

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Fur Trade in the UK, HC 823

Wednesday 7 March 2018

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 7 March 2018.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Neil Parish (Chair); Alan Brown; John Grogan; Dr Caroline Johnson; Kerry McCarthy; David Simpson; Angela Smith; Julian Sturdy.

Questions 1 - 145

Witnesses

I: Claire Bass, Executive Director, Humane Society International UK; Alex Bushill, News Correspondent, BBC London News; Sarah Hajibagheri, Reporter, Sky News.

II: Neil Hackett, Interim Supply Chain Director, Misguided; Paul Horsfield, Merchandising Director, BooHoo; Dorothy Maxwell, Head of Sustainability, House of Fraser.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Humane Society International](#)
- [BBC London News](#)
- [Misguided](#)
- [BooHoo](#)
- [British Retail Consortium](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Claire Bass, Alex Bushill and Sarah Hajibagheri.

Q1 **Chair:** Good morning. Thank you very much for coming to our inquiry on fake fur. It is great to have you all here. Would you like to introduce yourselves? We will then start with the questions straightaway.

Sarah Hajibagheri: My name is Sarah Hajibagheri. I am a reporter for Sky News.

Claire Bass: Good morning. My name is Claire Bass. I am the executive director of Humane Society International in the UK.

Alex Bushill: I am Alex Bushill, news correspondent, BBC London News.

Q2 **Chair:** Thank you very much. Naturally, we have decided to investigate the situation regarding real fur being traded off as fake fur. My first question, Sarah, is to you really. How did Sky come to investigate the issue of real fur being sold as fake fur last year?

Sarah Hajibagheri: I have worked as an investigative journalist for the past decade, specialising particularly in animal welfare and consumer rights. Over the past year, we have been working very closely with a whole host of charities, in particular Humane Society International, which we know has expertise in this area. We contacted it to see if we could work together on this issue in terms of the mislabelling of animal fur, and Claire suggested that we go on a shopping trip together, not to some back alley or side street but to the most famous shopping street in the UK. We went to Oxford Street. We spent a couple of hours there. We went to see some of the most famous retailers there.

Q3 **Chair:** You can name these retailers. You do not have to be too coy about it.

Sarah Hajibagheri: We went to the flagship House of Fraser store on Oxford Street. We went to some smaller outlets on Oxford Street, but we also looked at the online fashion retailers such as BooHoo and Missguided, which are going to be here, as well as TK Maxx. Claire, because of her expertise, was able to help identify the difference between real animal fur and synthetic products.

All the products that we found were labelled as faux fur. They were all quite cheap—from a cheap price point—under the £30 mark. We had those items sent off to a fibres expert, Dr Phil Greaves, who is one of the leading experts in this area, and he identified that they ranged in terms of species from raccoon dog to rabbit and mink. In one instance, it was most consistent with cat fur, quite extraordinarily.

I broke this story for Sky News in April last year. Last year was an exceptionally busy news year but, out of everything that Sky News put



out last year, this was the third most watched video: 6.5 million people watched it on our Facebook. That speaks to the fact that consumers were really outraged that something that was being advertised to them as a synthetic product—as a fake product—could possibly be animal fur. They were absolutely outraged. As a journalist, I have never had a reaction to a story quite like it. We had a whole host of media coverage off the back of it. Lots of newspapers followed it. Many broadcasters followed it.

I was really surprised that, after that story broke in April—in December of last year, in the run-up to Christmas—and I worked with Claire, we looked at the high street and found that other retailers were once again mislabelling animal fur. That really said to me that, despite the bad headlines and bad publicity, there was not the right traction.

Q4 Chair: When you were with these major retailers, what was your opinion? Do you think they had any idea that they were trading real fur as fake, or had they just not really investigated it enough? It seems strange, after the publicity earlier in the year, that there was not more care taken at the retailers. What was your view when you went? Did you feel they had no idea what was going on?

Sarah Hajibagheri: It is hard for me to speculate as to how much they know. All I had from them is that they would never knowingly mislead customers. To be honest, I do not think any person who is heading up a PR strategy would want these headlines, with Sky News leading on this all day long. I can only take that in good faith.

However, given the level of publicity, and having seen rival fashion firms in the headlines, you would have thought that most companies would therefore look at their own procedures and their own schedules in terms of buying products, to make sure that they had the right checks in place. Having spoken about this to consumers and politicians across parties, including some people on this panel, I do not think it is really good enough to say, “We did not know”. You need to take a proactive approach to make sure that this is not happening, because clearly there is the outrage there that this is happening. I have to credit the fact that the retailers all very quickly responded; they all said they were going to pull the items, but it really should not come down to a news broadcaster to highlight this to them. They should have the checks in place.

Q5 Chair: Claire, you went with Sarah. What was your impression of the retailers? Do you think they were completely unsighted, or were some suspicious of what they had there? What was the situation in your view?

Claire Bass: It varies by retailer. The vast majority of UK high street retailers have fur-free policies because they know that that is what consumers want. I think the big name brands with fur-free policies genuinely had no idea they were selling real fur and had been misled by suppliers. In other cases—for example the markets that we have been to in various investigations, Camden being one—I think there is more



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duplicity going on, where retailers or traders sell what they think people want to buy. In fact, the BBC London investigation was evidence of that.

Q6 Chair: That will be my next question to Alex. You found it mixed across the piece, basically. Some traders you were more suspicious of than others. Would that be right to say?

Claire Bass: Yes. The thing that was true across the board was that retailers and traders are completely shocked that real fur can be available so cheaply, so they are using price to determine that it is fake fur. That is true right from Oxford Street department stores to Camden Market independent traders.

Q7 Chair: I find that the most shocking thing, because not only is it wrong that we are potentially buying real fur when we believe it is fake; it is also the fact that it must be traded at such a low price. Whether you agree with fur farming or not, what can the price be that is got for this fur? It must be so low, and the animal welfare conditions and everything must be absolutely horrendous, let alone the principle of it. The fake fur now feels very much like real fur, and it is interesting that, with the naked eye and to the feel, you would not necessarily tell the difference with some of these, would you?

Claire Bass: No, absolutely. When we have polled people on the cues that they use to tell real from fake fur, they use a variety of completely unreliable cues, including price. Around 50% of people use cheap price as an indicator of fake fur. Colour is another; for example if it is bright pink, where there are no bright pink animals. People use all these unreliable indicators, price being the key one, when they go to a market and see a bobble hat for £10, for example. I believe the Committee has been given evidence about some of the examples of items that we found online, including £3.50 for a child's bobble hat with a bit of raccoon dog on top. At least 50% of consumers are thinking that is too cheap to be real.

Q8 Chair: It is an interesting point you make about fur being dyed, because naturally a lay person would think, "That is a different colour so it is bound to be fake", but of course it is not necessarily. It can be dyed to whatever colour you like and it can still be real fur. Of course, in a way, that probably hides it, which is even worse from a trading point of view—almost as though it is done to be hidden.

Claire Bass: Yes, absolutely. The procedures that the fur industry uses to preserve fur—because obviously it would naturally decompose when it is taken from the animals—involve some very toxic and carcinogenic chemicals, such as formaldehyde and chromium. It can basically be dyed any colour. That also presents a problem in terms of the analysis of which animal it has come from. The lab we use up in Yorkshire, which works with the police and trading standards, finds itself, in some heavily dyed samples, less confident about the species, because the structure of the hairs has been partially destroyed.



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Q9 Chair: Yes, it makes it much more difficult to identify. Alex, I would like to bring you in now. You investigated the stalls in Camden Market as well as wholesalers. What did your investigation find?

Alex Bushill: Broadly speaking, very much the same evidence that Sarah has mentioned. What was interesting from our point of view was that it seems quite clear that some, or maybe even all, of the vendors were themselves being duped. I am not so cynical as to say that they all acted in bad faith. Their right to reply varied from not engaging at all to saying that they looked at the labels, which is interesting, and were kidded into thinking that it was not real fur. Others said they asked their suppliers and were given assurances. Others also said that they did not even bother to ask; they just assumed that, at that price, it had to be fake fur.

Again and again, on our secret recording, they used that as a point. Whether that was knowingly or unknowingly, cynical or not, it was something that they kept saying: at this price it cannot be real fur. It may be that they, like the consumers, still have this outdated idea that their granny's mink coat that cost thousands of pounds means that real fur has to be expensive. Clearly, Claire is of the view that, because of these fur farms in China and elsewhere, the prices have come down very low. The 17 cases that we looked at seem to have borne that out, so there we are.

Q10 Chair: I can see the logic that you would say it is so cheap that it cannot possibly be real. This is partly why it has slipped through the net. You would consider that most of the traders, as far as you are concerned, were unsighted on it.

Alex Bushill: I could not be drawn on what proportion they are. Some of them were acting in good faith. I am fairly confident of that. I would also stress that it was not just stallholders; we went to shops in Stratford and Shepherd's Bush. These are not the high street chains that we are all familiar with; these are small, family-run businesses that are working on much smaller margins. They cannot expect to be held to the same standard of accountability. Nonetheless, they should not be misleading the public. In Sarah's piece, there was real concern by people, even people who choose to wear fur, who said to me on camera, "Look, this is not acceptable, because you need to be able to make informed choices". Our piece never set out to examine the rights and wrongs of wearing fur; this is a consumer rights issue for us. It is about whether people are able to make informed choices.

Chair: What Sky and you are doing is highlighting the situation and, along with the Humane Society, making sure that we get this out into the public domain. We will talk about labelling and other things in a minute, and whether we can do more. This might be one of these issues where, when we leave the European Union, we might be able to do more. There may be a positive approach to be taken on that one, but we will deal with that later.



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Q11 David Simpson: I suppose this question really is to Claire. In your opinion, how widespread is the mis-selling of the real fur as fake fur? How widespread would it be?

Claire Bass: I would start by echoing a point that Alex has just made, that the vast majority of high street retailers are not suffering from this problem in a substantial volume. The instances where we find brands with fur-free policies slipping up and letting real fur into their supply chains are relatively rare. As Sarah pointed out, their responses are usually very swift in terms of removing the items from sale.

Where we are seeing the real volume of, as we call it, fake faux fur is at the lower end of the market—market stalls, independent shops and online. Our most recent investigation, called Web of Lies, where we partnered with Sky, specifically looked at online retailers. We found an enormous amount of real fur being sold as fake from well-known retailers such as Amazon, eBay and Not On The High Street. There is quite a long list.

To give you an example of the proportion of these fake faux fur items, we looked at Amazon and we just did a simple search for faux fur. Thousands of items came up. We looked at the first 10 pages—there are around about 20 or 25 items per page—and found 60 items that were described as fake fur, where the pictures showed very clearly to us that it was real fur. We bought 10% of those—so we bought six items—had them tested and they indeed turned out to be real fur from a range of species. We have contacted Amazon about these findings, but we have not had a substantive response yet. That gives you an idea of the proportion of the problem.

Chair: We will be having them in to give evidence so we can put that directly to them.

Q12 David Simpson: You said that you have not yet had a full response from Amazon or other organisations. What is its source of this material? Who is supplying it? What is the source itself?

Claire Bass: Amazon, as with other platform retailers such as eBay, can sell things directly, where it is fulfilled by Amazon, and in fact we bought a coat that was described as fake fur that turned out to be raccoon dog, which was fulfilled by Amazon, so that is directly sold by Amazon. The item was made in China. Most of the items are made in China. It is also obviously a platform for retailers and for other suppliers to sell their products through, and that is the majority of the cases that we are finding. It has to be said that the vast majority—I would say 90% plus—of the items that we find say “Made in China”. Some of them are even posted from China as well.

Q13 Angela Smith: You say, Claire, that most of the items that we are talking about today were made in China. Do you know if the entire supply chain for making those items is in China? Are Chinese companies



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sourcing some of the materials from other countries? Do you know?

Claire Bass: I am afraid we do not know that. The global trade in fur is fairly opaque. There has been a proliferation of intensive fur farming in China over the last 10 years, with farmers having tens of thousands of animals with very low welfare standards. That is where a large volume of very cheap fur is coming from. China also has the infrastructure to make the products in a factory down the road, therefore keeping the costs lower. We do not know for sure whether there might be fur from foxes in Finland that goes to China, gets made into products and then comes to the UK. That is perfectly possible. It is quite opaque.

Chair: Without being too anti-Chinese, the general principles of animal welfare in China are poor, to say the least, as with dogs, cats and everything. It really is horrendous. The number of animals, the way they are kept and the price they get for them will be absolutely horrendous.

