



## **Report of the Fur Farming Review Group**

**2012**

**Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine**

| <b>Contents</b>   | <b>Page</b> |
|---|-------------|
| Introduction  | 3           |
| Executive Summary   | 4-6         |
| Chapter 1 Background to establishment of the Review Group   | 7           |
| Chapter 2 Submissions received on the review  | 8-10        |
| Chapter 3 Economic benefits of fur farming in Ireland   | 11-12       |
| Chapter 4 Practical implication of an imposition of a ban on fur farming based on the UK experience           | 13-14       |
| Chapter 5 Welfare Legislation – National and European Union   | 15-19       |
| • Irish legislation applicable to mink farming  | 16          |
| • Licence conditions  | 17          |
| Chapter 6 Inspection controls carried out on Irish Fur Farms  | 20          |
| • Enhanced Controls to be carried out by Department Inspectorate  | 21-23       |
| • Role of Private Veterinary Practitioners (PVPs)   | 23          |
| Chapter 7 Welfare Controls  | 24          |
| • WelFur  | 24          |
| • FAWAC’s report entitled:<br>‘ <i>Welfare aspects of the slaughter of fur producing animals in Ireland</i> ’ | 24          |
| Chapter 8 Recommendations   | 25-26       |
| Appendices  | 27-33       |
| Appendix 1 Membership of Review Group   | 27          |
| Appendix 2 Fur farming and its environmental implications   | 28          |
| Appendix 3 FAWAC’s SACAHW   | 29          |
| Appendix 4 WELFUR report  | 30-31       |
| Appendix 5 List of Acronyms   | 32-33       |

## **Introduction**

The Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Mr Simon Coveney TD, established a Review Group in November 2011 to examine all aspects of fur farming and to make appropriate recommendations.

The Terms of Reference of the Review Group were:

- (i) To review fur farming in Ireland taking into account existing legislative provisions for the licensing of mink farming
- (ii) To comment on the economic benefits of the sector
- (iii) To consider the effectiveness of existing welfare controls, and
- (iv) To make appropriate recommendations

Submissions were invited from the public/interested parties on the review of fur farming. A total of 441 submissions were received and these were considered by the Review Group.

This report represents the agreed deliberations of the Group and is submitted for consideration by the Minister in accordance with the aforementioned terms of reference.

## **Executive Summary**

The Fur Farming Review Group was established in November 2011 by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to review all aspects of fur farming.

The Group considered submissions made from a variety of organisations and interested parties on either side of the debate on the future of fur farming. In its considerations, the Group were mindful of the genuine concerns expressed on the one hand about the welfare aspects of fur farming and who favour its banning on ethical grounds, while also taking into consideration the interests of those currently engaged in the legitimate activity of the breeding and rearing of mink for fur production whose livelihoods are dependent on its continuance.

Fur farming is a lawful and permitted farming activity practiced in many European countries and the Review Group was mindful of the fact that were the activity to be banned, the production capacity would likely move to another country, most likely within the EU, and Irish producers would require to be compensated for the economic loss.

As things stand fur farming is governed by National and European law, and delivers economic benefits to the country, though it is acknowledged that these economic benefits are modest in national terms. Nevertheless it is an essential economic activity to those families directly involved in the production of mink.

The Review Group met on a number of occasions between October 2011 and February 2012 to review fur farming in Ireland taking into account existing legislative provisions for the licensing of mink farming, to comment on the economic benefits of the sector, to consider the effectiveness of existing welfare controls, and to make appropriate recommendations. The Group examined all aspects of fur farming within the context of the terms of reference and also took into account fully the arguments and points of view expressed in the submissions received. The Group also took account of the fact that the fur industry in Ireland has no current or future plans to breed foxes or any other fur animal other than mink on the existing licensed fur farms in Ireland. The Group met a number of parties and individuals who made submissions to the Review.

On balance the Group concluded that it did not find the arguments in favour of banning the farming of fur animals in Ireland compelling – therefore the Group recommends that fur farming be allowed continue under licence and subject to official control. Moreover, the Group did not accept arguments restricting licensing to existing operators on the grounds that to refuse an application for a mink farm licence under the Musk Rats Act 1933 solely on the basis that the operator was not already in the business would be open to legal challenge. The Group noted the extensive powers available to the Minister in legislation for revoking of licences in cases of non-compliance with a licence condition and where welfare conditions are not met.

