

FUR

Fur farms are a hidden and very ugly side of the global fashion industry.

Background

Most fur produced globally comes from fur farms¹, where animals are specifically bred for their fur. In 2018, approximately 93.2 million animals² were killed from the major fur farming regions (China 50.5 million, European Union 37.8 million, United States 3.1 million, Canada 1.8 million). These animals are confined in tiny, dirty, wire cages, where they cannot perform natural behaviours, often cannibalise each other or self-mutilate, live in their own waste, have limited access to water or food, are denied veterinary attention and have a very poor quality of life³.

Often the industry is enabled and supported by little to no animal protection laws or regulations and cheap human labour. Animals on fur farms are considered to be economic resources and animal protection is poorly considered.

In addition to fur farming, a significant number of animals are killed for their fur in the wild. Over three million were trapped in the USA alone in 2017. When wild animals are used for the fur industry, they are either shot or caught in various types of traps, such as snare or steel jaw. Animals caught in traps often die slowly⁴ over hours or days. If a mother with young is trapped, her young may also be victims of the fur industry or bludgeoned and left to die. The traps are non-selective and many non-target animals are also killed or injured in these traps, including endangered species and companion animals.

When the animals are finally killed⁵ for their fur (whether they are wild or raised in a fur farm), if not dead already, they are treated in horrific and violent ways. Methods⁶ include vaginal and anal electrocution, gassing by unfiltered truck exhaust or

other gases, having their necks broken, poisoned, beaten to death or hung on a rack and skinned alive. Several⁷ reports and under-cover investigations⁸ have detailed the barbaric practices on fur farms, including, "[e]ven after their skin has been stripped off, respiration, heartbeat, directional body and eyelid movements were evident for up to 5 to 10 minutes."

Species currently used in the fur trade¹¹ include: badger, bear, beaver, bobcat, chinchilla, coyote, domestic cat, domestic dog, ermine, ferret, fox (red, blue, grey, silver), goat, guinea pig, hamster, hare, lynx, kangaroo, marten, mink, muskrat, nutria (coyupu), ocelot, opossum, in particular, Virginia opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*), otter, polecat, possum (in particular, brushtail possum (*Trichosurus vulpecula*) also referred to as merinomink (blended with merino wool and angora), rabbit, raccoon, raccoon dog (Finn, Asiatic), sable, seal, sheep (Karakul, shearling), squirrel, stoat, wallaby, weasel, wild dog and wolf.

Import and export

In Australia, only the import and export of dog and cat fur is prohibited under the¹² *Customs (Prohibited Imports) Regulations 1956* ¹³(Cth)¹⁴, unless the importer is authorised by the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection. Whilst Australia is not one of the major fur suppliers or manufacturers, there is a domestic import and export market. The Animal Justice Party (AJP) opposes both.

The Australian brand Akubra which once sourced rabbit fur from wild caught and farmed rabbits in Australia now out-

¹<https://www.animallaw.info/article/detailed-discussion-fur-animals-and-fur-production>

²<https://www.hsi.org/news-media/fur-trade/#:~:text=Global%20fur%20farming%20statistics%20from,166%2C000%20raccoon%20dogs%3B%20227%2C000%20chinchilla>

³<https://www.hsi.org/news-media/fur-trade/>

⁴<https://www.peta.org/issues/animals-used-for-clothing/fur/fur-trapping/>

⁵<https://www.peta.org/issues/animals-used-for-clothing/animals-used-clothing-factsheets/inside-fur-industry-factory-farms/>

⁶<https://www.peta.org/issues/animals-used-for-clothing/animals-used-clothing-factsheets/inside-fur-industry-factory-farms/>

⁷<https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/3010538-Fun-fur-A-report-%20on-the-Chinese-fur-industry.html>

⁸<https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/3010538-Fun-fur-A-report-%20on-the-Chinese-fur-industry.html>

⁹<https://www.animalsaustralia.org/issues/fur.php>

¹⁰<https://www.animalsaustralia.org/issues/fur.php>

¹¹<https://www.animalsaustralia.org/issues/fur.php>

¹²<https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2016C00795>

¹³<https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2016C00795>

¹⁴<https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2016C00795>

sources to Russia to meet *demand*¹⁵. Approximately 12 rabbits are killed to make the felt for just one Akubra *hat*^{16, 17}.