Q14 **Alan Brown:** Alex, you touched on this in your opening questions, but just how receptive were retailers to the findings once you embarked on them?

Alex Bushill: There was a range of reactions. Some were left crying, frankly. The viewer would come to a view as to whether they believe them or not. We secretly recorded one lady saying, "I am an animal rights lover. I think it is shocking that someone would kill a cat to put a bobble on a hat". We then revealed that she had sold us a shawl with pom-poms made from rabbit. We took that to her and she burst into tears, saying that she would never do that and that she takes in strays herself. But she then admitted on camera that she had not even asked her supplier whether it was faux fur. She had not done any checks whatsoever. She had not asked for any certification or any paperwork to vouch for that. She then reassured us that she had removed all those items from her rails.

You then had others who said that they had spoken to their supplier and they had been reassured that it was faux fur. We then went to a wholesaler on Commercial Road, who appeared to show us, in our secret filming footage, how to use the labels as a ploy to dupe people into thinking, wrongly, that the items did not have any real fur on them. His company did not engage with us when we asked it for its right to reply. We then challenged him directly, and he said, "Look, this is what we are all up to on Commercial Road. It happens everywhere". Now, I do not know if he was just saying that to make himself look better, or what his motivation was. I could not be drawn on that, but it gives you a sense that there was a range of reactions, from people who are probably completely shocked that they have been caught up in this, to others who clearly are not shocked that they have been caught up in this.

Q15 **Alan Brown:** One was extremely blasé, effectively. Did any of the ones who were shocked give any indication of how they were going to rectify



that? It is fine being shocked, but one said, "I have never actually checked".

Alex Bushill: Some of them said they were going to take the items off from sale. There is no way of knowing that they will not put them back on in a month's time or a week's time. I do not know. These garments, if you look on the high street, are incredibly popular. You can go outside of the Houses of Parliament right now and see literally hundreds of people wearing bobble hats with faux fur or real fur pom-poms on them. They are a very successful line for companies that tend to be family-run, working on small margins. I can only tell you what they told me and assume that they are saying it in good faith.

Sarah Hajibagheri: Interestingly, two of the brands that we identified, Missguided and TK Maxx, first came to our attention because of consumers. In both of those cases, consumers had contacted the brands about specific products saying, "We think this is fur". Quite extraordinarily, in public tweets, Missguided tweeted back, dismissing it and simply saying, "We have a fur-free policy". It did not investigate even though that consumer had flagged the product—to the point that I had to break the findings of the report to that consumer on camera. Those concerns were not taken seriously.

I also have an email exchange from a customer who was really concerned with TK Maxx, going back and forth with customer services in the email exchange. TK Maxx says that it has been investigated and it was assured this was faux. It clearly was not investigated, because we sent it to a lab and it was real animal fur. There is a mixture in terms of how companies are responding to it. Given the level of publicity, I would hope that, if a consumer goes to a brand and says, "We are concerned about a product", the brand would investigate it.

I asked all the retailers to come on camera and come to an interview to explain how this had happened. They all turned Sky News down, apart from Missbardo, which is the smallest brand that we featured. To its credit, it thanked us and said that it was going to change its suppliers and put in new checks. I was disappointed that, despite getting written statements from the other brands, none of them wanted to come on camera, because of the level of interest in this story, and given that our audience were really passionate about it. We got statements from all the brands very swiftly saying that they would never knowingly mislead customers, that they were pulling the items in question, that they would offer refunds and that they were going to review their supply chains.

What is concerning for me is that I broke that story in April, and in December rival brands—admittedly different brands—were still being found to have fur items. Although they were small in number, these are big name brands that you would expect to have those checks in place.

Q16 **Alan Brown:** You talked in your opening remarks about the standard PR response and pulling items. Did a lot of the retailers not engage



positively, then?

Sarah Hajibagheri: They did engage positively, in the sense that we got very swift statements. It is not necessarily how they engage with the press; I am more concerned with how they engaged with the customers in the first place. The only reason we found out about this story is because customers were complaining. It is quite easy to give a response to an organisation like Sky News or the BBC and to take it quite seriously. When Joe Bloggs contacts them and says, "I think that you are selling real animal fur", they need to take those concerns just as seriously.

Q17 **Alan Brown:** You said you revisited the situation. Was that with other outlets, or have you revisited any of the initial outlets where you discovered fur?

Sarah Hajibagheri: I have not revisited the same brands. In the April investigation, I looked at Missguided. One of its direct competitors is BooHoo, which we found was selling, once again, mislabelled real fur in December. I would think, given that it is a direct rival, that it would have seen what had happened to its competitor. Some 6.5 million people watched it on Facebook. You would hope that people would engage with it. The fact is that they have not to this point, because we are still seeing it happen. This is a story that we will continue to investigate until, hopefully, there are the right checks in place to ensure that it is not happening and that consumers are not misled.

Q18 **Angela Smith:** We have just been talking about retailers and their responses to your approaches to them when they have been found to be selling real fur as fake fur. Sarah, you mentioned that one retailer in particular committed to changing suppliers and putting new checks in place. Can I just ask the panel to give us an idea of what those new checks might look like? How easy is it to change suppliers in a way that can give reassurance to consumers? Are there any other changes that we need to see retailers making in order to ensure, as much as is humanly possible, that they are not selling real fur as fake fur?

Sarah Hajibagheri: Obviously, Alex and I are journalists, so our jobs are to report facts as opposed to necessarily provide solutions. Claire might be the best person to give the most expert advice on that. From our point of view as a broadcaster, what we have seen is that the labelling has not been robust enough, because of the fact that this has got through in the first place. The penalties have also not been robust enough because we are once again, eight months on, still seeing big name retailers coming up in our investigations. Although there has been a lot of awareness among the public, people are still quite shocked when they find out—it does not matter how many items it is—that big name retailers are making these mistakes or have made these mistakes.

Angela Smith: That is more about what Government can do and about making regulations.



Claire Bass: We work with retailers that have run into problems. We thoroughly welcome the fur-free policies of retailers, and we want to help them enforce those. Since these stories have broken over the last year or 18 months, we have been working with retailers, running roundtable meetings. In fact, House of Fraser, which you will be speaking to in your next session, has been very proactive and supportive in facilitating those sessions and inviting retailers along, in order to share experiences and insights on where these problems happen, why they happen and therefore what you can do to stop them happening again.

The meetings are undertaken under Chatham House rules, so that companies feel that they can share openly. In the majority of cases, the problems are occurring because they do not have the right quality control measures in place to tell real fur from fake fur. That includes using things like price as an indicator, the same as the public do. There are some things that we can quickly and easily do with them to help them revise their checks. We show them the three reliable ways to tell real fur from fake fur, and suggest ways in which they can make sure that that runs through their entire staff, right from the buyers to the shop floor staff.

Q19 **Angela Smith:** That sounds really quite rigorous but, given that some of this merchandise is appearing on market stalls, how do we embed that approach into the retail market generally? That is quite a hard task, isn't it?

Claire Bass: It is very hard; I would say impossible, really. We cannot physically go around every single shop and market stall, and train people to tell the difference between real and fake fur. That is where we come on to the broader conversations about labelling and, ultimately, our wish for a fur import ban. The marketplace is confused. Consumer confidence in fur in general will ultimately be reduced if people do not have confidence in what they are buying.

Q20 **Angela Smith:** Do you think that there should be a duty on retailers to get this right?

Claire Bass: Yes, absolutely. We are seeing retailers step up to the plate. They are often as shocked as their customers are when these incidents happen. That duty extends to online retailers that are platform retailers as well, which sometimes try to take an arm's-length approach and say, "It is not us. We are just the platform, and they are selling on our platform so it is not really our fault". I completely disagree with that. They are big companies. They have the resources to support their suppliers to make sure they are selling what they say they are selling.

Q21 **Angela Smith:** I would have thought that trading standards would have a role in this. Has it shown any interest in investigating?

Claire Bass: It has been a slow burner, I would say, with trading standards. We appreciate that it is very busy and somewhat under-resourced. This, not surprisingly, is not exactly at the top of its priority



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list. We are seeing more traction as the story builds with repeated investigations. Initially, we present all our evidence from all the investigations we have done with media partners. We bag up the evidence and send it off to trading standards. We have had several productive meetings with trading standards. It has gone from sending warning shots across the bows to unofficial two or three strikes. Something more serious may happen, but we have yet to see anything more substantial happening in terms of penalties.

Alex Bushill: I was made aware yesterday that Tower Hamlets trading standards has approached the BBC to see our evidence and our garments. I assume that that is because it may have an interest in bringing some kind of prosecution.

Angela Smith: That is really interesting.

Chair: They must be breaking at least the Trade Descriptions Act if nothing else, because you expect to buy fake fur and you are buying real fur. In the first instance, they could probably argue that they did not know, through lack of knowledge, but it is getting more publicity. Sky raised it in April, and we are still here talking about it almost a year later. That is the issue. However difficult it might be, surely they have a responsibility. It is like if you went to buy pork and you were given beef. We had all the problems with horse-gate and horse meat being passed off in beef burgers. That is an issue where you are not buying what you are expecting to buy, and this is exactly the same here. Whatever the moral issues are, there is also an issue, in that you are not actually getting what you believe you are getting.

Q22 **Dr Johnson:** I want to come back to what Claire said about the three ways that you can tell. I was interested to hear that you could look at pictures on Amazon and be able to tell, to 100% of the ones that you bought, which ones were and were not fur. The consumer presumably is not able to do that. I do not know how to do that. What are your three tests? If I had a bobble hat, what would I look at? What are the three things that I would look at to be able to tell whether I had a fur hat or a faux fur hat?

Claire Bass: The first one is to part the fur to get to where the hairs join the base. In real fur, you will find a skin. It may not be a skin colour because it might be dyed, but it is a skin. On fake fur, you will always find a fabric weave like a mesh.

The second way is to look at the tips of the fur strands. Real fur tapers to a point, whereas fake fur will never do that. You have to be careful with that one, because real fur can be trimmed, in which case it will have blunt ends as well.

The third way, if you own the item and can do so safely, is to cut off a piece of fur and set fire to it. If it is real fur, it frizzles and smells like burning hair. If it is fake hair, it goes into a plasticky ball.



Chair: It melts.

Claire Bass: It melts, yes, and it smells like plastic.

Chair: That is very useful, thank you.

Q23 **Julian Sturdy:** Caroline has just asked my question. I wanted to touch on how easy it is to pass off real fur as fake fur. You have touched on the tests and what you saw on Amazon, Claire. Is there any accreditation that people should be looking for anywhere? Is there any specific labelling or anything like that at all that consumers or, further down the supply chain, retailers should be looking for and checking?

Claire Bass: Do you want me to move on to labelling? I have quite a substantial answer on that.

Julian Sturdy: Yes.

Claire Bass: Essentially, the problem at the moment is that the labelling regime for fur does not work for consumers. In answer to your question, very simply, there is nothing that people can look for.

Q24 **Julian Sturdy:** There is no accreditation or anything like that.

Claire Bass: The only requirement to label animal fur is from the European Union textile labelling regulation, but there are so many caveats and exemptions to it as to render it basically useless. You cannot reliably use it if you are looking to tell fur.

Q25 **Chair:** I do not want to go into all the detail on labelling at this stage. Do they actually need to have a label, legally?

Claire Bass: For fur items?

Chair: Yes.

Claire Bass: No, fur items do not all have to have a label.

Q26 **Julian Sturdy:** Why is that, then?

Claire Bass: That is a good question. It is because there has not been a push for labelling regulation to date. That is one of the things that we believe should happen. The textile labelling regulation requires animal parts in textile items to carry the label "contains non-textile parts of animal origin". That can mean bone, leather, down or fur. It is not very friendly language for consumers anyway. It does not tell you very much. Shoes are exempt, as are handbags, keyrings and lots of other things. Perversely, because it only applies to textile items, which have to be 80% by weight textile, if you have a full-length fur coat, you do not have to have any fur label on it, because it is a fur item, not a textile item. Similarly, if you have a leather coat with a fur trim, that is exempt. It is a minefield.

Q27 **Julian Sturdy:** Are there any examples of good practice elsewhere in the



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world where they are doing better quality control, better accreditation and better labelling?