The Group also considered the duration of licensing and, given the uncertainty that has existed for fur farming in recent years, which in turn has impeded further investment in upgrading facilities, recommended that licences be issued for a maximum five year period. Licences for a shorter period may be granted in situations where the operator is operating to an agreed Plan of Action towards achieving full compliance with legislative requirements.

The Group also addressed the issue of other types of fur farming where a legal lacuna may currently exist and recommends that all fur farming should be subject to licence by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) and that the new Animal Health and Welfare Bill should include a provision requiring new entrants (and existing licence holders) to fur farming to hold a licence.

In addressing welfare concerns, the Group made a series of recommendations. At operational level, it recommends that the DAFM Veterinary and Agricultural inspections and controls be doubled from the current level to allow for enhanced controls, including unannounced inspections so that additional confidence can be gained in respect of compliance with animal health, animal welfare, environmental requirements, greater security on the farms and contingency planning. Veterinary controls should include a review of the checks carried out by the private veterinary practitioner (PVP) engaged by the licence holders.

Recognising that primary responsibility to ensure the health and welfare of the animals rests with the operator, the Group recommends that licences should require increased direct engagement of PVPs to provide professional input into operational practices and these PVPs

in turn will be obliged to provide written verification of the effectiveness of the operational systems in place. The Group also recommends that Codes of Practice be established to promote sound welfare and management practices.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Background to establishment of the Review Group.**

The review of fur farming arises in the context of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine's (DAFM) legislative responsibility for the health and welfare of farmed animals together with the licensing of mink farming in Ireland. Licences are usually issued for a three year period and may be extended provided that certain conditions attaching to the licences are observed. On foot of the decision of the previous Government, announced in 2009, to discontinue mink farm licensing with effect from 31 December 2012, Minister Coveney initiated this current review to enable all interested parties the opportunity to contribute in a public consultation as part of a review of all aspects of fur farming.

The review is being carried out in the context of a number of issues:

- The fur industry is seeking a degree of certainty on the licensing regime, the absence of which militates against them making necessary long term investments in their enterprises.
- Repeated calls and lobbying from animal welfare and animal rights groups for a total ban on fur farming in Ireland. While fur farming is a legitimate farming activity practiced in many European countries, there is a body of opinion which believes that a ban on the farming of animals for their fur should be introduced on ethical grounds.
- The drafting of a new Animal Health and Welfare Bill and the extent, if any, that the issue of fur farming should be addressed in that Bill.

In arriving at its recommendations, the Review Group considered the future of mink farming together with the concerns in some quarters about the conditions in which mink are farmed. The Review Group was also mindful of the fact that mink farmers licensed by the Department have been engaged in a legitimate farming activity as their source of livelihood for many years and have displayed a willingness to comply with requirements in relation to the farming and slaughtering of mink.

## Chapter 2

### Submissions received on the review

Submissions were invited on the review of fur farming from interested parties with a closing date for receipt of submissions of 31st December 2011. A total of 441 submissions were received.

#### ➤ *Details of submissions received supporting the continuation of fur farming in Ireland*

Submissions in support of a continuation of fur farming in Ireland included submissions from the European Fur Breeders Association (EFBA), the Irish Fur Breeders Association (IFBA), the British Fur Trade Association and the International Fur Trade Association. Submissions were also received from local communities in areas where fur farming is carried out, including from employees engaged in the fur farming industry, supplier companies of services to the fur farming industry and from companies involved in the animal by-products industry e.g. the fish industry which relies on fur farms for disposal of animal products, offal etc.

Submissions were also received from individuals with no direct involvement in the fur industry but who referred to the legitimacy of fur farming and the impact the industry has on rural areas, providing employment crucial to the survival of families. Mention was also made of the fact that the industry is 100% export oriented and is beneficial to the wider national economy and the fact that the sector utilises large volumes of animal by-product waste thereby assisting with the issue of waste disposal.

Other submissions supporting the continuation of fur farming were of the view that opposition to fur farming comes from a small number of people who are ideologically opposed to the use of animals by man and that the closure of Irish fur farms will lead to production in other countries with potentially lower animal welfare standards.

