

Stella Kyriakides, European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety
Janez Lenarčič, European Commissioner for Crisis Management
Janusz Wojciechowski, European Commissioner for Agriculture
Rue de la Loi / Wetstraat 200
1049 Brussels
Belgium

17 June 2021

Via e-mail: cab-kyriakides-contact@ec.europa.eu, cab-lenarcic-contact@ec.europa.eu, cab-wojciechowski-contact@ec.europa.eu

COVID-19: Ban Fur Farming

Dear Commissioners:

I'm writing to you on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), our international affiliates, and our millions of supporters across Europe to urge you to take action to shut down Europe's fur farms – starting with mink farms. This life-saving move would help protect the health of residents and spare countless animals a miserable existence and a violent death.

Since its emergence more than a year ago, the novel coronavirus has affected the lives of hundreds of millions of EU citizens. In Europe alone, over half a million people have died from the disease and many are suffering from long-term consequences of it, such as organ damage, strokes, or psychological stress.¹ Urgent and decisive action is therefore needed to prevent a similar – or even more catastrophic – situation in the future.

Mink farming is of particular concern, because minks harbour infectious zoonotic diseases and are extremely susceptible to the novel coronavirus.² Scientific studies show that minks as well as raccoon dogs, who are closely related to foxes,³ can act as reservoirs for SARS-CoV-2.⁴ A recent report by the European Food Safety Authority and the European Centre for

¹SeyedAlinaghi SA, Afsahi AM, MohsseniPour M, et al. Late Complications of COVID-19; a Systematic Review of Current Evidence. *Arch Acad Emerg Med*. 2021;9(1):e14.

<https://journals.sbm.ac.ir/aaem/index.php/AAEM/article/view/1058/856>. Accessed 21 May 2021.

²European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. Detection of new SARS-CoV-2 variants related to mink – 12 November 2020. *ECDC:Stockholm*. 2020. <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/RRA-SARS-CoV-2-in-mink-12-nov-2020.pdf>. Accessed 21 May 2021.

³Prince T, Smith SL, Radford AD, Solomon T, Hughes GL, Patterson EI. SARS-CoV-2 Infections in Animals: Reservoirs for Reverse Zoonosis and Models for Study. *Viruses*. 2021;13(3):494. <https://doi.org/10.3390/v13030494>. Accessed 21 May 2021.

⁴Freuling CM, Breithaupt A, Müller T, et al. Susceptibility of Raccoon Dogs for Experimental SARS-CoV-2 Infection. *Emerg Infect Dis*. 2020;26(12):2982-2985. <https://doi.org/10.3201/eid2612.203733>. Accessed 21 May 2021.

Disease Prevention and Control concluded that all mink farms should be seen as at risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection.⁵

Since animals on fur farms are forced to live in unhygienic conditions and suffer from chronic stress and poor health, which can compromise their immune responses, disease can spread rapidly at such facilities. It therefore comes as little surprise that by January 2021, the virus had been detected on more than 400 mink farms in the EU and the EEA – including Denmark, France, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Spain, and Sweden.⁶ Most recently, Poland, the third-largest fur producer in the world, joined the list.⁷ As a result of these and other outbreaks on mink farms around the world, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Organisation for Animal Health, and the World Health Organization published a joint global risk assessment on fur farming, which identified a “high risk of introduction and spread from fur farming of the virus that causes COVID-19”⁸ in the European region.⁹ SARS-CoV-2 spills over from fur farms into human populations and carries a high public health risk, as it can mutate when it moves between animal and human populations. Novel variants of the virus could therefore reduce the effectiveness of vaccines.

The immediate closure of Europe’s fur farms would benefit humans as well as animals. Minks are intelligent, highly social animals who retain their natural, inquisitive instincts despite generations of captive breeding. This makes confinement to cramped, barren cages for their entire lives all the more traumatic for them. Unable to engage in natural behaviour, these sensitive animals often go mad, and some even mutilate themselves, chewing on their own legs or tails as a result of the constant psychological and physical torment. PETA and numerous other animal protection groups have repeatedly documented and exposed this. What’s more, the killing process – in which animals used for fur are either gassed or anally electrocuted – causes profound suffering.

The fur industry also gives rise to various ecological problems. Mink farming leads to high nitrous oxide emissions, eutrophication, and water consumption. Compared with textiles, fur has a higher impact per kilogram in 17 of 18 environmental categories, including climate

⁵European Food Safety Authority and European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, Boklund, A, Gortázar, C, Pasquali, P, et al. Monitoring of SARS-CoV-2 infection in mustelids. *EFSA Journal*. 2021;19(3):e06459. <https://doi.org/10.2903/j.efsa.2021.6459>. Accessed 21 May 2021.

⁶European Food Safety Authority and European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, Boklund, A, Gortázar, C, Pasquali, P, et al. Monitoring of SARS-CoV-2 infection in mustelids. *EFSA Journal*. 2021;19(3):e06459. <https://doi.org/10.2903/j.efsa.2021.6459>. Accessed 21 May 2021.

⁷Reuters. Poland finds first case of COVID-19 in mink. 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/poland-finds-first-case-covid-19-mink-2021-02-01/>. Accessed 21 May 2021.

⁸WHO Regional Office for Europe. New assessment shows high risk of introduction and spread from fur farming of the virus that causes COVID-19. 2021. <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/news/news/2021/2/new-assessment-shows-high-risk-of-introduction-and-spread-from-fur-farming-of-the-virus-that-causes-covid-19>. Accessed 28 May 2021.

⁹World Health Organization, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, World Organisation for Animal Health. SARS-CoV-2 in animals used for fur farming: GLEWS+ risk assessment. 2021. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-fur-farming-risk-assessment-2021.1>. Accessed 21 May 2021.

change and toxic emissions.¹⁰ This is concerning not only regarding the environment but also because, as noted by researchers, “The unsustainable use of natural resources by the mink industry impedes our response and recovery from the pandemic.”¹¹

Ms Kyriakides and Mr Lenarčič, in your respective roles as EU commissioner for health and EU commissioner for crisis management, you are required to prevent and reduce the risk of the emergence and spread of mutated pathogens in order to minimise the risk of pandemics and the threat they pose to the health of EU residents. Mr Wojciechowski, your area of responsibility includes ensuring the well-being of animals. As such, the only sensible, logical action is to ban mink farming immediately, with a ban on other types of fur farming to follow across the European Union, like the one many member states already have in place. Such a ban would be welcomed by the vast majority of residents, who, according to opinion polls, want to see this archaic practice consigned to the history books.

I look forward to hearing from you on this important matter.

Best regards,



Harald Ullmann

Vice President PETA Germany

¹⁰Bijleveld M, Korteland M, Sevenster M. The environmental impact of mink fur production. *Delft*. 2011. <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2021R1/Downloads/PublicTestimonyDocument/20559>. Accessed 21 May 2021.

¹¹Xia C, Lam SS, Sonne C. Ban unsustainable mink production. *American Association for the Advancement of Science*; 2020;370(6516):539. <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/370/6516/539.1>. Accessed 21 May 2021.