Labelling

Tests performed on fur in the EU, USA and Australia have demonstrated that mislabeling is common. Fur labelled as fox and rabbit has been identified as cat and dog fur through laboratory testing on more than one occasion. In 2011,¹⁸ *an investigation by Humane Society International*¹⁹ uncovered a number of items purchased from Australian department store Myer and fashion chain store Wittner, labelled as “rabbit” and “raccoon”, tested positive for domestic dog. Fur labelled faux, purchased by the public as an ethical choice, continues to be identified as genuine animal fur. Through similar testing, fur sampled from South Melbourne Market and Queen Victoria Market in Melbourne in 2019 were tested and²⁰ *revealed a number of items labelled synthetic to be consistent with genuine raccoon dog fur*²¹. Follow up investigations, carried out in 2020²² produced similar results with unlabeled items testing positive for raccoon dog, mink and fox.

Whilst the USA has *specific legislation*²³ for labelling of fur to address these unethical and fraudulent practices, Australia does not. No specific law covers fibre content (species identification), however misleading claims may *breach the Australian Consumer Law*^{24, 25}. The testing of fur to determine species type is often impossible because the dyes and chemical treatments applied to fur can damage or entirely remove DNA. This, alongside lack of monitoring and testing mechanisms to ensure accurate labelling enables the fur trade to operate largely unregulated.

This means that consumers really don't know who or what they are buying, wearing and supporting.

COVID-19

During the COVID-19 pandemic crisis of 2020, tests from fur farms across the Netherlands, Denmark, Italy, Greece, Sweden, Spain and the USA confirmed a *mutated*²⁶ *coronavirus*²⁷

also known as Cluster 5, present in minks (and *local farm cats*²⁸ in some areas). In most of these countries, the *first infections on mink farms*²⁹ were identified through contact tracing following confirmation of COVID-19 in symptomatic humans. The virus spread from human to mink, *developed a more severe and acute mutation*³⁰, spread rapidly throughout the mink population due to the squalid conditions on the farm, and then spilled back from the fur farms to the wider communities. Subsequently, *hundreds of thousands*³¹ of *animals were slaughtered*³² with another *17 million mink*³³ *killed*³⁴ *in Denmark*³⁵. This is a direct result of animal exploitation and cruelty.

Evidence suggests that the 2020 COVID-19 outbreak originated from wet markets in China, where animals are confined in similar abhorrent conditions to fur farms. It should be noted that the favoured mechanism by which emergent diseases have infected humans throughout history is by the zoonotic transmission of pathogenic agents from animals to humans. Viruses *continue to evolve*³⁶ within their animal hosts which presents a permanent pandemic threat for humans.

Forward looking

Many countries across the EU that previously farmed fur³⁷, have now either ceased, are phasing the industry out, or have regulated it so strictly that fur farming is no longer economically viable. Ethical and legislative change is moving through other regions with bans on the import and sale of fur in the US state of California, in São Paulo, Brazil and in India. New York State and New York City³⁸ are both considering bills to ban the sale of fur. Several councils in New South Wales have also now banned fur within their jurisdictions.

