stated in our pre-election leaflet "New Life for Animals”. We intend to prohibit it as soon as is practicable. Earlier this year, I reviewed the various options available to prohibit the keeping of mink and other species for fur. A public consultation letter was issued on 5 August, seeking comments on the way in which I proposed to proceed. The overwhelming majority of responses supported the Government's position that all fur farming should be prohibited.

The Destructive Imported Animals Act 1932 allows for the prohibition on the keeping of non-indigenous mammals, only in order to protect the environment. The Government have now concluded that there is insufficient evidence to suggest that the existing arrangements for keeping mink significantly contribute to the problems caused by feral mink. In the absence of evidence, therefore, it is not possible to introduce an order prohibiting the keeping of mink for fur under the 1932 Act.

I had hoped to make an announcement to the Committee about the Government's plans following the consultation exercise. I regret that the exercise is not yet complete, especially in Government Departments, but an announcement will be made as soon as possible. I can assure the Committee, however, that I remain fully committed to implementing our pledge to prohibit fur farming as soon as is practicable, and I am urgently considering how that can best be done.

He went on to renew the Order, though only for three years rather than the expected five. This dismayed animal welfare groups. He also pointed out that contrary to people’s belief the order related more to the security of premises and the prevention of escapes than to the existence of the industry. He also took this opportunity to raise license costs to allow greater inspection of fur farming premises.

\textsuperscript{13} HC Deb 29 October 1997 c 820W
\textsuperscript{14} Ninth Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation 11 December 1997
David Maclean MP made the point that mink are already wild in the UK countryside and so legislation to prevent further escapes when the industry is under imminent threat of prohibition seemed to be irrelevant. He had more concern that the banning of fur farming on moral grounds might lead to farmers being prevented from controlling those mink which were already in the wild.

Norman Baker raised the issue of whether the Government would have to pay compensation for the ending of the industry and that evidence existed to suggest that such compensation would not be payable. This would make the prohibition far easier:

He will confirm that he has received a copy of a legal opinion from Richard Plender, QC, a leading counsel often used by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, which was commissioned by Compassion in World Farming. The document discusses the various difficulties that the Government may encounter if they seek to ban mink farming. It deals with import and export regulations, with the European convention and other such matters in great detail. The opinion runs to 19 closely typed pages and I refer the Minister to the first paragraph, which states:

"We were asked to advise whether compensation would be payable by Her Majesty's Government in the event of the prohibition by legislation of `factory farming' of mink in Great Britain. For the reasons and under the conditions set out below we have concluded it would not be payable."

Therefore, the counsel who is used regularly by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food concludes that no legal bar exists to banning mink farming immediately.

James Paice asked whether the banning of fur farming in the UK would lead to an overall increase in animal welfare within Europe, or the world as a whole:

If that is the reason for the Government's stance, they must question the pan-European and the wider mink farming industry. There is no difference between mink in England and mink in France, Germany or any other country. If banning mink farming in this country simply leads to the increased import of mink furs from another country, where welfare standards might be worse than they are here, we will not have improved the welfare of mink.

Mr Paice followed by comparing the killing of animals for their meat and for their fur and asked whether it was possible to come to a compromise arrangement whereby welfare standards might be improved:

I want to ensure that the Government's belief in getting rid of mink farming is based on sensible grounds rather than on moral judgement. If it is based on welfare, I challenge the Minister to explain what the mink farming industry could do to put the welfare situation right, or is his objection simply a moral judgement against mink farming for the production of fur?
Later in 1998 Ken Livingstone MP asked the Minister about his timetable for banning fur factory farming; and what factors governed this:

Mr. Morley: The Government's firm intention is to ban fur farming as soon as practicable. Such a ban must be implemented in accordance with national and international law and I am currently considering how our intention can best be implemented. An announcement will be made once I have decided how to proceed and there will be public consultation on any proposals for legislation to ban fur farming.

Mr. Livingstone then asked what representations had been received from fur breeders opposing the Government's policy on fur breeding;

Mr. Morley: A public consultation letter seeking comments on how I proposed to prohibit the keeping of mink and other species for fur was issued on 5 August 1997. Since then, the Ministry has received 7 representations from fur breeding interests, including the British Fur Trade Association, the Fur Breeders' Association of the UK and the International Fur Trade Federation, all opposing the Government's policy on fur farming.

and what guidance had been given to those currently involved in the industry:

Mr. Morley: All the current mink farm licensees have been informed in writing that it is the Government's intention to ban the keeping of mink for fur in this country and that I am considering how this intention may best be implemented."}

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15 HC Deb 1 June 1998 cc 72-3W
### III Welfare Arguments

The campaign against fur farming relies heavily on a concern that the industry is inherently cruel to the animals being utilised by the industry.\(^\text{16}\) There are a number of organisations that campaign for an end to fur farming and these range from radical animal rights organisations such as PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) to the more mainstream organisations like the RSPCA.