Claire Bass: The US Truth in Fur Labelling Act, which was brought in in 2010, is the regulation that we would point to as probably the best one to emulate. It requires all fur items, regardless of weight or type, to carry a label that specifies the species of the fur animal used and the country of origin. The Swiss fur labelling regulation goes one step further and requires the item to also stipulate the method of farming and slaughter, I believe, as well.

Q28 **Julian Sturdy:** The Swiss one would be the gold standard.

Claire Bass: That would be the gold standard, yes.

Q29 **Chair:** It is interesting, because it seems to me that what has brought about this problem in many respects is that fur was traditionally much more expensive than fake fur. Therefore, in a way, it was the pricing regime that largely told you one from the other. Now, because of China and the vast amount of poor-quality, low-animal-welfare fur farming going on, the price has dropped so much that they are so much more equal. While the regime was not right before, it was not really shown up before. Would I be right in saying that?

Claire Bass: Yes. It is hard to put an exact number on it, but perhaps over the last 10 years we have seen this proliferation of very large volumes of very cheap fur. That is largely why we started our campaign to systematically look at this and research it two and a half to three years ago. It was simply because I was seeing a lot more fur on the streets, in shops and on market stalls. It does not add up with all the polling for decades that shows that the vast majority of the British public rejects the cruelty of the fur trade: 73% of people would never buy fur. There is a disconnect there. We are seeing so much fur and so many people wearing fur, and yet we know that there is an ethical objection to fur from the British public. There has been a price drop in recent years. High-volume intensive farming is what is showing up this problem more recently.

Q30 **Chair:** The figures show that the imports of fur have increased. It just shows that people do not know that they are wearing it. If it is coming in, it is not necessarily being traded as fur, is it? There is not an increase in people actually buying fur. That is the interesting thing. What is happening to it? It must be being traded off as fake. If you take the figures of the amount that comes in and the amount that is sold, they will not add up.

Claire Bass: No. Although it is a minor point, there are different customs codes and tax amounts for fake fur and real fur. Real fur is a slightly higher tax amount. If fur is coming in very cheaply from countries like China, it is labelled 100% acrylic and there is no indication that it is real fur. It is then sold as fake fur or as whatever people want



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to think it is. There is no reason to assume that it would have come in under the right customs code.

Chair: The Treasury could be losing money as well. I am sure all Governments would be worried about it if they thought the Treasury was losing money. It is an issue not only from a moral standpoint but from a financial one.

- Q31 **John Grogan:** Following on from Julian, Claire, you said Switzerland and the United States are the gold standard in terms of the comprehensive labelling that is demanded. How do penalties compare? Could you explain what the penalties are in our current law? Are there more stringent penalties in Switzerland and the United States?

Claire Bass: To be honest, I do not know the answer to that one. I am happy to look into it and give you an answer.

- Q32 **John Grogan:** Thank you. In perhaps designing a new law here, should there be different responsibilities for the retailer, depending on whether it is its own brand or whether it is selling somebody else's goods, possibly on an online platform? If you were designing a new law, how would it be structured?

Claire Bass: The Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations apply in this case. Online platforms and sellers that allow third parties to sell on them have the same responsibility. They are the brand. They are the outward-facing, trusted entity. People are thinking, "I am going to buy this from Amazon. I expect that Amazon has the right checks and balances in place to make sure that it is holding its suppliers to account such that, if they say they are selling fake fur, they actually are". Trying to hold it at arm's length does not really wash. Supposing Amazon suppliers started selling illegal products such as rhino horn or whale meat, would it say, "It is not our problem; it is our suppliers"? It cannot push that, really. It does not work.

- Q33 **John Grogan:** Finally, if there was one thing within the confines of the current law we could do to more robustly enforce it, what would it be? Would it be more resources for trading standards? What would it be if you were advising us?

Claire Bass: Within the current somewhat deficient legal framework, I would say, yes, more scrutiny by trading standards and prosecutions. As I said before, it is reasonable to give warnings, but they should not continue indefinitely. Retailers need to understand that there is a charge to be had.

- Q34 **John Grogan:** Are the figures available for prosecutions in different areas?

Claire Bass: By trading standards?

John Grogan: Yes.

Claire Bass: Yes, the figures are available. There have been no



prosecutions on the fur issue at all.

Chair: It shows that not much robust action has been taken so far.

Angela Smith: I asked about trading standards earlier. It just seems to me that the resources and expertise available to trading standards are things that we may want to look at.

Chair: As are the actions it is taking, or not.

Q35 **Angela Smith:** Exactly. I just want to ask, apart from that, why it is, in the first place, that the UK is one of the worst performers within the European Union on this matter. We have the stats somewhere. Our level of non-compliance is very high: 93%. The best performing European Union country—and these are European Union regulations—is at 49%. Why is the UK so bad at compliance?

Claire Bass: In all honesty, I do not know why. When we started looking at compliance with the textile labelling regulation and the non-textile parts from animal original label, and found this high degree of non-compliance, we had some mixed feelings about it. We do not really want to push for that regulation to be robustly enforced, because we do not believe it is fit, anyway, for the purposes of consumers being able to identify animal fur on all items across the board.

The non-compliance is just another nail in the coffin to say why this does not work. There is a whole list of reasons why it does not work for consumers, plus, in the UK, it is not even being implemented. In that sense, there is nothing to lose, because retailers will not have to change their label, because they are not there in the first place, if that makes sense. You could bring in a new fur labelling regulation and it would not change what is currently on labels because they are not following that labelling regime.

Chair: The issue is that we cannot label what is fur and what is fake fur, can we? We just label that it is of animal origin and, of course, that does not really mean a great deal to many people.

Q36 **Angela Smith:** No, and we think it is buttons and things, as you pointed out. Can I ask Sarah for a response to that question, please?

Sarah Hajibagheri: It is a challenging one, because my expertise is not necessarily in legislation in terms of labelling. You can look at some of the specifics of the items I looked at. For example, I know you have BooHoo coming in later. BooHoo is a fast fashion outlet. We found a pair of earrings there for £5. They were advertised as faux fur but they were found to be mink. Most consumers would think, first of all, that it says “faux fur”; secondly, it is a pair of earrings; and, thirdly, it is specifically a £5 product. You would not think that you would be able to get real animal fur for £5. That is the strongest message that I have got from consumers who have watched our reports, who are saying that at the moment they are using price as a faux label to themselves as to whether this is a synthetic or real animal product, and clearly that is not reliable.



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Although I cannot necessarily advise in terms of the right labelling that needs to be put in place, having covered this for a year, I have noticed that, whether it is prosecutions or penalties, the right penalties are not being put in place. It is continuing to happen. I cannot really stress the impact of that initial story. Every single newspaper followed it. I would hope that the major stores—I cannot speak for smaller stores and markets, and the checks they should have in place—would have seen that coverage and put the right people in positions, in terms of buying, to make those checks.

Q37 Angela Smith: Is there something in the structure of our retail market, or in terms of our differing tastes and choices as consumers, that drives the market in the UK as opposed to, say, Austria?

Claire Bass: I could not honestly give you a very sound answer on that, I am afraid. We were quite surprised to find that the UK was at the bottom of the league table.

Angela Smith: So am I.

Claire Bass: Speculating, it could be that we like bobble hats more in the UK. I do not know.

Chair: Having had a little bit of experience in the European Parliament, you will find that the attitude in Austria is that they would wear more real fur. I suspect that Austrians are buying real fur; we do not want to buy real fur, but we are getting it traded off as fake fur. That is why the statistics are partly as they are. Austria would have a different attitude to this. It is a cultural thing.

Angela Smith: That is the consumer choice. We are being exploited as a market.

Chair: That is right.

Alex Bushill: On the labelling, it is not just about non-compliance; it is about flouting. We bought 34 garments in total, and the vast majority of them had no labelling whatsoever. The ones that were labelled, which said "100% polyester", were falling foul of that EU regulation that Claire mentioned about 80% by weight. They should have had something on them. It is not just non-compliance; it seems, in our, albeit small sample that none of it was adhering to any of the rules.

Chair: Yes. That is the issue. Kerry's question will be on detailed labelling in a minute. It is about whether we have the right labelling and whether it is being enforced. We probably have neither at the moment.

Q38 Dr Johnson: At the moment, most of the policies and investigations we are doing are being looked at through the lens of Brexit. We have heard that the regulations on consumer labelling are not good enough. They are currently governed by EU regulations. What opportunity does Brexit offer us to change those regulations? What would you like to see



changed?

Chair: In an ideal world, what would you like to see on the label?

Claire Bass: I will talk specifically on labelling, because we have other hopes and aspirations for Brexit. As I mentioned before, the US Truth in Fur Labelling Act would seem like the most obvious regulation for the UK to harmonise with. That requires the species and the country of origin of the fur to be clearly marked on the label. It also has specifications for the items sold online to clearly state that the product contains real fur. That is what we would like to see. We are working with colleagues in the Fur Free Alliance, which is an umbrella body of organisations working to end the fur trade. We are working in Europe at the European Commission to encourage that exact same regulation to be adopted at the European level. That would obviously be the ideal in terms of harmonising the UK, US and Europe to have the same label. Businesses that still want to use fur do not want to have to sew 15 different labels, according to different regulations, into garments.

Q39 **Dr Johnson:** You talked about other opportunities from Brexit. What other opportunities to do you see for this issue?

Claire Bass: We would like to see the existing bans on the import of cat fur, dog fur and seal fur from commercial seal hunts extended to cover all species. We have a situation at the moment that is not consistent with public values and attitudes to fur. We know that 69% of people would support a full ban on the import of all animal fur into the UK, whereas at the moment we have this species-specific approach, in which all animals are equal but some are more equal than others, which is not reflected in public attitudes. When we polled and asked people whether they thought fur from a list of species should be bought and sold in the UK, there was very little difference between those that are currently banned and those that are currently still allowed.

For example, 9% of people think it is okay for cat fur to be sold in the UK, and that same percentage believe it is okay for chinchilla fur to be sold in the UK. At the moment, one is illegal and one is legal, so that does not make a lot of sense. We see Brexit as giving us the opportunity to get rid of that inconsistency and to follow the public moral opposition to the fur trade.

Q40 **Dr Johnson:** Is it the EU at the moment that is stopping us from extending those bans?

Claire Bass: Yes, under current single market rules. It would depend on the nature of the Brexit deal. If we remained in the single market, it would be extremely challenging under freedom of movement of goods rules because there are still countries, unfortunately, in Europe that produce fur, so their goods are currently still allowed into the UK. That number is dropping all the time. There are very successful campaigns happening in Europe. More and more countries are banning fur farming, so it is a dying trade in more ways than one.



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- Q41 **Chair:** From an enforcement point of view, if the fur could not come in in the first place, and you either traded in fake fur or you did not have fur at all, you would be immediately wrong if that was real fur. From that point of view, it would be easier to enforce.

Claire Bass: Yes, absolutely. The Fur Free Retailer programme now has over 850 retailers on its books. Recent additions include Gucci, Armani and Michael Kors. It is an ever-growing list. They all feel that the UK retailers that we had spoken to would be supportive of a fur trade ban because it would help them to enforce their own fur-free policies.

- Q42 **Kerry McCarthy:** Claire, there have been some efforts in the fur industry to give what they would describe as a welfare mark: the WelFur scheme. What do you make of that?

Claire Bass: High-welfare fur farming is basically an oxymoron. It is like putting lipstick on a pig really, with no insult intended to pigs. You only have to scrape the surface of these assurance schemes—WelFur, Origin Assured, Saga Furs, FurMark—to find that they do not offer any meaningful welfare provisions for the animals on these farms. While the livestock farming sector globally, following the European and UK lead, is moving away from the cage age, the fur farming industry is standing by it, almost as a badge of honour. It is absolutely not willing to do anything to make these animals' lives slightly less miserable.

The welfare provisions that they boast are all designed with productivity and return on investment in mind. An example was on "Countryfile" a couple of weeks ago. They visited a Danish mink farm, and the farmer proudly described that she had a nest box for the mink. Well, if you want mink to have more mink, you give them a nest box. That is a welfare "benefit" that is really designed with productivity in mind.

When meeting the welfare needs and the behavioural needs of the animals would put a dent in their return on investment, they are simply not met. Wire mesh floors to the cages are proven to have welfare problems for the animals, reduce their mobility and cause more sores, but they increase productivity and return on investment because you have less maintenance and you can have less staff to deal with the waste.