➤ *Details of submissions received calling for a ban on fur farming in Ireland*

Submissions were received supporting a ban on fur farming. The majority of these advocated against its continuation on the grounds that fur farming is unnatural, cruel and has no place in a modern, civilised and compassionate Ireland. A number of detailed submissions were received from groups and organisations opposed to fur farming e.g. the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ISPICA), Compassion in World Farming (CIWF) and Coalition to Abolish the Fur Trade (CAFT).

The main arguments advanced for banning fur farming were on grounds of animal welfare, damage to wildlife and the expense of controlling feral mink. The benefits to the image of Irish agriculture that would arise from a ban on fur farming were also mentioned. Arguments were also advanced that animal housing on fur farms is inherently cruel, the animals cannot be handled and it is therefore more likely that illness and injury would go unnoticed and untreated. Killing methods were also questioned particularly for foxes, though a number of submissions noted that foxes are no longer farmed in Ireland.

Reference was also made in submissions to the report on the slaughter of Irish mink and foxes prepared for the Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council (FAWAC) by the Scientific Advisory Committee on Animal Health and Welfare which reviewed practices relating to the slaughter of animals on fur-farms. Submissions also made reference to fur farming having been banned in the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland and that Ireland should follow this example. Some submissions argued that there is no practical and commercially viable means of upgrading the fur farm environment to enable it meet the welfare requirements of farmed mink and foxes, bearing in mind that these animals are not fully domesticated and must be kept in conditions that allow them carry out their natural behaviours.

On the economic aspect of fur farming, the view of advocates of a ban on the activity is that it is not a major contributor to the economy and the value of exported fur is estimated to be less than €5m which is insignificant in terms of export volumes. They further argue that there are no reliable figures in relation to employment in the sector and the issue of employment is also insignificant. A number of groups believe that banning fur farming would indicate to other

countries that Ireland is committed to the production of high quality agricultural produce, of which high animal welfare standards are an integral part.

➤ *National Parks and Wildlife Service submission*

In a separate submission the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) referred to its programmes in predator control at sites across Ireland. This programme is aimed at temporary local reduction of predation pressure around the nests of rare ground nesting birds. The NPWS recommends appropriate assessment of fur farm licences given the potential impact of mink escapes on protected species. The NPWS also recommends that new fur farms should not be located in or adjacent to sensitive wildlife areas and measures to minimise the risk of escape should be incorporated into all farm licences and each farm should have in place a rapid response protocol to deal with any large scale escapes.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Economic benefits of fur farming in Ireland**

The Group examined the economic benefits of the fur farming sector in Ireland. In commenting on this aspect, the Group looked at the profile of the Irish fur farming industry including its scale, value and location.

There are currently five licensed mink farms in Ireland, located in counties Donegal (2), Kerry, Laois and Sligo. Between them, the mink farmers currently farm 200,000 - 225,000 mink. The industry claims to be responsible for approximately 62 full-time jobs and staff salaries of some €1.3m per annum. The sector also generates indirect employment in feed suppliers and providers of services such as transport, refrigeration, engineering, building supplies, utilities and veterinary medicine.

Mink farms also provide an important outlet for the productive use of offal from fish and poultry processing, which has limited alternative use and would otherwise lead to disposal costs to the suppliers rather than a commercial benefit. Mink farmers do not receive any State or EU support for their farming activity. CSO statistics put the value of exports in 2010 at €4.992m. There is no added-value processing being undertaken at present while mink pelts are exported via international auction houses in Helsinki and Copenhagen. The committee is aware that certain operators are considering the potential for secondary processing in Ireland, which, due to the uncertainty about the future of the industry, had been deferred pending the completion of this review.

The EFBA estimates that there are 7,200 fur farmers in EU Member States and are responsible for 64% of worldwide mink-fur production. The EFBA estimates that the fur sector creates up to 60,000 full-time jobs in Europe, that the value of EU-farmed fur came to €1.5 billion in 2010 and that the industry provides an efficient use for more than 1 million tonnes of animal by-products each year from the fishing and meat industries.

The EFBA has affiliated national fur breeder associations in Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Finland, France, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Norway, Spain and Sweden. The EFBA states that fur farming is particularly significant in Denmark,

Finland and the Netherlands, with Denmark the largest producer of mink pelts in Europe and Finland the largest producer of fox pelts in Europe. The Association also states that fur is a key industry in some new EU States such as Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.

