



**VETERINARY IRELAND**

**POLICY DOCUMENT**

**ON**

**FUR FARMING**

**2018**

**AS RATIFIED BY**  
**VETERINARY IRELAND NATIONAL COUNCIL**  
**22<sup>ND</sup> NOVEMBER 2018**



## **Veterinary Ireland Policy Document on Fur Farming 2018**

### **Contents**

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>Wild Mink v. Farmed Mink</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>Veterinary Ireland Policy on Captive Wild Animals</b>	<b>Page 4</b>
<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>Page 6</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Page 6</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>Page 6</b>



## Introduction

Veterinary Ireland originally published its Policy on Captive Wild Animals in May 2018, with an update having been ratified in November 2018. Despite some advances, such as the banning of the use of wild animals in travelling circuses, which came into force on 1st January 2018, there remains significant concern within Veterinary Ireland for the welfare of wild animals in captivity.

Veterinary Ireland is particularly concerned about the welfare of wild animals farmed for their fur. In Ireland there are three fur farms which between them farm over 200,000 mink (*Neovison vison*) annually. The welfare of animals intensively farmed for fur has always been of significant concern to the public and public pressure has recently resulted in some well-known fashion houses removing fur from their collections. Fourteen EU Member States have already banned the farming of wild animals for fur; there is currently a Bill before the Dáil on the issue.

## Wild Mink v. Farmed Mink

Farmed mink are essentially wild animals. The differences between wild mink and farmed mink are summarised in Table 1, below.

<u>Wild mink</u>	<u>Farmed mink</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Both males and females are solitary animals</li><li>• Territories range between 1 and 3km<sup>2</sup></li><li>• Semi-aquatic, highly motivated to swim and dive</li><li>• Stereotypies do not occur in nature</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Live in close proximity to other mink and cannot avoid abnormal social contact</li><li>• Spend their entire lives in wire mesh battery cages, typically measuring 90 x 30 x 45 cm</li><li>• Cannot run, swim, dive or hunt thus preventing them from exhibiting basic natural behaviours</li><li>• Deprivation of swimming water results in similar stress to deprivation of food (Mason et al, 2001)</li><li>• Regularly suffer serious injuries</li><li>• Stereotypies commonly observed</li></ul>

**Table 1** Differences between wild and farmed mink.



### **Veterinary Ireland Policy on Captive Wild Animals**

In Section F of this Veterinary Ireland Policy Document, the following position statement is given:

#### ***FARMING OF CAPTIVE WILD ANIMALS***

*Given the nature of the animal species involved, Veterinary Ireland has a particular concern as to the feasibility of catering for the welfare of animals in commercial fur farms and other similar operations. It notes with concern that legislation in the area relates primarily to anti-escape measures and to humane slaughter, with little reference to ensuring positive welfare for the duration of the animal's life.*

Veterinary Ireland had originally looked at a number of recommendations to improve the health and welfare of farmed mink, including:

- a) Implementation of the WelFur welfare assessment programme without delay (<http://www.fureurope.eu/fur-policies/welfur/>).
- b) *Creation of a set of required welfare standards – these to include proper bedding and enrichment.*
- c) *A statutory requirement for regular welfare-related inspections of fur farms.*
- d) *Further research on the welfare of animals kept in fur farms.*

However, the Veterinary Ireland Animal Welfare Committee remained concerned whether these recommendations could prevent the welfare issues regularly encountered on fur farms and it was agreed to investigate further.

Based on such investigations, the following is a summary of the perceived shortcomings of the WelFur programme as it relates to the welfare of farmed mink.

The WelFur project was developed by the fur industry itself (the European Fur Breeders' Association, EFBA) in 2009 to assess on-farm welfare of mink and foxes. These protocols were eventually published in 2015 and trialled in 10 European countries. Full implementation was intended for 2016. A recent scientific review of animal welfare standards and WelFur concluded that it is not possible for the fur industry to meet the welfare needs of mink (and other farmed wild species such as fox and chinchilla) and concluded that a ban is the only solution to the serious welfare concerns detailed in that report (Pickett & Harris, 2015). This report listed concerns about the WelFur programme and gave specific examples of where the standards therein fell short, as outlined below.