Similarly, on the provision of water for mink, mink are semi-aquatic in the wild. They will range over several kilometres over a river or shorefront. In fur farms, they do not get access to swim in water at all. Interestingly, when you look at the situation in Germany, which last year changed its regulations for fur farming, it did not ban it, but it enhanced the standards to the point where the remaining four mink farms are saying that they will have to stop trading, because they require the animals to have water to swim in, and the fur farms cannot do that and still make a profit.

- Q43 **Kerry McCarthy:** The margins are tiny.



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Claire Bass: The margins are very tight. These are the “best” fur farms, but they are competing with countries such as China and Poland, which are intensively producing enormous volumes of very cheap fur. It is almost like a race to the bottom. No one is going to do away with their cage and create a beautiful sanctuary for fox and mink to live in before they are skinned, because the margins are that tight.

Q44 **Kerry McCarthy:** The scheme would only cover fur produced in the US, Canada and Europe. I appreciate you have said that there are issues with Danish mink farming, and we have had evidence from Luke Steele about an investigation in Sweden in 2010 and another one in 2014, so there are clearly problems in Europe. But it would not address the issue of the animal welfare conditions in countries outside the US, Canada and Europe. In China, for example, there would be the much lower welfare standards.

My question is about the people who are at the end of the market that we are talking about, which are the very cheap products online or in market stalls. One issue is that they do not think they are buying real fur in the first place, but they are also not at the end of the market where they will be looking for certification marks. Most of what they see in front of them will be the Chinese stuff, which will not cover this mark.

Claire Bass: The fur industry would like us to believe that there is nice fur from Europe and North America, et cetera, and it is trying to distance itself from the Chinese fur farms. All the investigations that we have commissioned or seen from colleagues in other organisations, regardless of which country it is in, be it China, Denmark, Finland or America, show the same welfare problems: animals with gaping sores, infanticide, animals with abscesses.

Q45 **Kerry McCarthy:** They would say that, to get this mark, you cannot farm in this way. This mark is presumably aimed at trying to raise standards. But it only works to raise standards in the same way as, if you look at battery cages and free range eggs, that standard was introduced, which consumers then responded to. As a result, the market moved in a certain way so people started producing in a certain way. Would this mark have that effect? You are saying that it cannot raise standards because the margins would be too low.

Claire Bass: It is just impossible to keep wild animals like mink and fox in cages in a humane way. That is why the UK banned fur farming back in 2000 after a process of decades of considering it. In 1987, the Farm Animal Welfare Council was asked, “Could we come up with a welfare accreditation scheme for UK fur farms?” It said, “No, we are not willing to put a rubber stamp on an industry that cannot be made reliably humane”. Very simply, keeping wild and undomesticated animals in captive conditions like that can never be humane. It does not matter how slick the marketing propaganda is or how nice the logo is; it is just a thin veneer over the same suffering.



Q46 Kerry McCarthy: If we were to look at a ban on imports once we leave the EU, it would not be possible to attach a condition to ban imports from countries that do not have higher animal welfare standards. You are saying that it is a false distinction between countries. I suppose there is also a question of enforcement, because you can have all the best regulations in the world but if there is no enforcement of the way farming is carried out, it is pretty meaningless.

Claire Bass: Yes, absolutely. The FurMark scheme and all its daughter agreements have basically set out to look at what they have got and then attach a veil of respectability to it. They have not said, "Right, if we are going to farm foxes, what should that look like?" They have said, "Right, we have all these cages. Let us see if we can somehow endorse that and attach some slick marketing to it". It is meaningless. It is a fairly desperate PR attempt by an industry that is trying to recover its rightly tattered reputation. We absolutely would not support any exemption for any so-called welfare assurance schemes for fur farming.

Q47 Kerry McCarthy: When the Labour Government banned fur farming in this country in 2000, it was banned on the grounds of the protection of public morality, which is needed for WTO rules and things like that. The Government at the time said, "It is wrong for animals to be farmed and slaughtered for their fur. It is not consistent with a proper value and respect for animal life". How do you square that with allowing imports? How do you square the idea that it is not okay in this country, but it is still okay to do it in other countries and to buy things that are produced in other countries?

Claire Bass: Absolutely, Kerry. That moral inconsistency is the crux of our campaign. We are effectively outsourcing our animal cruelty. We have said we do not want it in our own backyard, because it is nasty and people do not agree with it, but we are going to pay people in China, Finland and Poland to do it. We are still paying for that same cruelty, and that is not acceptable.

San Francisco is currently looking at a fur sales ban. Israel and Switzerland have both been considering fur import and sales bans. As more and more countries ban fur farming, the wave moves on, and countries are looking at fur import bans. Prime Minister May's and Michael Gove's aspirations for the UK to be a world leader in animal welfare should not end at our borders. That extends to animals that we trade in with overseas countries. We should not be trading in the product of suffering from the fur trade.

Q48 Kerry McCarthy: Why is cat and dog fur different? Why is that prohibited and other related species are not? Some would argue that coyotes are the same species as dogs because they can interbreed without any problems. What is the logic with that? Is it because we are getting a bit sentimental about cats and dogs being pets, and mink, foxes, coyotes and rabbits are different? Rabbits are pets as well. What was the logic for just going down the cat and dog route?



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Claire Bass: Neil was part of the campaign in Europe that got the cat and dog fur trade ban, so maybe Neil can answer your question better than I can.

Chair: It captures the imagination because we have dogs and cats as pets. That is probably what captures it. Rabbits are grown for meat as well, you see. The issue really captured the imagination of Europe in particular, as well as this country. It is a legitimate point about the fact that we banned fur farming here, but I suppose as a consumer choice we allow people to buy fur. While 69% of the British public say they would support a ban on fur, at the moment the sales seem to be increasing. Is that because the price of fur has dropped in the shops?

Q49 **Kerry McCarthy:** Or is it because they do not know what they are buying? Is this the British public exercising the choice to buy real fur? This is probably getting into the realms of ideological debate and philosophy about freedom of choice, but when you have these partial bans, you are limiting choice in a certain way. To what extent should people have the right to buy fur?

Claire Bass: We already have partial bans, such as bans of cat, dog and seal fur, reflecting public morality and opinion against those things. We know that public opinion also supports bans on other species, such as fox and mink. As I said before, we are in favour of removing that inconsistency. Sorry, I cannot remember the other part of your question.

Kerry McCarthy: It was about choice: 30% want to buy it.

Q50 **Chair:** Are people actually buying it more as real fur, or is it being traded off as fake fur? The actual statistical figure for the amount of fur being bought in this country is going up, not down.

Claire Bass: It is difficult to know for sure. The likelihood is that people are unknowingly buying fur, and that is therefore reflected in the import figures. Because we have no fur production in the UK, we know that all the fur that is exported from the UK must have also been previously imported. About half of the fur that we imported last year was then re-exported to places such as Hong Kong. You need to look at the export market as well, and we do not quite know the details of that. It will be interesting to hear from the fur trade on why that is.

Q51 **Kerry McCarthy:** Is it the raw material of the fur that is imported, and then attached to hats, shoes and coats?

Claire Bass: Yes, I am guessing it is raw fur skins coming in that are then processed in the UK and sold in Hong Kong, for example.

Chair: We need to check the amount of raw fur that comes in, and whether it is then traded as real fur or as fake fur. That would start to give us the deception that is going on.

Q52 **Angela Smith:** How practical would it be to enforce an entire ban on the import and sale on fur? We know with the ivory trade, where a ban is



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now being consulted upon, that there will have to be exemptions for antique ivory in musical instruments and so on. The problem for the Government is determining what those exemptions should be. How easy would it be to effectively introduce a ban, given that people could claim, "Well, I have had this fur coat for 20 years, 10 years, five years"?

Claire Bass: There is no reliable way to age fur, so it is not comparable with ivory.

Q53 **Angela Smith:** But it makes it more difficult.

Claire Bass: It does make it more difficult. As I keep coming back to, we have the ban on seal, cat and dog fur, so we have those precedents in place. Although we found what was thought to be cat fur being sold by a retailer last year, that is very isolated. We are not going out there and finding cat, dog and seal all over the place. Those bans are working. There is a moral consistency case for extending those, in line with public expectations and beliefs, to all species. I am not saying it would necessarily be entirely easy or straightforward, but it is what should be done.

Q54 **Angela Smith:** I do not deny the moral case and the consistency that you are arguing for, Claire. My point would be that, if you ban all fur imports and sale, the fact that people are not generally buying seal, cat or dog fur may be because they can buy fox, rabbit and other furs. I wonder whether you think there needs to be an assessment of how effective a ban on all fur trade could be. Alex?

Alex Bushill: This is beyond my expertise, so I would defer to Claire to answer.

Claire Bass: That assessment would be important to do. There is an e-petition for a ban on the sale of fur at the moment. When it got to 10,000 signatures, the Government's response was very insufficient, in our view. It talked about regulations that any fur that can be imported into the UK comes from animals that have been humanely treated, trapped and killed. That is the line that is currently being espoused by the Government, and it is simply not the case. If the Government want to walk the talk of being this world leader on animal welfare, they cannot say that the existing regulations are stopping inhumane production methods coming in.

Chair: The point Angela is making is a good one. There needs to be a proper assessment of how to enforce whatever the Government decide to do. It is not only having a regulation; it is also enforcing it. That is what we are always keen to do.

Q55 **Julian Sturdy:** On that point, Claire—sorry to the other panellists; it seems to be very focused on Claire at the moment—you mentioned the fact that, about 18 months ago, you found some cat fur that had come in. Obviously that is banned. What is the process at that point for tracing it back down the supply chain, and for a potential prosecution? It is illegal



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for that cat fur to be sold in the UK.

Claire Bass: There was a catch with that. I have mentioned the dyeing process that can destroy some of the structure of the hairs, which means the lab we work with can only give a definition of “most consistent with cat fur”. He cannot categorically say that it was cat fur; he can say it was most consistent with cat fur, based on his reference library of things that are cat fur.

Q56 **Julian Sturdy:** So there could not have been a prosecution on that.

Claire Bass: There could not be a prosecution in that case, because the test that would have been required for a prosecution was a DNA sample, and the fur was too heavily dyed for that to be extracted.

Q57 **Julian Sturdy:** Does that highlight one of the problems, if there is potentially a ban going forward, in how it is enforced?

Claire Bass: In some ways, an overall ban would make that easier. At the moment, if we cannot tell the difference between cat, dog and seal fur and mink, chinchilla and rabbit fur, how can we really hope to enforce the existing regulations? If we have a blanket ban, to Angela’s point, there may need to be exemptions. There are religious uses; there are bearskin hats, not that we are very fond of them at all. I am sure that there would be a lot of cases made for cultural or religious exemptions. Aside from those, a blanket ban would in some ways be easier to enforce because you would not have to try to do species ID.

Q58 **Julian Sturdy:** Have there been any prosecutions since the ban on cat, dog and sea fur came in?

Claire Bass: Not that I am aware. I am fairly sure there have not.

Q59 **Julian Sturdy:** Have there been any more cases found where this fur has illegally come into the supply chain?

Claire Bass: Again, not that I am aware of. I am aware there have been claims. Dog leather has been an issue. Obviously that is not to do with fur. I am not aware of anything that has been corroborated.

Q60 **Chair:** If you completely ban fur, in some ways it is easier to enforce, because you either have that fur or you do not. You are either guilty or you are not.

My question is a little bit beyond what this inquiry is about, but relevant. As we move away, and want people to move away, from real fur, we have to be careful, since some of the acrylics in the fake fur are pretty environmentally nasty. In some ways, we have to also say to people, “In the end, do you want to have fake fur if it is not environmentally friendly?” These are quite cheap products. I do not know whether you want to answer that one, but it is an interesting point. We have to be careful, in some respect, if we say to people who do not want real fur, “Do you actually want fake fur instead?”



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Claire Bass: Yes, that is a perfectly reasonable question. The Humane Society's position is that fake fur is a great alternative if people want the look and feel of real fur but without the cruelty. We are aware that all plastics, of which fake fur is made, carry environmental burdens, as does all the clothing we wear.

There was a study done a few years ago in the Netherlands by Delft, which is an independent research institution; it did a lifetime environmental impact comparison of a real fur coat versus a fake fur coat. It looked at 18 areas of environmental impact, including water pollution, climate change, land use, ozone depletion and other things. In those 18 areas considered, the real fur coat came out worse than the fake fur coat. To the greenwashing that the fur industry tries to do to say, "This is a lovely natural product", it is not, once you have poured formaldehyde all over it and dealt with the amount of waste that the animals produce.

