

IT'S TIME FOR THE MOD TO GO FAUX



PETA Bearskins Campaign Briefing

SUMMARY

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) has always maintained – to the UK public, members of Parliament, and the media – that its support for the slaughter of Canadian black bears for the Queen’s Guard’s caps would end as soon as a “suitable and affordable [faux fur] alternative” became available. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and ECOPEL – the world-renowned faux furrier – have now created the world’s first faux bear fur that looks and

performs just like the real thing, and ECOPEL is offering to provide the MoD with free faux bear fur until 2030. Since these ornamental caps currently cost the UK taxpayer £1,710 a piece, you’d assume the MoD would be thrilled by the news. But you’d be wrong. It has rejected the faux fur, citing issues with “water shedding”, its visual appearance, user comfort, and durability. This is complete nonsense and a disingenuous attempt to thwart progress and change.

BACKGROUND TO THE CAMPAIGN

For almost two decades, PETA – a charity – has devoted significant time, money, and other resources to developing a humane faux fur that would allow the military to retain the aesthetic of the bearskin cap. In contrast, the MoD is not proactively seeking an alternative, content to pass judgement on what it considers the failings of samples put forward by PETA, while denying faux-fur experts the opportunity to work directly with its cap-makers to find constructive solutions.

Several years ago, PETA was promised by Secretary of State for Defence Peter Luff and MoD officials that once a faux fur matched the unique 9.5 cm length of real bear fur, the MoD would take the fabric forward.

In September 2017, PETA notified the MoD that ECOPEL had produced a lustrous faux bear fur that met its length requirement. After following up for a year on our request for ECOPEL to meet with MoD officials to present the faux fur, a meeting scheduled for September 2018 was cancelled by the ministry at short notice. The Army Secretariat finally responded in May 2019,

claiming that the faux fur “does not meet requirements” without having met with ECOPEL or seen the faux fur.

The current secretary of state for defence, Ben Wallace, has a long history of actively working to block any switch to faux fur. In 2006, he put down an amendment to an early day motion that called for the development of a faux-fur version of the Queen’s Guard’s cap, urging the government to hang on to the “glorious” military tradition of real bearskins. In 2019, Wallace refuted his predecessor’s promise, claiming that PETA’s paper trail “does not accord with [the MoD’s] own records”.

PETA then enlisted the services of a fabric technologist who perfected the faux-fur fabric – removing a felt-like backing, making it lighter than bear fur – and lined and prepared the faux-fur swatches for testing. PETA commissioned an MoD-copyrighted WIRA shower test to be conducted at the ministry’s accredited laboratory, Intertek. In December 2020, Intertek shared the results simultaneously with PETA and the MoD:

the lined ECOPEL faux bear fur is 100% waterproof to the military's standards and performs in a remarkably similar way to real bear fur in water shedding tests. To the naked eye, the two fabrics look virtually identical.

In August 2021, the Army Policy & Secretariat noted PETA's "claim" of a new faux fur that met its requirements but stated that it had not been shared with the MoD and therefore Defence Clothing had "not had the opportunity to commission tests by our laboratories in order to complete their own assessment of the latest

synthetic". The MoD-accredited laboratory Intertek had indeed shared it with the MoD, but it was ignored.

In November 2021, PETA relaunched its public campaign and lodged a Freedom of Information request that confirmed in December that the MoD had received the positive test results. The ministry then said that it did not agree with PETA that the faux fur met the range of basic requirements. This is preposterous as the performance of the faux and real fur is *virtually identical*.

THE BEAR 'CULLS'

Over the years, the government has given conflicting stories about the way in which the bear pelts are acquired, variously claiming they are from licensed fur traders, from the indigenous "Inuit people of Canada", or from animals who have died from causes either natural or accidental. However, in a 2021 Freedom of Information request by PETA, the Army Secretariat conceded that it doesn't know anything about the supply chain: "No information in scope of this element of your request is held by the department. ... [T]he MOD receives the final product from our contracted suppliers and is not involved with the licensed cull sanctioned by the Canadian government."

The MoD frequently makes the claim that the bear pelts are the by-product of a "cull" overseen by Canadian authorities. Yet, as confirmed to PETA by both the federal and the provincial Canadian governments, no such "cull" exists. PETA believes the MoD is using the term disingenuously as a euphemism for bears who are killed by "sport" or "trophy" hunters. The Canadian government issues an annual quota of hunting tags to licensed hunting enthusiasts. Once in possession of these tags, hunters are free to bait and kill bears. Many are shot several times, and some escape and die slowly from blood loss, gangrene, starvation, or dehydration. Some provinces allow mother bears to be killed, meaning their cubs are left to starve or are killed by predators. Even the use of bows and arrows is permitted. Hunters are permitted to sell their "trophies", which often means that the pelts are sold to fur auction houses for financial gain. It is therefore undeniable that money from buyers such as the MoD funds the suffering of bears in Canada by making the baiting and killing of bears and the sale of their pelts a profitable pursuit for hunters.

WASTING TAXPAYERS' MONEY

In just seven years, the MoD has squandered more than £1 million of taxpayers' money on caps which serve no military purpose. In a country where fur farming was banned 20 years ago, a ban on the importation and sale of fur is being considered, and measures to restrict the importation of hunting trophies – including from black bears – are to be laid before Parliament during 2022, it's incomprehensible that a symbol of the UK as iconic as the Queen's Guard's caps is still being fashioned from the pelts of bears gunned down overseas. Even the regiment's namesake, Her Majesty the Queen, no longer purchases fur for her own wardrobe. A viable and humane faux bear fur is tried, tested, and ready to go. Please support PETA's campaign to quick-march the humane, 21st century faux-fur caps into service.

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PETA