Fur farming is claimed to be ecologically sound and two studies have been referred to the Group in this regard - MTT Agrifood (Finland) on the life cycle assessment of mink and fox pelts produced in Finland and DSS Management Consultants Inc. (Canada) on a comparative life cycle analysis - a synopsis of the two studies is attached at Appendix 2.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Practical implication of an imposition of a ban on fur farming based on the UK experience**

The Review Group examined whether existing licences should be allowed to expire in 2012. This would involve renewing licences and providing an expiry date of 31 December 2012 with no extensions beyond 2012. This scenario would in the Review Group's view likely lead to a requirement to compensate existing operators for the loss of their livelihood and being forced to exit the business from a hitherto legal activity. Based on the experience in the United Kingdom where fur farming has been banned since 2003, it is estimated that a compensation cost of up to €20m could be incurred in Ireland.

The experience in the UK is that the UK Fur Farming Prohibition Act 2000 banned fur farming and provided for an order to be made setting out terms of a compensation scheme for farmers affected by the ban. The Fur Farming (Compensation Scheme) Order 2004 provided compensation under a number of categories of losses and costs. Briefly, these are (a) income loss (operators were given 7.4 times the average profit in a preceding 5-year period), (b) the depreciation of specialist equipment which had no alternative use, (c) cost of asbestos removal from buildings, (d) the vouched cost of obligatory redundancy payments to staff, (e) the vouched cost of extrication from contractual liabilities to suppliers and (f) the cost of engagement of professional advice to prepare and support claims. The UK authorities had initially offered a lower level of income replacement compensation coupled with a 'headage' payment per breeding female animal but this gave rise to anomalies which ultimately led to a successful judicial challenge to the 'headage' element on equity grounds.

Leaving aside the challenge to the headage payment element, the UK Scheme has proven very cumbersome and protracted in its implementation. Compensation payments to some claimants became entangled in complicated arguments over issues ranging from valuations to accountancy rules in computing income. While there were only 13 operators to be compensated in the UK, the Scheme has still not been finalised almost eight years later and has entailed the deployment of significant resources, especially in the engagement of expensive independent expertise.

Although Ireland has much fewer mink farm operators than the UK had at the time of the introduction of the UK ban – five as opposed to thirteen - the scale in terms of production of mink pelts in Ireland stands at almost double the output of UK mink farmers at the time they ceased to operate.

## Chapter 5

### Welfare Legislation – National and European Union

The Group examined the legislative aspects of fur farming at national and European Union (EU) level. DAFM has statutory responsibility for the welfare and protection of farmed animals through the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes Act 1984 and the European Communities (Welfare of farmed animals) Regulations 2010, S.I. 311 of 2010 including EU Council Directive 98/58 on the protection of farmed animals. This requires Member States to adopt provisions to ensure that the owners or keepers of animals look after the welfare of their animals and ensure that they do not suffer any unnecessary pain, suffering or injury. This legislation applies to animals reared or kept for the production of food, wool, skin or fur or for other farming purposes.

The rearing conditions relate to the following areas:

- **staff:** there should be a sufficient number of staff looking after the animals with appropriate ability and professional competence
- **inspections:** animals must be inspected at least once a day
- **freedom of movement:** all animals must be given enough space to move without unnecessary suffering or injury
- **buildings and accommodation:** materials used in the construction of buildings must be capable of being cleaned and disinfected. Air circulation, dust levels, temperature and relative humidity should be kept within acceptable limits
- **automatic or mechanical equipment:** equipment must be inspected at least once a day
- **feed, water and other substances:** the animals must be given a wholesome and appropriate diet, fed to them in sufficient quantities and at regular intervals. All other substances are prohibited, unless given for therapeutic or prophylactic reasons or for the purposes of zootechnical treatment.
- **breeding procedures** - no animal shall be kept for farming purposes unless it can be kept without detrimental effect on its health or welfare.

Fur farmers are also subject to EU legislation on protection of animals at time of killing, namely Council Directive 93/119/EC ((transposed into national law through the European Communities (Welfare of farmed animals) Regulations 2010, S.I. 311 of 2010.)) which requires that animals are spared any avoidable excitement, pain or suffering during slaughter or killing and related operations, both inside and outside slaughterhouses. In this connection new welfare legislation, namely EU Council Regulation (EC) No. 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at time of killing has been adopted and will come into effect on 1 January 2013.