There are several issues that are common to both ends of the spectrum of opinion with regard to fur farming. The more radical end of the spectrum, as represented by PETA do not believe the use of animals in any shape or form is acceptable and should be disallowed. This, when taken to its conclusion, would result in there being no animal husbandry for meat or animal products such as milk and wool and even to disallowing the keeping of pet animals such as cats and dogs. Such issues are of a moral nature and outwith the scope of this paper.

**A. Mink are wild animals and should not be kept in cages**

This argument is based on information known about how mink live in the wild and how they act in captivity. Whilst the keeping and domestication of mink might have been accepted if the product was needed rather than simply desired, to do so for what is essentially a luxury product is unacceptable to many. The argument, then, is slightly more complex than simply that mink are wild animals. It is more that wild animals should not be subjected to the inevitable stress of domestication purely for the enjoyment of mankind.

The major differences between keeping mink and killing them for their skins and keeping cattle and killing them for their meat and skins are:

- that fur is perceived as a luxury item whilst beef is commonly regarded as a foodstuff;
- that cattle have been domesticated over thousands of years whilst mink have been in captivity generally for less than one hundred years;
- that herbivorous animals such as cattle are easier to domesticate than carnivorous animals such as mink.

Mink are known to be solitary animals in the wild which defend their territory through patrolling, scent marking and aggression. This aggression has been noted between unfamiliar adult animals which are put in the same cages.\(^\text{17}\)


In the wild mink will have a territory in which they reside and a larger range in which they hunt. Within this range they will have several nests and will defend against incursion by other mink. The mink, used to hunting, travel large distances every day; some studies have recorded mink making overnight trips of over 4.3 kilometres. The desire to travel has been demonstrated by the fact that mink, in captivity, do not have to be rewarded to run on wheels placed in their cage.

The natural requirement for hunting by mink has led them to be inquisitive and investigative. This curiosity leads to a need for captive animals to be given some enrichment of their environment to assuage this need for activity.

There are reports that mink will cower and run away from humans who approach their cages. This would suggest that they are not domesticated and still displaying the fight or flight reflex of wild animals to human presence.

It is also claimed that the large mink population in the wild, derived from escaped and released mink, adapt quickly to such a life, thereby demonstrating their inherent wild nature.

B. Mink are semi-aquatic and need water in which to swim

Studies of mink show that they spend most of their time in or close to water. Mink often hunt in water and spend some of their time at play in aquatic environments. The mink has seem-webbed feet which show they have evolved toward spending a significant amount of their time in the water. In the fur farming environment there is no opportunity to swim at all which cannot be ideal in terms of welfare.

One study\(^\text{18}\) examined the importance mink placed on various additions to their environment. Within the experiment mink were provided with several cages which could be accessed but doors were made progressively harder to open using weights. The importance placed by the mink on each environment was assessed by the weight against which they would push to access that environment. It was found that the mink would work as hard to access swimming water as they would food. This suggests that access to swimming water should be a significant welfare consideration.

C. Conflict exists between commerce and animal welfare

Welfare organisations feel that because fur farming is a business animal welfare is given insufficient priority compared with profits. Captive mink can display a wide variety of pelt colours and rare ones, such as white, fetch a premium in the marketplace. The colour

of the pelt, controlled by a sequence of eighteen genes, can be manipulated through careful breeding.

This means there is a positive financial pressure on fur farmers to produce these rare colours. The breeding programmes have, however, concentrated upon the colour of the pelt regardless of other concerns and rare colours may be linked to poor physical condition. The white pelt, for example, is produced by a line of mink which are congenitally blind. The conflict between welfare and profit here is obvious but the breeding line still exists due to the emphasis of profit over welfare.

It is obvious that improving welfare standards will inevitably cost the producer more and cut into the profitability of a fur farming business. In certain countries improving the welfare standards have coincided with the cessation of fur farming in that region. This would suggest either that good welfare makes farms uneconomic to run, or that farmers will relocate to avoid onerous costs due to animal welfare.

D. Killing methods are cruel

Due to the nature of the business it is necessary to harvest animals farmed for their fur without spoiling the pelt. This means that killing methods have to be employed other than those accepted as humane for food animals such as cattle and sheep. There are a number of options in wide use throughout the world and animal welfare groups have some concern about most of them.