Chair: Yes, it is not as pure as all that. On both sides of this particular argument, we have to be careful of the acrylics that are being used. It is a bit like our situation where we are using less plastic now. We have to look at what we produce our clothes out of in the future. It is not just the issue of the fur; it is also about the environmental conditions of the fake fur. It is an interesting one to throw into the mix.

Q61 **Angela Smith:** My last question relates to the use of leg-hold traps. The RSPCA's view is that the restrictions covering inhumane caught imported furs are so confused and poorly worded that they discriminate against certain countries and make enforcement difficult. I just wondered what changes you would like to see around the imported fur caught by leg-hold traps. Do you agree with the RSPCA? What do we need to do?

Claire Bass: Yes, we absolutely agree. The agreement on international humane trapping standards is entirely deficient. We do not believe it should be ratified or put into force in the UK, because it is meaningless in terms of welfare for animals. It was negotiated after the USA, Canada and Russia threatened a WTO challenge when the European Union was threatening to ban the import of fur from leg-hold traps. It was basically to appease that threat.

It is insufficient because it allows the use of padded leg-hold traps, which are demonstrably inhumane trapping methods that are banned in the UK. It allows other inhumane methods, such as drowning of animals such as beavers. It allows a maximum time until death of up to five minutes, even though veterinary experts who advised on the standards when they were formulated advised it should be 30 seconds. They went for five minutes. We absolutely agree with the RSPCA. It is not fit for purpose, and it should not be seen as an acceptable welfare standard for fur from trapped animals.



In terms of what could be done to improve it, I would just come back to my earlier points. We do not believe that fur farming can be made acceptably humane; the same is true for trapping of animals for fur production and the imports of fur from species caught in leg-hold traps. It should not be allowed in the UK.

Q62 Angela Smith: Post Brexit, any US trade deals should effectively ban the import, and not include the import, of fur products from the US.

Claire Bass: Yes, that would be nice—or indeed from anywhere. We would obviously need to be non-discriminatory under WTO rules.

Angela Smith: Of course.

Q63 Chair: Sarah and Alex, you brought this to our attention—Sky back in April, and the BBC now—which has helped to prompt us with this inquiry. We very much thank you for the work that you have done. What plans do you have to come back to this issue and continue with it?

Sarah Hajibagheri: The really important thing to stress here is that, in terms of the stories that I have covered and the retailers that I have mentioned, they all say they are fur-free retailers. I am passionate about consumers being able to make an informed consumer choice. It is up to them to decide whether they buy fur or not; I am not here to make that ethical decision for them. If you are a big name high street firm and you are going to say you do not sell fur, you are going to advertise that on your website and you are going to have that in communication on your social media with your customers, you need to stick by your word. If you are going to advertise something as faux fur, it really cannot end up being mink. It should not take a broadcaster or a charity to highlight that.

The traction of the story and the amount of people who have engaged with it have shown us that people are really passionate about this. This was a story I covered in April. I did not expect it to be as big a splash again in December. I was really disappointed that it was, and that it did not have the impact that I wanted in terms of retailers. It is of course something that we at Sky News are going to continue to invest in and highlight.

The right penalties and labelling need to be in place, but we are also hearing from the audience—as I have heard from Claire as well—that it has sparked a broader debate in the country about animal welfare and the fur situation in this country. It is not for us to decide the rights and wrongs of it, but people were absolutely shocked that fur was being brought into this country and sold for £5 as mink. The facts speak for themselves: it is continuously happening, and it is something the Government need to get on top of.

Alex Bushill: Similarly, we have noted with interest the impact that our piece had, and we look forward to continuing to look at this whole issue.



We would be particularly interested to hear what the inquiry reports back in due course.

Chair: Naturally we are going to bring retailers in. We are going to question them strongly on how much they know and what actions they are going to take. We need a better labelling system in the future, so we can label what is and is not fur, instead of having something “of animal origin”, which is rather complicated and people do not understand. There is a lot we can do. We appreciate the evidence from you all this morning, and you bringing it to our attention. We hope to put together a good report when we are done. Thank you very much for coming this morning.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Neil Hackett, Paul Horsfield, and Dorothy Maxwell.

Q64 **Chair:** Good morning. Thank you very much for joining us. You are our second panel on the inquiry into real fur being traded off as fake fur. If you would like to introduce yourselves, we will then get straight on into the evidence session.

Paul Horsfield: My name is Paul Horsfield. I am the merchandising director for boohoo.com.

Dorothy Maxwell: Good morning, everybody. My name is Dorothy Maxwell and I am the head of sustainability at House of Fraser.

Neil Hackett: Good morning, everybody. My name is Neil Hackett, and I am interim sourcing director at Missguided.

Q65 **Chair:** Thank you very much. Can you all tell us how you found out that you were selling real fur as fake fur, and in what products did it appear? What was the timescale? Did it take the media to find it for you? Did you find it yourselves?

Paul Horsfield: I would like to say first that, in BooHoo’s instance, we were very disappointed to find that three of our products—footwear and accessories—have been found to breach our policies and procedures. We stand by our animal welfare policy, and we are fully committed to it, especially as regards fur. In terms of how we came about these three issues, we were informed, and we welcomed that information from Sky. We dealt with that very quickly, in terms of those particular products. One of those products was taken from a Chinese supplier. We found out in the first week of December, and within seven days we had actioned and discontinued with that particular supplier. We dealt with it very quickly. We found out via Sky.

Q66 **Chair:** You dealt with it very quickly, but you dealt with it after all the



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publicity came out. Do you not think you were perhaps duty bound to find it before that? Did it not make you suspicious that these products were coming in from China, given the fact that there is a lot of fur farming going on there under very poor conditions?

Paul Horsfield: It did. The policies and procedures we had, prior to Sky informing us about those particular products, were well in place, hence why we are very disappointed to understand that those policies had been breached on those three items.

Q67 **Chair:** Last April, nearly a year ago, Sky brought it to attention. You are talking about December this last year: seven, eight or nine months later. Surely something ought to have been in place, rather than just saying, "I am very disappointed that it has happened".

Paul Horsfield: Prior to that, we had clear policies and guidelines already in place in terms of supplier best practice. When we onboard suppliers, we have a very clear policy in terms of them having to sign a supplier acknowledgement form: "These are all the policies that we expect you to adhere to". Whether that be the animal welfare policy that we have in place or the Modern Slavery Act, we expect all our suppliers to adhere to them. They have to sign up to that before we start operating with them. Not only would we expect them to sign and deliver that back to us in terms of a process, but we would expect that particular supplier to go through or have already had an audit. We have a very clear audit process with our supplier base.

Q68 **Chair:** I have had this before when witnesses come before us. You have wonderful processes, but they did not work. What about these suppliers that you have now found out were basically duping you? Are you still taking supplies from them or not? Unless you send a clear message to those that are supplying whichever company you are, this is not going to stop, is it?

Paul Horsfield: I agree with that entirely. As a result of that, we have stopped supplying from the supplier in question. It took us a week to make that decision. With the following supplier, we are stopping working with the factory that supplied it with those products. It has taken that action. For me, that is quite severe action that we took.

Q69 **Chair:** That is important. If you send a message back to the suppliers, "We will not buy from you in the future if you are selling real fur as fake and trading it through our company when we have a policy against that", that will bring some realism and start to stamp this out.

Dorothy Maxwell: In terms of our incident, this was with respect to a pair of gloves that had a rabbit fur trim. It was produced by a concession brand in House of Fraser called Moda in Pelle. Just to explain, House of Fraser is a department store. We have what we call our own house-branded products such as Biba or Howick, where we control the supply chain. That is about 30% of our business. Outside of that, the biggest bit of our business, 70% of it, is the brands and concessions that



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sell their own products in House of Fraser stores. In those instances, they control the supply chain.

Q70 **Chair:** As House of Fraser, when did you find out you were selling real fur as fake fur?

Dorothy Maxwell: We were notified of this rabbit fur trim pair of gloves through the investigation. It is deeply concerning to us that, as a fur-free retailer, a brand of ours was selling a real-fur product in our store.

Q71 **Chair:** When was that?

Dorothy Maxwell: That was when the Sky News investigation came to light. In terms of timeline, within a day we had the product taken out of the Oxford Street store. It was one pair of gloves.

Q72 **Chair:** What was the date? I do not like timelines. Please give me an actual date.

Dorothy Maxwell: April 2017. I am sorry; I do not remember the exact date. It might have been the 23rd, when the Sky News investigation launched. That day, we contacted the brand immediately and we removed the product from the Oxford Street store, but just for safety we removed all of that line and any of it that was online. As it turned out, it was one isolated pair of gloves. On that exact same day, we reached out to the concession and the contacts that we have, not just on the technical sustainability side, but straight to the CEO, through the chain in our business, to flag this breach and start to investigate exactly what happened.

Q73 **Chair:** This pair of gloves was taken off the market in April last year. As far as you are aware, you do not believe that in House of Fraser you now have any product that is trading as fake fur but is actually real fur.

Dorothy Maxwell: We have not identified any further instances.

Q74 **Chair:** What does that mean? That is a very political answer, if I may say so. Yes or no: have you products in your shop that you believe could still be real fur when being traded as fake fur—either you or the franchises you have?

Dorothy Maxwell: We do not believe, in absolute good faith, that we have any real fur in our stores. We have been a fur-free retailer for many years. On the particular issue with a trim or a bobble, it is really important to understand, as we heard in the previous situation, that it appears contamination of the supply chain is happening in certain brands. This could happen in any brand if it does not have good due diligence.

For many years, House of Fraser has had, as I am sure have many others here, a very rigorous system in place. With respect to our own house brands where we control the supply chain, we have not had an instance of this. However, as part of the terms of doing business with our brand and concession products, we require them to do the same thing. We



require evidence of that, but operationally they must do that. This contamination challenge is something that deeply concerns us, because isolated instances could still occur. You always have to be on it. In answer to your question, we have really strong practices. We ask our brands and concessions to do the same, but until these issues happening in the supply chain are eradicated it is still possible that these isolated instances could occur.

- Q75 **Angela Smith:** I really do not buy the argument that House of Fraser, with its franchising system, can in any way distance itself. I know you say, Dorothy, that you ask your franchisees and brands to go through their own checks, but when people buy something from House of Fraser—whether it is Jaeger, although you do not sell Jaeger now, or whatever it is—they think they are buying from House of Fraser. They have bought a Jaeger dress, or another kind of dress, from House of Fraser. Is it not the case that, in terms of trust, consumers are relying on House of Fraser to get it right? Does that not give you a moral duty to ensure, as much as is humanly possible, that the franchises are complying?

Dorothy Maxwell: I absolutely agree. As a fur-free retailer, any product sold in House of Fraser stores is absolutely our overall responsibility. That is why we have agreements in place with the brands and concessions, as well as our own house brand supply chains, as part of the terms and conditions of doing business with House of Fraser, that none of these breaches will occur. We completely take responsibility, and we would never want to mislead our customers in any way, which is why this instance has been deeply concerning to us.

- Q76 **Chair:** Thank you for that evidence. It is all recorded now, so thank you very much for that. Neil, I take it your title, Missguided, does not mean we will be misguided as to the concern around whether it is real or fake fur. What is the situation with your trading online?

Neil Hackett: Missguided came to know of the incident through the media as well, unfortunately. I was brought into the business following this to review the end-to-end supply chain and sourcing processes and practices at Missguided. I joined the business earlier this year.

- Q77 **Chair:** Do you mean earlier *this* year?

Neil Hackett: Sorry, last year, in 2017.

- Q78 **Chair:** When did you join the business?

Neil Hackett: I joined in April. It was a relatively new business—eight years old. We really needed to look at the end-to-end supply chain and our internal practices. It is very easy for any retailer or brand to say, “We did not know we were selling fur”. It is very easy to say that for everybody. There are a lot of retailers out there, other than the three on the panel, that have had reports of fur being sold that is labelled as fake fur.

- Q79 **Chair:** Just because others are guilty does not make you any less guilty.



Neil Hackett: Absolutely.

Chair: That is the thing. You are the ones who are before us here this morning. I would like you to answer the situation regarding your company, not necessarily others. It is up to us to bring them in. When did you know that you as a company were selling real fur traded off as fake fur?