The revised legislation on the welfare of animals at time of killing provides for a series of practical measures to ensure animals are humanely treated, minimising distress and avoiding pain throughout the killing process. There are two important elements to this new regulation: the first relates to permissible slaughter methods within the EU, and the second concerns the training of operatives and standard operating procedures (SOP) for abattoirs. For mink, permissible methods include: carbon monoxide from a pure source at a minimum concentration of 4%, carbon monoxide associated with other toxic gases at a minimum concentration of 1% and carbon dioxide at concentration of more than 40%. Under the revised legislation, permissible methods are therefore much more controlled than previous slaughter methods and parameters will be measured and monitored on a constant basis.

### **Irish legislation applicable to mink farming:**

The farming of mink in Ireland is regulated by the Musk Rats Act, 1933. Section 9 of that Act prohibits the keeping of musk rats in Ireland unless the keeper is licensed by the Minister. It also provides that the animals must be kept at the premises specified in the licence and that the keeper must comply with conditions attached to such licence. The Act empowers the Minister to attach any conditions as he may think proper to a licence and in particular, conditions regarding (a) the nature of the premises where the animals are kept, (b) the manner in which they are to be kept, (c) the precautions to be taken to prevent their escape, (d) the duration of the licence and (e) returns to be made by the licensee.

Section 15 of the Act empowers the Minister to revoke a licence if there has been a breach of or a failure to comply with a licence condition or if the licensee has been convicted of an

offence under the Act. The Minister is also empowered under the Act to revoke all licences if he is of the opinion that this is in the public interest.

The Act also contains provisions enabling the Minister to take necessary steps to destroy musk rats found at large or ones held other than under a licence. Powers to conduct inspections of licence holders' premises by authorised officers is also provided for in legislation. It is an offence to turn loose or wilfully allow any musk rats escape into the wild. The Act allows the Minister to apply the provisions of the legislation to a species of animals to which the Act applies, where he is of opinion that this is desirable.

The Musk Rats Act, 1933 (Application to Mink) Order 1965, applied the licensing elements of the Act to animals of the 'mustela vison' species, commonly known as mink.

**Recognising that fur farming is a lawful farming activity undertaken in many areas of the world, including in a number of EU Member States, and having considered all the submissions made, the legislative controls that currently exist and having evaluated the data assembled, the Review Group, on balance, did not find the arguments in favour of banning the farming of fur animals in Ireland compelling. For this reason the Group recommends that fur farming be allowed continue under licence and subject to enhanced official controls.**

### **Licence conditions**

The Minister may grant a licence, attach conditions to a licence, vary the licence conditions, revoke a licence or refuse an application for a licence. The following are the conditions currently attached to mink licenses:

- (i) Each licence holder must comply with all relevant legislation concerning the environment and animal health and welfare.
- (ii) Mink shall be kept only at the premises specified in the licence.
- (iii) Mink shall be kept in cages or other containers of such material and constructed in such a manner as to prevent their escape. Such cages or containers shall, except when being used for the transport of mink from place to place, be kept within an

enclosure or building which complies with the provisions of the Musk Rats Act, 1933 (Application to Mink) Order, 1965.

- Enclosures shall be bound by a guard fence of such material and constructed in such manner so as to prevent the escape of mink.
- Buildings used for the keeping of mink shall be constructed in such a manner or enclosed by such material so as to prevent the escape of mink.
- The licence holder shall ensure that trees, shrubs and undergrowth are not growing or planted in such a position in relation to the guard fence to render the escape of mink possible.
- Holes in which mink could escape to be effectively blocked.
- Any drainage channels on such licensed premises shall be adequately guarded to prevent the escape of mink.

In addition,

- (i) The Department must be informed if mink cease to be kept at any premises covered by the licence and of any change in ownership.
- (ii) Authorised officers must be allowed to inspect the premises at all reasonable times.
- (iii) If any mink escape, the Department must be informed at once.
- (iv) The licensee must make available to the Department any returns it requests.