The WelFur protocols:

- Have been **specifically designed around the very serious limitations of current housing systems** and generally reward the *status quo*, even where this is known to compromise welfare, rather than encouraging the development of alternative systems with the potential to provide a higher level of welfare;
- Do not adequately penalise practices that **fail to meet essential existing minimum standards** set out in the Council of Europe Recommendations;
- Do not address **inhumane handling and killing methods** and the lack of training for all personnel carrying out killing of fur animals;
- Downplay the importance of **serious injuries** that are associated with extreme suffering;
- Underestimate the true levels of **mortality and stereotypies**;
- Use **inadequate measures** of hunger, human-animal relationships and positive mental states;
- **Will not achieve its stated aims** of ensuring ‘a high level of animal welfare’ on fur farms and functioning as ‘the new scientific reference’ for fur-farmed species;
- Use complex scoring systems to combine different welfare measures into a single category indicating the overall welfare level - this approach allows high positive scores on some elements to mask **serious failings** on others;
- Do not take account of societal concerns and **score welfare only up to a ceiling of ‘best current practice’**;
- Would be **misleading** if used as the basis for a labelling system.

A fuller critique of WelFur’s ability to prevent serious welfare issues is provided in Pickett & Harris 2015, but essentially the programme would endorse the status quo and not only allow poor welfare, but potentially reward it.

Additionally, there is a framework for supporting a ban on fur farming through European legislation. European Council Directive 98/58/EC states that:

*‘No animal shall be kept for farming purposes unless it can be reasonably expected, on the basis of its genotype or phenotype, that it can be kept without detrimental effect on its health or welfare’.*

In addition, the Council of Europe Recommendation Concerning Fur Animals states:

*“No animal shall be kept for its fur if: a) the conditions of this Recommendation cannot be met, or b) the animal belongs to a species whose members, despite these conditions being met, cannot adapt to captivity without welfare problems”.*



### Conclusions

Having reviewed the available evidence, Veterinary Ireland concludes that the WelFur programme cannot prevent the welfare problems regularly encountered on fur farms, such as stereotypies and serious injuries. It has additionally concluded, given the nature of the animals concerned and the environment in which they are held, that there are simply no welfare standards or inspection regime that would prevent such problems arising on a regular basis. It is further clear that fur farms cannot provide for the five freedoms (or welfare needs) of mink, particularly in relation to the need to be able to express most normal behaviours. Using the five domains concept, as detailed in Veterinary Ireland's Policy on Captive Wild Animals, it would seem that fur farms fail on all except the provision of appropriate nutrition. Farmed mink do not live in an environment that provides choice, appropriate shelter or a species appropriate comfortable resting area. The conditions experienced by farmed mink do not promote an environment that enhances fitness, but rather serves to protect the value of the animals' fur. Further, given the barren battery cages that farmed mink are confined to, there is little opportunity to provide any meaningful environmental enrichment. The behavioural restrictions inflicted on farmed mink can only lead to negative experiences (e.g. pain, fear, frustration) and therefore fail to maximise positive experiences.

### Recommendation

Accordingly, Veterinary Ireland recommends that there should be an immediate ban on the farming of mink, and similar wild animals, for the production of fur.

### References

- Mason, Cooper & Clareborough (2001) Frustrations in fur-farmed mink. *Nature* 410: 35-36.
- Pickett, H. & Harris, S. (2015). The case against fur farming: A scientific review of animal welfare standards and 'WelFur'. A Report for Respect for Animals.



**VETERINARY IRELAND**

**POLICY DOCUMENT  
ON  
FUR FARMING  
2018**

**AS RATIFIED BY  
VETERINARY IRELAND NATIONAL COUNCIL  
22<sup>nd</sup> NOVEMBER 2018**