

Fur Farming in Ireland

Submission, 2011



www.anvilireland.ie

PO Box, 10914, Dublin 22
Phone: 00353 (0) 861999512
e-mail: info@anvilireland.ie

December, 2011

Foreword

ANVIL was established in response to, what many people felt was an absence of representation of animals, small rescues, and individuals involved in animal rescue and welfare. Our mission is, to raise awareness, at both a public and government level, of the problems facing animals and welfare organisations. An important aspect of our work is, to encourage public debate on the present status of all animals, (in particular companion animals) and the questioning of legislation and practices that fail to address their needs, or prevent their suffering.

The organisation intends to examine the political and legislative system, establish where reform is needed, and push for this reform. We are building a network of compassionate and conscientious citizens who are committed to making animal welfare a social and political issue.

ANVIL Ireland is completely independent and is not a vehicle for any one welfare or interest group, and is an all-Ireland organisation. Our supporters have a wide spectrum of views and expertise which may be called on. The face of animal welfare is changing in Ireland and ANVIL is an example of this change.

The principle objectives of ANVIL Ireland:

- To Research the existing legislation and structures dealing with companion animals, identify any shortcomings and make recommendations for improvement.
- Carry out studies, make submissions based on our findings and identify where further information or research is required.
- Raise awareness of the problems faced by animals and rescue groups, and make representations to Government on their behalf.
- Make available our information and research to Politicians, others involved in animal welfare and protection, and the public, to enable and improve informed debate.

Miriam Anderson, MSc, MAMLS,

On behalf of ANVIL Ireland

This submission is made by ANVIL Ireland and on behalf of the following groups:

Animal Care Society (ACS), Cork

Animal Trust Fund, Sligo

Animal Welfare Federation, Northern Ireland

Armargo's Goat Sanctuary, Clare

Assisi ARC, Wicklow

A.S.H. Animal Rescue, Wicklow

Celtic Animal Life Line, Kildare

Clare Animal Welfare Ltd.

Cottage Rescue, Co Tipperary

Dungarvan Rescue Kennels, Waterford

Greyhound Welfare Northern Ireland

Friends of Animals, Westmeath

Friends of Ben Dog Rescue

Irish Animals

Joan's Ark, Cavan

Kitten Adoption

Mayo SPCA

MADRA Dog Rescue

Marie Healy Sanctuary, SPCA

Monaghan SPCA

Orchard Greyhound Sanctuary

Pat Conroy

PAWS, Co Tipperary

Pets Ireland

Retired Greyhound Owners Network

Sligo SPCA

The Animal Foundation, Kildare

Tipp-Off Animal Rescue, Co Offaly

Uisneach Border Collie Rescue, Ireland

Introduction

Presently in Ireland there are five mink farms and according to figures from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) 141,812 mink pelts were exported from Ireland in 2010. Foxes are also farmed. These include artic and silver foxes. CSO figures for 2010 show *1,436,100 fox pelts were exported in 2010.

*(*Mr Lorcan O'Broin, External Trade Section of the CSO has conceded there is a problem with this figure and it is being investigated by the CSO. They will alert us when there is an update on this situation)*

Further statistics from the CSO show the value of exports from the industry to be less than €5 million. Due to the nature of the industry, it is not labour intensive. This activity therefore, does not contribute greatly either financially or in terms of employment.

While there are no EU directives on this matter, some countries like the UK and Austria have banned the practice. The Netherlands have agreed to phase out this practice over 10 years and a move by Sweden to implement a ban on ethical grounds appears imminent. There is also strong public support in this country for a ban on moral and ethical grounds.

Animal Welfare.

Under the Treaty of Amsterdam animals are recognised as sentient beings, capable of experiencing fear, stress and pain among other things. In order to prevent unnecessary suffering, the conditions in which animals are kept should take account of this.

These conditions should allow the animal to exhibit natural behaviours like foraging, breeding or marking territory which are common to most animals. Conditions should also allow for specific adaptive behaviours which some animals have, depending on the type of habitat they live in. In the case of mink, these would include semi-aquatic habitat while Arctic foxes have adapted to live in extremes of cold.

In 2001, The European Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare (SCAHAW) published a report on the welfare of animals kept for fur farming. This report states, “The welfare of an animal will become poorer if it cannot successfully adapt to the conditions in which it is kept”.

The report explains that animals can be prevented from developing elements of species specific behaviour due to lack of trigger, restricted space or the lack of an appropriate outlet for these activities (Dawkins 1980, 1990).

The publication also states that restricted space and lack of appropriate outlet results in the “thwarting of needs to show certain behaviours and will often induce suffering, “(Dawkins 1980).

In other words, an animals’ welfare is dependent on its own biological features and the accommodation and living conditions to which it is subjected. Failure to allow an animal to exhibit natural behaviours will result in stress in that animal.