One of the most widely used methods for the killing of mink is the use of gassing by carbon monoxide (CO) or carbon dioxide (CO₂). These gases are supposed to reduce the availability of oxygen to the animals and lead to unconsciousness followed by death. It is not immediately obvious why this may be of concern, as these gases are killers of people in their own homes. The Government are always keen to tell the public that poorly maintained gas heaters will result in a colourless, odourless gas that will kill.

The use of carbon dioxide is of more concern than carbon monoxide, but the source of both gases is the main concern of welfare groups. Carbon dioxide is a colourless gas, but possesses an acrid odour. It is claimed that whilst 100% carbon dioxide can kill mink in 19 seconds, the mink react to its presence and suffer extreme stress in being forced into such an environment. Being seem-aquatic, however, the mink are capable of holding their breath for extended periods of time and this method will not result in a quick or easy death.

Carbon monoxide would then appear to be a better option. However, it has been reported that mink seem capable, not only of detecting the presence of dangerous gases but the

20 ibid
reduced availability of oxygen. Whilst they may not detect the presence of the carbon monoxide they will detect the reduced availability of oxygen and again suffer the stress of looking for a non-existent escape before being overcome. More general concerns about gassing are the requirement to handle the animals whilst transferring them from cages to the gassing chamber and the method by which the gasses are produced. In most farms the gases, carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide, are generated through the use of an engine where the exhaust gases are cooled in water then filtered through a scrubber unit before being introduced to the gassing chamber. Even in the case of carbon monoxide there are concerns that the residual gases will cause distress to the animals and that only clean cylinder gas should be used. This would, of course, raise costs substantially.

Barbiturates and other materials have been utilised to render the animals unconscious or to kill them. The problem with such materials is that they are often difficult to administer and some methods result in conscious but immobilised animals which may be skinned alive. Some are also responsible for extremely uncomfortable deaths.21 In the UK in 1997 there were fifteen mink farms. Fourteen of these used gassing (10 with carbon monoxide) whilst only one used barbiturate injection.

IV  Industry Arguments\textsuperscript{22}

The British fur trade is represented by the British Fur Trade Association (BFTA) which has recently placed an open letter in the House Magazine which branded Maria Eagle’s Private Member’s Bill “ill considered and emotive”. They base their concerns very much on the fact that the legislation will not prove effective in increasing overall animal welfare and that prohibition is not necessary to improve welfare of animals bred for their fur.

The BFTA would present the facts as follows

- Farmed mink have been bred as such for over 80 generations and cannot be directly compared to their wild counterparts.
- Significant numbers of mink released from fur farms will return to their cages at the normal feeding time.
- Fur farmers themselves have an interest in the welfare of the animals as the pelts are worth more when they are in good condition.
- Scientific study has shown that there is potential for welfare to be improved on fur farms, to such an extent that the trade should not be considered unnecessarily and inherently cruel.
- British fur farmers are willing to improve welfare standards.

A.  Trade would not stop, just move abroad

The market for fur is stable or growing – the amount of pelts the market will bear will not disappear if the UK trade is banned. Foreign fur farms will take up slack. The BFTA believe that it is unreasonable and disproportionate to destroy the livelihood of farmers and their families who take a responsible approach to the care of their animals. They believe that science, and not emotions or morals, should take the lead in setting welfare standards.

As mentioned in previous sections welfare regulations in many other countries are less rigorous than those in the UK. The UK trade is not a large part of the European fur trade and their contribution could easily be taken up by other EU Member States.

B.  Prohibition is not necessary

A 1994 report, by Professor P.R. Wiepkema to the Dutch Government, recommended that the fur farming trade might carry on with improved standards of welfare.\textsuperscript{23} The industry has reacted to this report by drawing up an action plan for mink farming. The plan was assessed by Professor B.M. Spruijt of the Centre for Animal Welfare of Utrecht University. This action plan has been accepted by the Dutch Government.

\textsuperscript{22}  Personal communication and material from British Fur Trade Association
\textsuperscript{23}  Dutch Fur Breeders Association (NFE), Action Plan for mink farming in the Netherlands, October 1996
The recommendations put forward include:

- nest boxes should be available at all times;
- animals should not be subjected to a slimming diet;
- group housing with more than one conventional cage available;
- animals should be selected for curiosity and quiet behaviour;
- females and young should have more spacious accommodation.