Neil Hackett: It was reported through Sky News late in 2016. We have taken steps. We have had a full end-to-end review of the supply chain and the processes. When something like this happens, the processes are reviewed and tightened. Missguided has taken a lot of steps, and it had practices and policies in place to prevent this from happening, but obviously it was not going far enough and the risk factor was not appropriate enough, which is what was reported through Sky News. It is unfortunate it was reported. However, it was where we were.

Since then, however, we have taken a lot of steps to prevent this from happening in the supply chain. We immediately removed it from sale. We reviewed the internal processes. We provided training to the buying and merchandise technical teams. We also provided training to the supply base, predominantly in China, where the incident happened. That training was then taken through to all suppliers on our animal policies and our sourcing, ethical and modern slavery statement policies. We took advice from HSI as well during this process.

We check all our development samples, and we checked them all for faux fur, which is what we expect we are purchasing from the supply base. However, the process that we did not do to follow it through and close the loop on it was that we were not checking production samples; we were just checking development samples. We have now put in processes to check not only development samples but production samples. We deconstruct any item, whether it is footwear, a handbag, et cetera, to make sure it is faux fur being sold. We do random quality checks in the warehouse.

Q80 **Chair:** What products have you found it in? That would be interesting for us to put on record.

Neil Hackett: It is mainly in small items. These small items are traditionally bought from markets in the Far East, as opposed to going to a big mill where it is modacrylic or faux fur fabric in large quantities.

Q81 **Chair:** Do you mean hats? What do you mean?

Neil Hackett: Fur trims: pom-poms mainly, and trims for footwear. We take particular care with our sourcing for very small items of fur, and everything is deconstructed and tested. Modern-day testing methods are not generally 100% conclusive, but they give you a very good indication. We will do the burn test, for example; if it melts, it is more likely to be acrylic or synthetic, and if it smells of human hair, there is a potential risk of animal hair. We have magnifying glasses, which will check the end of



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the fibres. Synthetics generally have a square end and animal hairs tend to be pointed. In the deconstruction process, we will look at the backing. If you see threads, it is more likely to be synthetic.

It is sometimes very difficult to tell the difference, but we have now provided a lot of training and development for our teams, internally and externally. We have recently opened an office in south China, which monitors ongoing quality, and manages and enforces a lot of our policies on the ground. We are getting much closer to our suppliers.

Q82 Chair: Quite a lot of product that you would sell would come from China, so you would probably have the potential for some of this real fur coming in as fake. Would you suggest you have quite a lot of exposure?

Neil Hackett: We do not have a lot of exposure now, no. We have reduced the risks, and we do a lot of due diligence to prevent anything happening in the supply chain, both pre, during and after goods arrive into the UK. If we did find anything, we would of course have a review and follow it through. Sometimes, just disengaging with a supply base is the easy option. It is more difficult to coach, guide and educate the supply chain in terms of how to improve. That is the same throughout all our policies. You do not just walk away if you have an ethical issue; you work with the supplier to improve it, or else you are just passing the problem on to somebody else.

Q83 Chair: How confident are you now that anybody buying from Missguided is not getting real fur that they thought was fake?

Neil Hackett: We would be as confident as we could possibly be, bar human error when they are actually looking. As I said, it is very difficult to tell some types of real fur versus fake fur. It is extremely unlikely that will happen in the supply chain.

Q84 Chair: You took action last April, and then you said you were taking action from the end of 2016. At what stage do you feel that you were confident that, within your supply chain, there was no real fur being traded off as fake?

Neil Hackett: Pretty much instantly. Everything that had already been imported at that time was checked in the UK. We were pretty certain that nothing incorrectly labelled or misrepresented was going to get through our DC out to the consumer. It is pretty certain. We were pretty thorough and pretty robust about this. Again, it is easy to say post the event, "This is what we have done as a result of it". At the time, we should have been looking at more due diligence and questioning our own supply chain. But we are doing that now and we are continuing to do it.

Q85 Chair: It is good that Sky brought this to our attention. As is always the case when cases—of meat inspections and others—are brought to us by the media, it is good that the media have done it, but it would be better if you had found it in the first place. I know hindsight is an easy thing for me to have, but it shows that we need to be more vigilant.



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Neil Hackett: At Misguided, we now have independent steering committees set up to manage and review the risks of the business throughout the business, whether it be ethical compliance issues, sustainability or sourcing. It is not just the traditional buying team that is now part of this. We have widened it out to independent committees, which are represented from board level down.

The other thing that has been quite useful, in terms of educating suppliers on enforcing this, is that we now do a declaration for all our imports for suppliers that the material they are putting on to any component, shoe, handbag, et cetera is faux fur. That is a signed document that a supplier has to fill in, and that goes along with our shipping documentation.

Q86 **Alan Brown:** Paul, the actual fur that was discovered was in your own-label products. Given it was in your own-label products, where you have extra responsibility, why did your checks not pick up that real fur was getting used?

Paul Horsfield: On investigation, we consulted with the suppliers at source. We asked them for their test reports, to understand whether they had them. In the first supplier's case, they had the test reports for the metals that were used for the earrings, but not the fur. When the buyer went out there, she in good faith raised the orders for the earrings and expected those to be faux fur with the trim. That was the expectation. The checks came back on the initial production samples, but the actual shipment samples came through with the real fur on. Due diligence had been followed to the point at which the supplier had shipped them into the country.

In the second instance, a factory where, on further investigation, the trim upon the shoe was found to be real fur, again, had disclosed and said that it should have been faux fur. In terms of our processes in place, as far as we were concerned, the buyer had bought in good faith and raised the order with the understanding that faux fur was to be used on that particular product. Unfortunately, it had come into the business with real fur upon it.

Q87 **Alan Brown:** In the case of earrings, you said you had to go and ask the supplier, "Did you have a test certificate?" Is that not a weakness in the system, when you are belatedly asking, "Do you have a test certificate"? Should you not be checking the certificates are in place beforehand?

Paul Horsfield: They issue a certificate 99% of the time, but in these two or three instances—and it tends to be on this type of small product: accessories and footwear—we have a bit of a loophole, which we have needed to close. Test certificates are available 99% of the time, and they are done in advance of those products being available for sale.

Q88 **Alan Brown:** What have you done to close the loopholes that you mentioned, to make sure that does not happen again?



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Paul Horsfield: In those two instances, we have stopped functioning with one supplier and one factory. In terms of the procedures and policies that we have in place, we have re-briefed the buyers in terms of how we should be conducting ourselves. They are making sure that they are asking and making sure that the fur we are using is faux fur. They are making sure from the outset that they have signed their NSQ, their supplier acknowledgement form, to make sure they are clear on all our policies, in particular the animal welfare policy, to make sure that has been signed and they are adhering to that.

We have also improved our AQL process. That is our sample testing when it comes through the back door of our warehouse. Last year, we sampled just over 13,000 samples coming through our warehouse, to ensure that our products are as specified. We have a certain failure rate, from minor issues to more major incidents. We have really tightened up on that process in terms of AQL and what they expect to find at the warehouse.

Q89 **Alan Brown:** You are acknowledging that you have picked up on failures within this increased sample testing. Presumably that is being dealt with behind the scenes. How do consumers have confidence that this system is now robust enough to fully meet their expectations?

Paul Horsfield: With these three incidents that we found, similarly to what Missguided did, we took off all the styles, we checked them and we found that there were another two incidents. In the grand scheme of things, although still significant, we only found a further two incidences of those products. The process that we have at the moment is robust. It is catching some of the issues that we have, and it is about making sure that we make that more robust going forward.

Q90 **Alan Brown:** Neil, to the opening question from the other Neil, you gave a really detailed answer about what you are now doing in terms of process to try to make sure you really are ensuring they are faux fur products. In terms of the deconstruction testing that you do, how continuously does that happen on a specific product line? You are saying you sample when the products come through. How often does that continue, just to make sure suppliers are kept in accordance?

Neil Hackett: It is 100%. It is part of the process we now have to follow. We have a risk assessment on every product that comes into the business, not only from a fur perspective but from a safety perspective. We are testing for any quality concerns we might have upstream that we want to follow through. We have as robust a risk assessment as you can have in a retail environment.

Q91 **Alan Brown:** Listening to the evidence that has been given, Neil gave detail in terms of the new processes and guidelines they have put in place and additional offices doing checks. Are you confident that your system is as robust as what I feel I am hearing from Neil?



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Paul Horsfield: I think so, yes. At BooHoo, we have a team in place of more than 50 people from a QA, QC and supplier compliance perspective. It is their job to make sure that the policies in place are followed through, in terms of due diligence.

In terms of where we have tightened up, we have homed in on one or two of the areas where we have some shortfall on the faux fur piece. The action that we took at the time was to take them off sale straightaway and have a forward view of those orders coming in. Making sure that we are doing further inspections and more random testing on faux fur as part of the AQL process will help us capture more of that going forward.

To go back to the initial stats, when we took off those styles and did further investigation on all our faux fur styles, we found only a further two incidents. What is interesting is that, where those incidents occurred, they were from a Chinese supply base.

Q92 **Angela Smith:** Paul, our earlier witness from Sky, Sarah, expressed disappointment that, eight months after the initial televising of her investigation with HSI, she was still finding fake products on the shelves in your stores. Why did it take so long? Why, eight months later, did you still have those products on the shelves?

Chair: When the fury of the press cools down, are you going to go back to your old ways again?

Paul Horsfield: Absolutely not.

Chair: Why should we be confident that you have got it sorted?

Q93 **Angela Smith:** Why did it take so long, and how confident can we be?

Paul Horsfield: Those initial two or three styles were only disclosed to us at the beginning of December. We felt at the time that the processes we had in place were pretty robust, if I am being honest. That is why there was no further investigation. It was as good as that. We felt the processes we had in place were there.

Q94 **Angela Smith:** We have House of Fraser here, but we also have BooHoo and Missguided, which sell to a market of 16 to 24-year-olds and broadly 16 to 35-year-olds. Is there any evidence that it is that market, rather than the older market, that is buying these goods? I am really interested in the types of items that are being bought. It focuses quite a lot on accessories.

Chair: Is it the pricing as well?

Angela Smith: It is the accessories and the pricing that may appeal to a younger, less affluent market.

Paul Horsfield: I am not personally aware of any market stats that would support that.

Q95 **Angela Smith:** But you only sell to 16 to 24-year-olds. My question is



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for House of Fraser, really.

Dorothy Maxwell: We know from asking our customers that they are not interested in buying real fur. Having been a fur-free retailer for many years, it is also because we know our customers do not want it.

Q96 **Angela Smith:** Is there an age differentiation here? Clearly, real fur is being sold and bought. Is there an age-related issue here?

Dorothy Maxwell: I am not aware of any information or evidence that we have gathered in House of Fraser to say a younger customer might be more likely to buy this than others. From our point of view, we are endeavouring not to have any real fur in the store, so that it would all be faux fur anyway.

Q97 **Angela Smith:** That is avoiding the question. The question is about people buying real fur thinking it is fake fur. I am really surprised that there is no analysis by the retail sector of the market for fake fur products.

Dorothy Maxwell: Our understanding of the market is that, when we look at our customers, roughly eight out of 10 tell us they want products that are not only free of fur but that meet other good performance standards on sustainability. That is the information that we have.

Angela Smith: That is not the question here. There is no analysis of the types of consumers who are buying fake fur products.

Q98 **Chair:** Related to Angela's question, is the product that would suit the younger generation more likely to have the real fur in it that is being traded off as fake fur, because it might be a slightly less expensive item? This is the question we are asking.

Angela Smith: It absolutely adds to the exploitation of younger consumers who cannot afford to buy at high prices.

Dorothy Maxwell: I understand where you are coming from. Thank you for clarifying. From our point of view, we understand the challenge is that in trim—in things such as trim or a bobble on a hat or a shoe—contamination is happening in the supply chain. That could be targeted at any market. It could be the premium market or the value end of the market. It is as a result of real fur being cheaper than faux fur from these farmed supply bases. That really is the challenge, as we understand it from working with groups such as Humane Society International, PETA, and the British Retail Consortium. Effectively it could be in any type of retailer, not just ones that are at the value end and associated with a certain price point, or trying to target a certain market.

Chair: It seems to be this mass production of real fur in China, under very poor animal welfare conditions, that has saturated the market.

Angela Smith: That then drives consumer choice.



Q99 **Chair:** Neil, do you agree with that?