The ethical case has also influenced the fashion industry and many international designers and retailers acknowledge the cruelty of the fur industry and have decided to not use or sell fur. In 2018, London Fashion Week³⁹ was the first global fashion week to ban animal fur. The event was a fantastic

¹⁵<https://www.weeklytimesnow.com.au/agribusiness/sheep/akubra-dumps-australian-rabbit-suppliers-for-russian-rabbit-skins/story-fnker8up-1227432522077>

¹⁶<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-05-24/rabbit-shortage-forces-akubra-to-look-offshore-for-raw-materials/5474918>

¹⁷<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-05-24/rabbit-shortage-forces-akubra-to-look-offshore-for-raw-materials/5474918>

¹⁸<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-05-12/fur-claims-dog-myer-wittner/2709662>

¹⁹<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-05-12/fur-claims-dog-myer-wittner/2709662>

²⁰<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/real-fur-from-tortured-dogs-being-sold-as-fake-in-melbourne-s-markets-20191121-p53cw2.html>

²¹<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/real-fur-from-tortured-dogs-being-sold-as-fake-in-melbourne-s-markets-20191121-p53cw2.html>

²²<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6949888/goods-with-real-fur-found-at-vic-market/?fbclid=IwAR3fWsNZeld2G2OqTFxnCzDi202jYeS4qldJzjg283dvmkQ6M>

²³<https://www.ftc.gov/enforcement/statutes/fur-products-labeling-act>

²⁴<https://www.choice.com.au/shopping/packaging-labelling-and-advertising/labelling/articles/real-fur-that-is-labeled-faux>

²⁵<https://www.choice.com.au/shopping/packaging-labelling-and-advertising/labelling/articles/real-fur-that-is-labeled-faux>

²⁶<https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-54842643>

²⁷<https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-54842643>

²⁸<https://www.government.nl/latest/news/2020/05/19/new-results-from-research-into-covid-19-on-mink-farms>

²⁹[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099\(20\)30912-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099(20)30912-9/fulltext)

³⁰[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099\(20\)30912-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099(20)30912-9/fulltext)

³¹<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/17/spain-to-cull-nearly-100000-mink-in-coronavirus-outbreak>

³²<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/17/spain-to-cull-nearly-100000-mink-in-coronavirus-outbreak>

³³<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54818615>

³⁴<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54818615>

³⁵<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54818615>

³⁶[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099\(20\)30912-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099(20)30912-9/fulltext)

³⁷<https://www.peta.org/features/fur-bans-fur-free-future>

³⁸<https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?%20ID=3903503&GUID=EBE55293-8737-4620-945A-308ADC3A23DC&Options=ID%7CText%7C&Search=fur>

³⁹<https://www.animalsaustralia.org/features/fur-free-shopping-list.php>

⁴⁰<https://www.furfreealliance.com/fur-free-retailer-2/>

opportunity to show off the luxe synthetics. The rejection of fur by some of the largest fashion⁴⁰ houses such as Gucci, Michael Kors and most recently Prada, signals a positive trend. The fact that so many animals world-wide suffer and die each year merely to satisfy human vanity, consumerism and greed is not acceptable.

Fur alternatives continue to emerge with research and investment focused on environmentally conscious fibres such as tencel, denim, hemp and recycled plastic. Ecopel, the biggest global producer of fake fur fabric, uses recycled plastic bottles. Some examples of brands that use these alternatives include Calcaterra, Unreal Fur, House of Fluff and Shrimps. The most recent faux fur industry forecast predicts significant growth for the period of 2019-23.

For Australia to be a modern, ethical and compassionate country, it must end the import and export of all animal fur and cease the operation of domestic fur farms.

Policy

The Animal Justice Party opposes the production and use of animal fur.

This includes both the import into and export from Australia of fur from purpose-built fur farms, as a by-product of the meat industry and from native free-living animals shot and killed in their natural habitat.

Key Objectives

1. Ban all import of animal fur into Australia
2. Ban the farming of fur, and all other methods used to take fur from animals, in Australia
3. Ban the sale of products containing animal fur in Australia
4. Ensure accurate labelling and testing on all faux fur products so that consumers can shop with confidence.

(Photo Courtesy *We Animals*)

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