The new standards are to be phased in, immediately 25% of animals will conform to new standards rising to 50% by 2000 and to 100% within 10 years.
V Scientific Comment

The most recent comprehensive review of the literature relating to the welfare of animals raised for their fur is that carried out by the University of Cambridge Animal Welfare Information Centre. This paper was commissioned by the organisation Respect for Animals and contains many points worthy of comment.

A. Effects of confinement

One of the most common effects of confinement on farmed mink was stereotypy. The studies looking at this phenomenon have identified the reasons for this as being boredom and looking for a way to escape their confinement. Stereotypy is repetitive behaviour, such as head twirling, with no apparent goal, which confined animals are known to exhibit. Their occurrence is often associated with environments lacking in stimulation for the captive animals, behaviour which is absent from wild animals in their natural environment. There are different stereotypical behaviours but once the stereotypy is established it may, subsequently, be elicited by a number of stimuli. There is evidence however that though associated with poor welfare conditions, mink that do exhibit stereotypy are actually coping better with their captivity than mink who do not.

In one study of 142 female mink (kept singly in cages) 70% exhibited stereotypy to some degree and half of them did so for over 25% of their waking hours. Other studies have shown similar levels of this behaviour in both male and female mink. Captive mink within enriched environments (e.g., with swimming water, added cages, available toys) or in zoos where the environment is better tailored to the animals’ needs, stereotypy is absent.

Another commonly quoted effect of confinement is self-mutilation or cannibalism. This again is accepted as good evidence of poor welfare conditions. Cannibalism seems relatively rare amongst mink as compared to other species but improved conditions reduced both self-mutilation and cannibalism amongst captive mink.

It has been claimed that farm-reared mink have become less fearful of humans and more tame due to their captivity over generations. The Cambridge report spoke of early scientific papers describing mink fleeing to the rear of cages at the approach of humans and contrasting such behaviour with that described in a paper published in 1996 where mink responded to nearby human activity with curiosity.

The 1996 paper described attempts to breed mink to display various behaviours. The only trait there was any success in achieving was more fearful mink. There was no evidence to suggest that farmers would be successful in selecting for less fearful animals.

B. Requirements of confined animals

The most basic requirement for captive mink was a nest box, an area where the mink might escape from general view. In the wild, however, mink are likely to have more than one nest and so the availability of alternative nest boxes would be beneficial to welfare conditions. In comparison, several studies have shown that the lack of a nest box results in more stereotypy and in poor general overall health.

Once the necessity of a nest box was established related factors have been studied. For example, changes in access to the nest box and design of the nest box were found to be important. For example, a nest with a false bottom reduced kit (infant) mortality.

The size of the actual cage was also shown to be important. Cages which were too small resulted in animals which displayed fewer natural behaviour activities, such as scent marking.

Although not looking at mink one study found that activity and interest were not simply a matter of adjacent chambers for animal movement. Comparison was drawn on how often foxes moved from one chamber to another when two cages were connected simply by an opening and two similar cages connected by a 1.5m long tube. It was found that foxes with the simple connection swapped about 250 times a day whilst those with the tunnel swapped up to 500 times per hour.

There have not been many studies which have looked carefully at enriching the environment of cages for mink. Those which do exist suggest that even minor enrichment of cages improves welfare. A raised platform reduced the incidence of stereotypy in female mink, a result, it was suggested, of being able to rest free from the demands of her kits. Watering by the use of an automatic spray system led to increased activity of mink whilst the introduction of toys such as balls were less effective. More natural enclosures, i.e., containing soil and branches removed running stereotypies and increased the incidence of play amongst captive mink. In many of these studies it was not possible to definitively quantify the effects of such enrichments but there is enough evidence to suggest the welfare of mink in cages can be improved.

C. Social behaviour of captive mink

The Cambridge paper describes studies which looked at the best social housing for mink. In the majority of cases mink are housed either singly, in mated pairs or female with kits. This is due to the known fact that the mink live naturally in territories which rarely overlap and meetings between unfamiliar adults can result in extreme hostility.

An early study found evidence that group housing of mink increased stress levels compared with singly housed mink. This has not been fully supported by later studies. Indeed several studies show that group housing of mink may actually improve welfare, though such groups must be established from the time of weaning.
The keeping of mink in family groups may make the provision of larger and more enriched caged environments more economically viable for fur farmers.

D. Conclusions of University of Cambridge Report

The report concludes that enough scientific evidence exists to show that the current level of welfare for mink on fur farms is not adequate. Mink are denied a range of behaviours within farms that would be available to them in the wild. A nest box is the minimum requirement for mink and good welfare would require much more.