Neil Hackett: I do. To answer your earlier question about whether there is evidence as to the age demographic, you have two people on the panel here from fast fashion: online, aimed at the younger market. You then have the more mature, premium end. If you look at the catwalks and the runways around the world, that will dictate what the young, fast-fashion market is going to be wearing, whether it is fur or faux fur. Nobody wants to buy fur any more, and we, like other people, have said, "We do not sell fur, because our customer does not demand it and does not need it". I do not think there is any age demographic.

Q100 **Angela Smith:** They are demanding fake fur. This is the point.

Neil Hackett: We all demand faux fur. We have a policy: we do not have real fur.

Q101 **Angela Smith:** Given that the retail sector is offering younger consumers what they think is faux fur, more often than not at very, very cheap prices, is there not a huge responsibility on the part of retailers to make sure that those consumers can buy with confidence? I am absolutely confident that younger consumers in particular will not want to buy real fur. It heightens your responsibilities to get this right.

Dorothy Maxwell: They should be able to buy with confidence. I completely agree with you. The whole system has a role to play in that, from the retailer through to the brand, through to the consumer being informed.

Q102 **Julian Sturdy:** Following on from Angela's questioning, given all the publicity over this, have you seen a consumer response in what they are buying? That is not about the difference whether it is fake fur or real fur, but about the actual products they are buying—as in with no fur or fake fur on at all. To use an example, if it was a food scare, we would see a huge consumer change. Have you seen that with this incident?

Neil Hackett: In my capacity, I am not close enough to marketing and the customer, so I cannot answer that.

Paul Horsfield: I am a bit closer, and I would say there has not been any change in the sale of faux fur. The demand has stayed relatively stable.

Chair: That is why we have to get it absolutely right.

Q103 **Julian Sturdy:** Dorothy, have you seen any change?

Dorothy Maxwell: No, not any specific evidence. The only thing I would highlight is that, typically, this sort of trim, whether it is the bobble or a pair of gloves, is to do with autumn/winter. It is at that time of year and it is that specific type of product: a glove, a scarf, a hat. It is about trends at that time of year.

Q104 **Julian Sturdy:** But is it still following the fashion trends that Neil talked



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about—the catwalk stuff?

Dorothy Maxwell: We have not seen a specific, noticeable decline. At this time of year, you would not really have it in a lot of products, because you are moving into spring/summer.

Q105 **Chair:** No, it is quite seasonal I suppose, coming up to winter.

Dorothy Maxwell: Correct.

Q106 **David Simpson:** I was going to ask you to explain how your supply chain works and how real fur entered into it, but you have touched on that a wee bit over the course of the interviews. In relation to a similar incident that happened in 2015 with House of Fraser, how was this allowed to happen again? If there was an issue in 2015, how was it allowed to happen again?

Dorothy Maxwell: If I take the first aspect first, I can give a little more clarity on the supply chain.

David Simpson: That is good.

Dorothy Maxwell: In terms of the situation where a concession branded product has this issue—in this case Moda in Pelle—we very much take the responsibility that the product is in our store. While we do not control the supply chain, we have a really clear code of conduct, with the systems that have to happen for all those brands and concessions.

Q107 **David Simpson:** What do you mean when you say you do not control the supply chain?

Dorothy Maxwell: If you think of a branded product that is manufactured in the supply chain, every decision that you make—the material you use to make the product, where it is made, the due diligence that all the different suppliers in that chain will do, the testing that you require, the specification of the material to pick up that it is man-made and not real fur—is part of that supply chain. The ability to control that for your own product is there. Similarly for a brand, the ability to control it is also there.

However, overarching that, the retailer can demand certain things are done. If we take the case of Moda in Pelle and the glove, when we looked into it with them immediately after this incident, we found that the levels of due diligence were not what they should have been. We worked with them for six months to do all the things that you need to do: getting the specification right, sending samples of the fibres to a lab so that you know they are man-made, doing it at different stages of the chain.

Q108 **Chair:** We have had enough detail on that. The question I want answered is why it happened in 2015. It happened again in 2017. Is it going to happen again in 2019? That is a quite legitimate question.

Dorothy Maxwell: The experience we had in 2015 was with another concession called Silvian Heach. This was a jacket which, again, had a trim on it with rabbit fur. Silvian Heach had just started to be a



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concession with House of Fraser at that point, and three products were online that had this trim. Similarly to what happened with Moda in Pelle, when we found out about it, we immediately contacted the brand and removed the product from sale. In that particular case, customers had bought a product, so they got a full refund. We reached out to them and we explained that we would never mislead them and so forth, but that we had not known. It was a similar situation. We looked into it with Silvan Heach. At that stage, it had just started doing business with us, so the business was then terminated going forward.

David Simpson: It happened in 2015 and 2017, so how can you guarantee to this panel and, more importantly, to the general public that it will not happen again?

Q109 **Chair:** Would you accept that—while it may be concessions, and it may be other people trading in your shop—when people go to buy at the House of Fraser they expect you to be responsible at the end of the day for what they buy? You would accept that.

Dorothy Maxwell: We would.

Q110 **Chair:** I can understand it is quite difficult to control some of the franchisees, or whatever the position is, but the public are not really interested in your process. They are interested in the fact that they go to the House of Fraser and they expect a guarantee that it is fake fur and not real fur.

Dorothy Maxwell: What really concerned us about the incidents, particularly with Moda in Pelle, because we had worked with PETA and then we started working with Humane Society International, was that—we now understand—there were these contamination problems in the supply chain.

Q111 **Chair:** It took you two years, from 2015 to 2017, and you still did not get it right. This is the interesting bit, isn't it?

Dorothy Maxwell: The challenge is about understanding the nature of the problem. The problem, that supply chains are being contaminated because real fur is cheaper than faux, was something that only really came to light with the Sky News inquiry.

Q112 **Chair:** Back in 2015 you were not alerted to this position. Is that what you are saying?

Dorothy Maxwell: Not that it was happening in that way—such that, in the choice of material, we would expect it to be a fact that fur was coming in.

Q113 **Chair:** You did not test your products in your shop after that. You did not feel it was necessary. It is interesting that you now feel it is necessary but you did not feel it was necessary back in 2015, because otherwise, in 2017, it would not have been in your shop, Sky News would not have had it and the BBC would not have had it. This is what we are



trying to get to grips with. Is this going to carry on? When the heat dies down, will you go back to having some real fur traded as fake fur?

Dorothy Maxwell: With complete respect, our systems were in place in 2015. They continue and, at each step, if something happens, we learn and we improve the system. What we are doing differently, which we instigated right after the incident with Moda in Pelle, once we understood about the supply chain contamination problem, is reaching out to every single one of our brands and concessions. We ran two webinars with PETA to show videos on what was happening, to understand the problems. We then started working with Humane Society International. We brought not just our own brands and concessions and our own suppliers together, but we opened it up to all retailers here in the UK. We did a big session with them, so that Humane Society International could bring the expertise about this challenge in the supply chain, and bring all the toolkits of what you need to do, how you need to have better due diligence—all the things we have talked about in the sessions today.

We genuinely feel that creating that awareness and capacity building are very important parts of the solution, so that our brands, of which there are 1,800, can start to improve their performance more quickly. That does not in any way take away from the fact that we have been requiring this for a very long time. We have had the tripping and falling that we are talking about here, for sure, and we absolutely accept that. Then we start to work specifically with those particular brands. Now we are going across them all much more proactively to raise awareness on the specific problem that farmed fur, particularly from China, and, we understand, from Poland, is contaminating these supply chains.

David Simpson: The reputation of the House of Fraser is at stake here. It happened in 2015 and 2017. It is a large organisation, and you can stand against a lot of these things, but it is important that you all get this right, because we do not want to be sitting as a Committee in 12 months' time doing exactly the same thing again. It will not only ruin public confidence, but it will ruin the reputation of your companies. There is no question about that.

Chair: Yes, you make a very good point, David.

Q114 **Julian Sturdy:** I agree entirely with what David just said. Following on from that, I want to drill down a little more from my earlier question about consumer drop-off. You have all said that, to the best of your knowledge, the consumer drop-off was not there. Does that then drive how you react to this? Ultimately, if consumer sales are not dropping off, that means that is not affecting you financially as a company. Going back to the food scares, companies had to change. They were hugely affected financially, whether it was right or wrong. If they did not act, they would be out of business.

Going back, Dorothy, to the fact that you had this situation in 2015 and then two years later, if you are not seeing a financial hit because of what is being found in your stores, whether you are to blame, or whether it is



further down the supply chain, is the drive coming down from the top of your businesses to deliver that change? There is no financial cost to you, at the moment, with consumers changing their behaviour or moving away from your businesses and spending money elsewhere.

Dorothy Maxwell: Yes, absolutely, the drive is unchanged. Things happened very differently between 2015 and afterwards. I came into the business in 2016. Starting to improve these systems has been a key focus of my job in House of Fraser. Irrespective of customer demand and whether it affects the commercials and so forth, this is part and parcel of doing business with House of Fraser.

We will continue to improve the systems on this issue and on sustainability. It is the nature of running these systems. It is irrelevant whether there is a commercial driver or not. As you have already stated, and we completely agree, when these incidents happen they are very damaging to our reputation and it is completely against our values. We have genuinely been a fur-free retailer for many, many years and we do not want to have real fur in our stores.

Q115 **Julian Sturdy:** I understand it damages your reputation, but from the evidence you gave earlier on it is not damaging to the bottom line, potentially.

Dorothy Maxwell: If you lose consumer confidence and customers do not believe what you are saying, it affects their loyalty, as on any sustainability aspect. We know this is very important to our customers.

Q116 **Dr Johnson:** We know that, when we ask customers about food, they want high welfare, free range and all the rest of it, but when they actually go into the supermarket and buy their food, the biggest factor is price. The customer who comes in to buy a hat with a fur bobble or a faux fur bobble on top, if asked which they would choose between the fur and the non-fur, may prefer not to have the fur. But is the fact that they are not reducing their sales of these things, when they know they might be fur, a sign that they are not as bothered about it? It is not really affecting your sales, even though they know it might be fur. The fact that they are still buying them suggests that they are not as bothered, even if they might respond in a particular way to a specific question.

Chair: Are they more price conscious than they are fur conscious? It is an interesting point.

Dorothy Maxwell: We use surveys to understand our customers' views, in addition to just looking at things such as volumes sold. From our perspective at the premium end of the market, we know that our customers are aware of these issues and that they expect us to perform well on them. They come in with that expectation to begin with. Many times, the technical detail behind whether something is real or not can be confusing to a customer. When they look at a label and they see, for example, it is 100% acrylic, they would assume it is not a real fur



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product. They assume that what is being provided to them in a store like House of Fraser would not be real fur.

Q117 **Dr Johnson:** My other question, which you have all touched on already, is what actions you have taken against the vendors to make them aware of the seriousness of this issue. Paul, you said two things that interested me. First, you have now stopped working with one retailer completely, and with another retailer you have stopped working with one factory.

Paul Horsfield: Another supplier, sorry.

Dr Johnson: Have you stopped working with both suppliers?

Paul Horsfield: Yes. It was very easy in the first instance. We did not have a longstanding relationship. We have a policy. Our code of conduct with the suppliers is to give them a length of time to work with us and understand the business, but in this case, because it had not provided the right test report and we did very little business with it, it was very easy to say no.

In the second instance, we had had a longstanding relationship with the supplier of over eight years. Over the last year or two, of the incidents that we checked—so from the AQLs, the sample checks, that we had done with it—we had had less than 5% or 6% of an issue with its products. That was not purely related to faux fur products; it was any issue that we had with those products. The issues that we had with them were quite minimal as a percentage. For the issues that were faux fur, it was smaller again.

However, we understood from that supplier that one particular factory that was supplying it was out of kilter with its factory base. This particular supplier has three factories. All three factories were SMETA audited. They were all above board. They were all in good condition. They were all following due diligence and best practice. The third of those factories was not compliant in terms of the test reports. It was not us that took the decision. After we were made aware of the issues and informed that particular supplier, the supplier went down to the chain to understand that the factory had not adhered to the policies, as was needed, and took the decision to discontinue, based on what we had found and made it aware of. We dealt with the factory at fault, but we kept with the supplier itself.

Q118 **Dr Johnson:** Is that because it was a big supplier, rather than a small supplier?