Mink are reared intensively on fur farms despite being solitary animals. They are kept in small wire mesh cages which do not allow them to carry out their natural behaviours. On the issue of accommodation on fur farms the SCAHAW report concluded “The typical mink cage with a nest box and wire mesh floor impairs mink welfare because it does not provide for important needs.” On the subject of foxes “The typical fox cage does not provide for important needs of foxes.”

Mink are also semi-aquatic and in the wild would live near water. Swimming and diving are very important natural activities for mink and the lack of access to water for these animals on fur farms deprives them of a basic need.

In the SCAHAW publication, a definition of domestication is given as :”the essence of domestication is the capture and taming by man of animals with particular behavioural characteristics, their removal from their natural living area and breeding community, and their maintenance under controlled breeding conditions for mutual benefits” (Bökönyi (1989))

The report goes on “some aspects of domestication have a positive selective value, allowing the animal to adapt to particular environmental conditions. This does not apply to mink or foxes as the report admits there has been a lack of selection for tameness and adaptability to captive environments. The report further states, that mink have only been held in captivity for a relatively short time when compared to cattle and sheep, therefore “mink are not domesticated in the same sense”.

A statement from the UK Farm Animal Welfare Council described farmed mink and foxes as “essentially wild”. The overwhelming evidence proves these are essentially wild animals and therefore completely unsuited to being farmed.

A report was carried out in Ireland by the working-group to the Scientific Advisory Committee on Animal Health and Welfare (SACAHW) entitled, “Welfare aspects of the slaughter of fur producing animals in Ireland”. This report outlined the methods currently used in Ireland to kill mink and foxes. The report also discusses the welfare implications of the methods used and makes recommendations.

There are two methods currently in use in Ireland for the killing of mink. Both of these methods involve using gaseous mixtures, either carbon monoxide (CO) or carbon dioxide (CO²). With both of these methods the selected animals are removed from their cages by grasping at the base of the tail and placing into a chamber filled with the gaseous mixture. Up to 70 mink at a time may be placed in the gas chamber.

The efficiency of either of these gases as a killing agent is questionable according to the report. Another cause for concern is the large number of animals present in the chamber while the gassing takes place. The potential for stress and suffocation from the crush of other animals is great.

The American Veterinary Medical Association Guidelines on Euthanasia (2007) state that CO² euthanasia may take longer than other means. The guidelines also note that high concentrations of CO² may be distressful and that burrowing and diving animals may have a very high CO² tolerance. This last item applies in particular to mink.

Cooper, Mason and Raj (1998) reported that mink were aversive to high concentrations of CO². The EU Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare's Report on The Welfare of Animals Kept for Fur Production, 2001 concluded that the use of CO² for killing impairs mink welfare.

The method used in Ireland to kill foxes is electrocution. A one step method is employed whereby an electrical apparatus is connected to a standard battery. The fox is caught and restrained using a neck tongs. Two electrodes are attached, one to the mouth, the other to the rectum. A current is applied for more than three seconds to achieve electrocution.

The EU Working Party Report on Recommendations for Euthanasia of Experimental Animals (1997) suggests that head to tail stunning is unacceptable as it fails to cause immediate unconsciousness before cardiac fibrillation. The American Veterinary Medical Association Guidelines of Euthanasia (2007) also concludes head to tail electrocution is an unacceptable method of killing.

Ethics and Morality

Ethically, fashion and a simple desire for something do not constitute moral necessity. It must be proven that the good that is secured is essential and no alternative means are available. From this perspective, it is immediately apparent that fur farming fails a basic moral test

Wearing fur may well be pleasant, fashionable or even desirable to some people but it can never be defined as an essential. It is obvious, to any right minded people, that it is unjustifiable to inflict suffering on animals for such non-essential and trivial reasons. According to the "The Ethical Case Against Fur Farming" fur is a "non-essential luxury item".

Discussion

Our attitude to animals has changed over the years. The public are more aware now of the way animals are kept and farmed and are interested in the welfare of these animals. Survey after survey reveals that the public are against the cruel practice of fur farming and the majority feel there is no justification for it.

Politically as well, times are changing. The fur Farming (Prohibition) Bill 2004 was narrowly defeated by 67 votes to 50. A phasing out of fur farms was included in the programme for the last government and a reference to this was widely expected in the new upcoming animal welfare legislation. This current review is a step backwards in animal welfare terms.

In the northern part (Northern Ireland) of this island fur farming is banned. This ban also applies to our nearest neighbours in Great Britain. We are out of step with more progressive and compassionate societies while we allow this practice to go on in our country; with the move towards a ban by other European countries we will be further out of step.

ANVIL Ireland is not an animal rights group, we believe human responsibility is more of an issue than animal rights. In this regard we represent a very middle of the road attitude. We believe this practice is immoral, unethical, and cruel and has no place in a civilised society.

In light of this we call on the Minister to act in the best interest of animal welfare and introduce a ban on fur farming.

Miriam Anderson, MSc. MAMLS

On behalf of ANVIL Ireland