



Council of the
European Union

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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: Fur Farming in the European Union
– *Information from the Netherlands and Austrian delegations, supported by the Belgian, German, Luxembourg and Slovak delegations*

Delegations will find in Annex an information note from the Netherlands and Austrian delegations, supported by the Belgian, German, Luxembourg and Slovak delegations on the above mentioned subject to be raised under "Any other business" at the meeting of the Council ("Agriculture and Fisheries") on 28-29 June 2021.

Fur farming in the European Union

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Introduction

Within the European Union, the keeping and killing of fur animals has been part of the public debate in different countries since quite some time. The main driver of this discussion is that the welfare of these – essentially wild – animals is seriously impaired by housing systems that do not fit their natural needs. There has been increased momentum for movement on this topic since COVID-19.

The role of COVID 19

Since the first infections with SARS-CoV-2 in humans, there has been focus on the possibility of virus transmissions between humans and animals. After having been located in laboratory animals, the virus was also found to be circulating around mink populations in the Netherlands. Later, similar outbreaks were found in other but similar holdings in Europe. The emerging of new COVID-19 strains in mink holdings brought more attention to possible health risks involved in keeping minks in such contexts. This led to (temporary) bans on keeping fur animals in Member States such as the Netherlands, France, Denmark, Sweden and Italy.

Initiatives on fur farming within the EU

Fur farming has been prohibited in Austria since 2005. Several other Member States of the European Union have banned fur farming or do not allow it. In November 2020, the German Minister Julia Klöckner asked for a public debate on fur farming during the meeting of the Agricultural and Fisheries Council. So far, this debate has not been followed up. However, in February 2021, the Austrian Minister for Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection Rudolf Anschober sent an open letter to Commissioner Stella Kyriakides to take action.

Call for action

Austria and the Netherlands have taken the initiative for a joint note to ask the Commission to take appropriate action to end fur farming in the European Union. We, together with our co-signers, believe that — now that many mink have been culled and several Member States have banned fur farming and breeding in their own countries — the time has come for the European Union to move forward on this topic and express their respect for animal welfare and their willingness to end an economic activity that is without doubt harmful for the wellbeing of animals kept in small cages for the sole or main purpose of obtaining fur.

Fur farming in the European Union

1. The signing Member States call upon the European Commission to undertake appropriate action leading to the end of fur farming in Europe. The reasons for this request include the severe impact of keeping animals for their fur on the welfare of these animals as well as ethical considerations with regard to keeping and killing animals for the sole or main purpose of obtaining their fur. The signing Member States also take into consideration the risk that keeping mink on a commercial basis might pose for public and animal health because of their susceptibility for infections with SARS-CoV-2.
2. The way of keeping mink and raccoon dogs and other animals such as foxes and chinchillas on commercial fur farms has a negative effect on the welfare of these animals.¹ Changing the conditions and management under which fur animals are kept does not automatically lead to an improvement or guarantee of animal welfare. Therefore, fur farming per definition poses serious threats to animal welfare.
3. We believe that the purpose of fur production does not legitimize the maintenance of keeping and killing these animals, and consider keeping and killing animals solely or mainly because of the value of their fur to be ethically unacceptable.

¹ [The welfare of animals kept for fur production \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-communications/infographic/infographic_welfare_of_animals_kept_for_fur_production.pdf)

4. We recall the European Union's history of constantly improving animal welfare and also ethical standards related to the veterinary sector, not only in the EU but also worldwide via e.g. standards of the OIE. These efforts already led to successful steps like Regulation (EC) No. 1523/2007 banning the placing on the market and the import to, or export from, the Community of cat and dog fur, and products containing such fur and Regulation (EC) No. 1007/2009 on trade in seal products. We believe that the time has come to take the next step on this way forward.
5. In addition to the aforementioned animal welfare and ethical considerations, SARS-CoV-2 infections have been reported in various Member States. Moreover, several human cases of COVID-19 were linked with SARS-CoV-2 infections in mink. The World Health Organisation and EFSA stipulated that mink can act as a reservoir of SARS-CoV-2, pass the virus amongst mink and continue to pose a risk for virus spill-over from mink to humans or to wild animals.
6. The signing Member States welcome the European Commission's efforts towards a harmonized approach for monitoring of SARS-CoV-2 infections in certain animal species, including mink and raccoon dogs. However, considering the zoonotic character of SARS-CoV-2 risks as well as the aforementioned risks to public and animal health, the signing Member States believe that emergency measures in accordance with the Animal Health Regulation are appropriate.
7. Given the abovementioned considerations related to animal welfare, ethics and public health, the signing Member States would like to ask the European Commission to investigate the options for the permanent prohibition of fur farming in the EU and to present a legislative proposal to achieve this goal.