Paul Horsfield: It was not a big supplier. It was a supplier that was close to us and had done lots of work with us. We had a good partnership and they were people that we could work with. That is something that we really need to bear in mind. The source of all the five incidents we have found is China-based. To be able to stamp it out properly, we have to work with suppliers like that quite closely to develop the right due diligence and processes. Walking away from some of these



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suppliers is not the right way to go. Working with them and making sure they have the right audits in place and are working with the correct factories is the right way to go.

Q119 **Dr Johnson:** You talked about one in 20, or 5%, of the products having a problem. You also mentioned earlier “catching some”. Those were the words that you used. Does that imply that the tests you are doing now are still finding fur passed off as faux fur?

Paul Horsfield: Yes. Post the investigation, we took all our styles off site. We reviewed all our styles that were there and we found a further three back in December or January.

Q120 **Chair:** Of this year?

Paul Horsfield: In the December to January period of this year, yes. I wanted us to make sure that the policies and procedures that we had in place were absolutely robust. I wanted to go back through all that again to understand how many were defaulting against that particular policy, of which we found a further three. For my own piece of mind, I wanted to make sure that that was the case.

Q121 **Dr Johnson:** What did you do about the other three?

Paul Horsfield: One we have discontinued with, and with the other two it was a factory situation again. We have discontinued with the factories, but we have continued to work with the overall supplier.

Q122 **Dr Johnson:** Are you still regularly testing your products?

Paul Horsfield: Yes, we are. Part of what we have changed since is that, for those suppliers that we have continued with, we put them on what we call a red watch. For the next six months, we will continue to review any of those styles that they produce and give them a more thorough examination on top of what is already done. We will keep them on a high alert because they are producing what we consider to be a critical product or fabric.

Q123 **Dr Johnson:** Do you think that is enough? If you are a supplier working in China or somewhere else, you might say, “I am working with this company. I have a contract. I am going to make some good money out of it. I know it is going to check my product for the next six months but in six months’ time I can largely do what I like, and if it catches me it will just check me again for six months but I will get away with it”. What penalty is there for not doing what they need to do?

Paul Horsfield: That is the first and second line of defence. One is finding it; one is understanding what process is at work. The next part is about taking the styles off and then saying, “Okay, six months’ watch”. The stock was sent back to them, by the way. There is no financial gain for them; nor is there for us. They were told to take the stock back, and they accepted that. At the next point, it starts to come into penalties,



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then we get to a third strike, and then we will seriously look at discontinuing that particular supplier for continued abuse.

Q124 **Dr Johnson:** What does “seriously look at” mean?

Paul Horsfield: It means evaluating how bad that breach has been. Not only are faux fur and fur a consideration with these suppliers. There are lots of other things, such as our product safety policy and our ethical code of conduct. Animal welfare is the case in point today, but there are other things to take on board with that supplier. If it was faux fur, it would probably be in the third instance that we would look at discontinuing with that supplier.

Q125 **Dr Johnson:** When you look at your suppliers, presumably you are looking at the quality of the product, what they are making and how much they are going to charge you for providing it. If your suppliers are able to undercut their competition by even occasionally managing to get these products through, and your answer is, “Three strikes and then you may or may not be out, depending on how we feel about you”, how does that help the supplier that is legitimate and doing things properly but that necessarily incurs higher costs in doing so?

Paul Horsfield: That is a good question. For us, it is about being consistent with our whole supplier base at BooHoo. It is about making sure that the hand that we lay across all our suppliers is the same in terms of how we approach them.

Q126 **Dr Johnson:** But it is not, is it? One retailer was told, “You have done something wrong. Off you go”. Another one was told, “You have done something wrong. We will let you close that factory and keep supplying us with the other two”. That is not consistent. That is not: “If you give us something that is wrong, we will not get stuff from you any more”.

Paul Horsfield: It is consistent in the sense that the first supplier just had one factory, and the second supplier had three factories and that one had gone against the policy. It is consistent in terms of that.

Q127 **Chair:** Is it not down to the scale and the amount that the supplier supplies you? Does that not govern some of your policy as well?

Paul Horsfield: It does not govern the policy, no.

Q128 **Chair:** Would it not be a gap in the market if you did not have a product from one of them? To the point that Caroline made about China, if you are producing a garment in China for this market, they are not going to have any ethics about whether it is fake or real fur. They will just decide what they can source more cheaply and make look good. That is all they will be interested in. That is why we have to be doubly careful and you have to be doubly careful, because they will slip it in if they think they can because it is cost-effective and it looks good. That is what they will be looking at.



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Paul Horsfield: I do not quite subscribe to fur being cheaper than faux fur. There are different grades. In my experience, that is not quite correct.

Q129 **Chair:** We are being told that, in China now, with the appalling way fur farming is carried on, very often real fur now is virtually as cheap as, if not cheaper than, fake fur. That is why I am saying to you that the potential for it to get into products will always be there.

Paul Horsfield: Yes. We need to have the policies and procedures in place to address that. We have the teams there to enforce it. Going back to the supplier base conversation, there are many suppliers that could be utilised that are audited. We are not hinged to one supplier or another. It is about that working relationship, which is important to make sure we do the best for animals and the animal welfare, but also for the suppliers, to make sure that we are making the right decision.

Q130 **Dr Johnson:** Once you have gone past your six-month red card, do you test anything?

Paul Horsfield: Yes, we do.

Q131 **Chair:** Is that spot checks or all checks?

Paul Horsfield: AQL checks are carried out randomly across all the stock that comes in through the warehouse from all our suppliers.

Q132 **Dr Johnson:** My other question was for Dorothy about Moda in Pelle. You have had two suppliers that have, on two different occasions, provided you with a product that contains real fur, against their stated contract with you. The first time you decided to no longer stock any of the products, as I understand it, from that supplier. The second time you decided just to take the single product off the shelves. Again, why the inconsistency?

Dorothy Maxwell: In the first instance, in 2015, the concession, Silvan Heach, had literally just started doing business with House of Fraser. This breach happened at that point. There were also quality and other issues so, on all these points, the decision was made to stop doing business. I have received that information from my colleagues, because I was not in the business at that time. That was the process.

In this particular case with Moda in Pelle, we worked with them and we went through their supply chain with them. They found out where the breach was happening, which was at one particular factory. The decision was made to stop doing business with that particular factory. We were part of that decision-making process in terms of continuing our business relationship with Moda in Pelle. At the time this happened in 2017, Moda in Pelle had been working with House of Fraser for many years, so it was an established relationship. In those cases, our preference would be to try to work with the brand, first of all to understand it, and then, if we can, to help to resolve it.



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In this case, the decision made was to stop doing business immediately with that supply factory. We said, “We will work with you now and work alongside as you improve your due diligence process. If you have any further breach, if this does not work, we will terminate doing business with you”. That is the arrangement we have made with Moda in Pelle.

Q133 **Dr Johnson:** You have good consequences in place, such that, if in the process Moda in Pelle is found to be providing a product that contains real fur for sale in your shop, you will terminate the contract.

Dorothy Maxwell: That is correct. That is part of the terms and conditions of doing business with House of Fraser.

Q134 **Julian Sturdy:** Quickly, what discussions have you had with trading standards over the last 12 months regarding these incidents?

Neil Hackett: I do not believe we have engaged with trading standards.

Q135 **Chair:** Do you feel you should have done, and should it have engaged with you?

Neil Hackett: There should be a lot more collaboration across multi-stakeholders in general. I was late in for the first session this morning, for which I apologise. There is a lot more we could do collectively to address this. Trading standards is too late. We need to address it further up the supply chain and prevent it getting into the UK. Collectively, through reiteration of this, and more communication with different parties—we are all part of the Ethical Trading Initiative, the ETI, for example—we can be sharing with the rest of the retailers. It is about more collective promotion.

Q136 **Chair:** And sharing information.

Neil Hackett: Yes.

Dorothy Maxwell: In our case, through Humane Society International, trading standards got in contact with House of Fraser. In our case, with respect to the issue of the label on the product, the Moda in Pelle glove with the rabbit trim was not labelled in any way as fur. From subsequent discussions—we have worked with Humane Society International and BRC on how we solve this, which we see as an industry problem—our understanding of the challenge that happened in that case is that, when you have a product under the current EU legislation, the trim can be excluded because it is less than 10% by weight of the product. You do not have to say if it is real fur.

Q137 **Julian Sturdy:** That made it very difficult for trading standards, did it?

Dorothy Maxwell: It is a real gap. We had the conversation in the earlier session about what could be done as the next step. This would be an excellent next step to resolve that gap. That is something that we have submitted as our suggestion to this process through the BRC.



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Paul Horsfield: Trading standards has not been in contact with us regarding this particular issue. We have worked with it on one or two other pieces within the company and found that extremely useful, so we would welcome any input.

Q138 **Julian Sturdy:** Do you feel you should have contacted trading standards?

Paul Horsfield: We did debate it. That was only in the last week or two. I think that would have been a bit contrived. We are waiting to see what the outcome of this would be. I would agree with what Neil said, in terms of the need for greater collaboration across the piece on this and how we can handle it. The guidelines are quite loose and vague. They need tightening up. All retailers would benefit from that.

Q139 **Julian Sturdy:** Very quickly—and I will be extremely quick on this—going back to an earlier point, what mark-ups do you have on these products that you are selling?

Paul Horsfield: They are no different from any other products.

Chair: You probably cannot ask for a percentage, Julian.

Q140 **Julian Sturdy:** I am not asking for a percentage. There are big mark-ups on retail, and there have to be, I understand, because of running costs and things like that. It depends on the type of business. I want to understand whether this is price-driven. Is the way you are driving down price with your suppliers causing them to make difficult decisions?

Paul Horsfield: No.

Julian Sturdy: I know you are going to answer me no.

Paul Horsfield: The margin is no different from any other products. It is consistent across the board and is no different in faux fur products. It is very consistent across the board.

Q141 **Julian Sturdy:** Is that the same with all of you? There is no difference.

Paul Horsfield: No, certainly not at BooHoo.

Chair: Julian, I really must stop you there, because I have a PMQ. We have just started Prime Minister's questions. We will not be quorate in a minute.

Q142 **David Simpson:** Very quickly, I will ask a question to the three of you. What voluntary action have you taken to improve labelling on your products, if any?

Chair: What are you doing to label it better?

Neil Hackett: Everybody has to label to the legislation, and that is what people do.

Q143 **David Simpson:** Everybody has to.



Neil Hackett: Yes.

Q144 **Chair:** Is it the same with House of Fraser?

Dorothy Maxwell: At the point that we agree what the product is to be made of, we agree a fibre composition. At that point, we identify whether it could have fur in it. We get it tested. Similarly, when the product is produced and goes into the market, it has that for the customer. With our suppliers, we are looking at whether fur could have contaminated that chain, and that would have to be represented on it. We are using it as another gate to try to make sure this does not happen.

Paul Horsfield: On our own brand products, yes, absolutely. The guidelines for fabric composition and how that should look on the label are in the supplier manual, which is available to all the suppliers. They all have to review what is in the supplier manual. It is 200 pages of detail, which allows the products to be on sale.

Q145 **Chair:** This is the last question. What additional measures should be taken to ensure that prohibited fur does not enter the UK market? Do you want to give a quick answer, or do you want to give a written answer? Perhaps you could give both.

Paul Horsfield: We have discussed the label piece. Upstream, at the point at which the product is imported or exported from particular places, especially China, that could be reinforced before it gets on a container vessel. It is about reinforcement of the policies that retailers like us have in place, to make sure that they are out there with all our suppliers.

Dorothy Maxwell: Filling the gap in the labelling would be an excellent step forward.

Chair: We may be able to do that after Brexit.

Dorothy Maxwell: In terms of the import of real fur into the UK, as a fur-free retailer that would be a positive for us, because it would help as an additional way of stopping this contamination happening.

Neil Hackett: For the products that are high risk—the pom-poms, the trims and the accessories—having a different commodity code for the importation of cargo would highlight the risk to customs, so it could increase the percentage of route 6s to check containers. Even if it is labelled as faux fur, if it is a jacket, a t-shirt or a shoe, whatever it is, it will put people off.

Chair: It would send a message back that they cannot get it in, which would be very useful. If, in a blinding flash when you leave this meeting, you decide there is something you would like to give us in evidence, make sure we have it in writing. We very much appreciate your evidence. It was robust questioning, and you were bound to expect that, but we were very pleased with the answers you gave. They are on record. We really have to sort this out, and make sure that it is stamped



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out and it does not happen again. We very much welcome your evidence. Thank you for coming this morning—well, it is just after noon now. Thank you very much.