The keeping of mink in captivity has not yet led to the complete domestication of mink. Indeed, only fearful behaviour has, so far, shown to be responsive to breeding programs.

Good welfare may be possible within the context of a captive environment. There has been no estimation of the economic consequences of such enrichment and the effects this might have upon the feasibility of fur farming.

One of the methods by which welfare may be improved and economies made could be through keeping groups of mink within a community environment. There has as yet been no serious attempt to model such a community but there exists that possibility.

The main thrust is that, if mink farming is to continue, then a radical rethink of housing is required.
VI The Fur Farming (Prohibition) Bill

A. Summary

The Fur Farming (Prohibition) Bill was introduced in the House of Commons on 25 February 1999. Explanatory notes have been provided by the Ministry for Agriculture Fisheries and Food which may be accessed via the Internet. It has been kept short, only seven clauses, to ensure that it addresses the problem at hand, i.e., the farming of animals for their fur. It does not seek to ban the trade in furs nor the wearing of garments fashioned from fur. As such the Bill makes it an offence, punishable by a fine, to keep or breed animals that will be used, primarily or solely, for their fur. There is provision, within the Bill, to allow the Minister make schemes whereby compensation may be paid to farmers forced from the fur trade. There is also provision to provide powers of entry and forfeiture to aid in the enforcement of the legislation.

B. Commentary on the Clauses

Clause one contains four subsections. Subsection one provides the main thrust of the Bill; making the keeping of animals, primary or solely, for the purpose of killing them for their fur an offence. It does not matter whether the person who breeds the mink actually kills them; it is enough that they are being bred for their fur. The primary or solely wording is an attempt to ensure that animals which provide leather do not come under the legislation and killing is mentioned to exempt those animals which provide, e.g., wool but are not killed in the process.

The second subsection extends the liability of the offence to others who knowingly permit, or cause, others to keep animals as above. An example is provided in the explanatory notes:

An example of a person who might be guilty of the offence of permitting is a person who grants a tenancy of land for the purpose of enabling the tenant to carry on a fur farming business.

Subsection three also extends the bounds of the offence to breeding animals and subsequently selling them where they will be killed for their fur. That may for example include the breeding of animals in the UK and then selling them to fur farms in the EU where they may, in the future, be killed for their fur.

The final subsection of clause one indicates the scale of the fine that may be expected for breach of the legislation, i.e., a fine not exceeding £20,000.

25 http://pubs1.tso.parliament.uk/pa/cm199899/cmbills/013/en/99013x--.htm
Clauses 2 and 3 relate to forfeiture orders. When someone has been convicted of keeping animals for the purpose of killing them for their fur the animals concerned may be removed and killed, or otherwise disposed of. The court does not have to take any other action, such as fining the offender, and there is opportunity to show cause why the order should not be made.

When a forfeiture order has been made, there is a right to appeal against that order within seven days of the date of the order. No animals may be destroyed before the opportunity for such an appeal, and its potential success, has passed.

Once a forfeiture order may go ahead, the former owner of the animals may be made to pay for their continued upkeep either on his own premises or someone else appointed to keep them. A person appointed by the court to carry out a forfeiture order will be acting as an agent of the court.

Clause 4 provides the Minister with the power to authorise entry onto premises where there is reasonable grounds to suspect that animals are being kept contrary to the provisions of the legislation. These powers of entry allow those authorised to enter and inspect animals or other material found there. The Bill would make it an offence to obstruct or hinder those exercising power of entry. Right of entry under this provision does not extend to private dwellings.

Clause 5 provides the appropriate minister with the power to provide compensation to those who will suffer as a result of this Bill. The appropriate minister is defined in clause 6 as the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and, in relation to Scotland or to Wales, the Secretary of State. The legislation will not extend to Northern Ireland. If there is any dispute over compensation paid by such a scheme then they will be examined either by the Lands Tribunal or the Lands Tribunal for Scotland.

Clause 7 states that clauses 1-4 would come into effect on the 1st January 2002 and clause 5, which allows the arrangement of compensation, to come into effect two months after the legislation receives Royal Assent. This would allow farmers who cease farming before the trade is ruled illegal to be eligible for compensation. Clause 7 also provides that the powers conferred to ministers within this legislation would be devolved with the formation of the Scottish Parliament.
Appendix

Mink Production by country, 1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Thousands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>10,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holland</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>2,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIS</td>
<td>2,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltic States</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Argentina</td>
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<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>26,295</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: WSPA, Fashion Victims 1998
Data from Oslo Fur Auctions*