



INTERGROUP ON THE WELFARE & CONSERVATION OF ANIMALS

Ms Stella Kyriakides
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Established in 1983

Brussels, 12 November 2020

Re: Request to permanently close all mink farms in the EU over the spreading of a mutated form of SARS-CoV-2 among farmed American minks

Dear Commissioner Kyriakides,

The undersigned Board Members and Members of the European Parliament Intergroup on the Welfare and Conservation of Animals, express their deep concern over the spreading of a mutated form of SARS-CoV-2 among farmed American minks.

The Danish government recently announced that all 17 million minks reared in more than 1000 farms in Denmark will be culled. This decision has been taken after 12 people who were in contact with farmed minks in the region of Northern Jutland, were infected by a mutated form of the Coronavirus (COVID-19).

This indicates that new strands of the Coronavirus are developing in Danish mink farms which could potentially undermine the international efforts to combat the virus. Indeed, the State Serum Institute, the official Danish authority for pandemics and infectious diseases, warned that a mutation could interfere with the effectiveness of future vaccines. This is why the Danish government has reacted swiftly.

However, Denmark is not the only country with mink farms. Minks which are kept in crowded conditions, - ideal for spreading a virus, have been infected also in other countries, including the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Sweden and some U.S. states. For this reason, the Dutch government decided on 28th August 2020, to put forward a ban on mink farming, previously scheduled for 2024.

Given the devastating economic and social crisis caused by the pandemic, the risk of a mutated virus interfering with the effectiveness of vaccines for humans cannot be afforded.

If infection by SARS-CoV-2 spills into wild mustelids, these have the potential to become a permanent reservoir of infection for other animal species. Such a scenario has been seen before with rabies in raccoons and skunks (Rupprecht et al. 1995).

There is no time to lose. We call on your support to ensure that the EU takes prompt action by urging all Member States to follow the Danish example and to close all mink farms.

In case of transmissible animal diseases including zoonoses, the Commission has the necessary powers, to adopt protective emergency measures. These include trade restrictions and funding exceptional support measures for the fur farming sector which could help farmers to reconvert their activities into occupations that do not jeopardise public health and animal welfare.

As millions of farmed mustelids are going to be culled, we call on the Commission to monitor that this is done humanely, and according to the requirements of the EU legislation.

We thank you in advance for your consideration of our proposals. We would appreciate a swift reply and would be delighted to discuss the matter with you.

Yours sincerely,

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