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Briefing: Fur

The fact that fur is still on sale in the UK is hypocritical. The main methods of obtaining fur are banned in Britain due to the inherent cruelty involved and opinion polls have consistently shown that fur is only worn by a tiny minority of people. The vast majority of UK citizens are opposed to the wearing of fur and the fur industry.

Many people buying fur are unaware that it is real - made from the skins of animals that have suffered and died simply because of the fur on their backs.

Fur is produced in two ways: by the factory farming of animals in tiny barren wire cages and by trapping animals using steel jawed leghold traps in the wild.

Fur Farming has been banned in the UK since 1 January 2001 when the government recognized that the factory farming of animals for fur offended public morality. The use of cruel leghold traps has been banned in the UK for over 50 years and throughout Europe for more than twenty. Yet still, it is legal to trade in the products of such cruelty in the UK.

Despite the demise of the fur industry in the UK since high profile campaigns began back in the 1980s, which saw the number of dedicated fur shops drop from over 200 to just a dozen today, fur continues to be sold in both up market department and designer stores and on the high street.

Labeling

As there is currently no legal requirement for real fur to be labeled as such, it is down to the consumer to make a judgment call when purchasing items made of or trimmed with fur as to whether or not the fur is real or fake. Quite often the shop staff are unable to help as without labeling they themselves can only proffer an opinion. Price is no guide. Gloves trimmed with rabbit fur have been found on sale costing only £4.99 and a leather coat with a coyote fur collar was sold for £99.99.

Focus group work has shown that consumers believe that all fur on sale outside of stores by designers known to use fur is fake with many on average incomes believing that if they can afford it then the fur must be

fake. When asked to give an estimation of price for a jacket trimmed with real fur and a similar jacket trimmed with fake fur the price estimates trebled or quadrupled for the item trimmed with real fur when in reality the cost difference was a matter of a few pounds.

These same consumers were shocked to find out that they had purchased items from stores that sell both fake and real fur and that they could have inadvertently purchased real fur.

Although the British Fur Trade Association runs its own voluntary labeling scheme to which its members can sign up, this applies to only a small percentage of the fur on sale in the UK as most retailers do not belong to the BFTA.

Until all garments made of or trimmed with real fur, regardless of the percentage of real fur used or the cost of the item, are labeled as being real fur consumers will be misled. As both of the methods used to produce fur are banned in the UK because they are deemed cruel or morally unacceptable it is vital that consumers are given the correct product information so that they do not unwittingly buy real fur.

The UK has already banned fur factory farming but its policy on fur is hypocritical and inconsistent. As an interim measure real fur on sale in the UK should be clearly labelled to enable consumers to make informed choices.

It is illegal to import and sell whale products and cat and dog fur in the UK as they are deemed to be cruel and unnecessary – the same as fur products. A ban on the import and sale of fur should be brought in by the UK government.