In its submission on the review, the industry has indicated its dissatisfaction with the duration of licences (currently three years). It claims that other countries grant licences for twenty years or in perpetuity and that the short duration of an Irish licence inhibits long-term investment. Up to recently, Irish licences were granted on an annual basis, but this was extended to three years to accommodate the industry. Because a licence tends to acquire a proprietary value in Irish law, licences for livelihood activities tend to be difficult to revoke successfully, even where there has been a failure on the part of the licensee to comply with licence conditions. The requirement that a licence holder successfully applies for a new licence at periodic intervals tends to act as an incentive to compliance, as it is much easier for a licensing authority to refuse to grant a new licence than to revoke an existing one.

**The Group notes that the Animal Health and Welfare Bill will give effect to Government commitments to amend and strengthen legislation on animal cruelty and**

**animal welfare. In this context the Group recommends that existing licensing arrangements for mink farms should continue and in addition, all fur farming should be subject to licence by DAFM. In addition the Group recommends that Codes of Practice be developed to promote sound welfare and management practices to assist fur farmers adopt and maintain the highest standards of animal husbandry. The new Animal Health and Welfare Bill should include a provision requiring new entrants (and existing licence holders) to fur farming to hold a licence.**

**In addition the Review Group considered the option to allow renewal of existing mink licences only, with no new licences to be issued. It is the Group's view that to refuse an application for a mink farm licence under the Musk Rats Act 1933 solely on the basis that the operator was not already in the business would be open to legal challenge. The Group also recommends that fur farmers should be allowed to continue farming mink under licence issued for a specified period or periods, subject to a maximum five year period. Licences for a shorter period may be granted in situations where the operator is working to an agreed Plan of Action towards achieving full compliance with certain legislation e.g. animal welfare and nitrates legislation. The Group notes the extensive powers available to the Minister for revocation of licences where there has been a breach of or failure to comply with a licence condition.**

## Chapter 6

### Inspection controls carried out on Irish Fur Farms

Controls are carried out on an ongoing basis by the Veterinary Inspectorate and the Agricultural Inspectorate of the Department. The Group considered the effectiveness of existing welfare controls and how these might be reinforced and/or intensified.

#### ➤ **Controls carried out by the Veterinary Inspectorate**

The on-farm welfare inspections carried out by the Department Veterinary Inspectors include assessment of the animals, the facilities provided and the management practices employed. The inspections include an examination of cage sizes which, to date, indicate that licenced fur farms are generally complying with the Council of Europe Recommendations for minimum space allowances for fur animals. Operators have shown a willingness to address any issues raised. The current Council of Europe Recommendations on minimum space allowance is a free area of more than 1600 cm<sup>2</sup> and a height greater than 45cm.

The methods authorised for slaughtering fur animals on fur farms are set out in the European Communities (Welfare of farmed animals ) Regulations 2010, ( S.I. 311 of 2010). The permitted slaughter methods allowed include inhalation by toxic gas, electrocution and lethal injection. The method used in Ireland currently is gas inhalation. It is the obligation of the owner or person in charge of the animals to ensure that the slaughter of fur animals is carried out in accordance with national and European legislation.

#### ➤ **Controls carried out by Agricultural Inspectorate**

The Agricultural Inspectorate carries out one inspection per farm per year. Controls are based mainly on the specific Licence conditions pertaining to the housing within which the mink are kept and the premises in general. Compliance with environmental legislation is also examined.

Using a standard Check List the inspecting officer decides the stock-proof nature of the outer (guard) fence particularly regarding its effectiveness in preventing mink escaping. The

presence of trees, shrubs and their proximity to this guard fence is examined for this purpose. The inspector also examines the escape proof nature of the cages and containers within which the mink are kept. The Inspectors are asked to comment on the farm's compliance with the Nitrates Regulations. Finally the inspection is used to gather statistics around animal numbers being farmed at the time of inspection and data concerning waste produced – droppings, carcasses and offal.

Inspections carried out over the past five years demonstrate high standards with the stock-proof nature of the guard fences, the cages and containers where mink are kept. Entrance gates are generally well constructed and function effectively to secure the compounds. However significant investment is needed to enhance the waste storage facilities for organic manures on some farms.

### **Enhanced Controls to be carried out by Department Inspectorate**

#### **➤ Enhanced Controls by Veterinary Inspectorate**

An enhanced programme of Inspections will be developed by the Veterinary Inspectorate to ensure awareness and compliance of animal welfare requirements on fur farms. It is proposed that the frequency of inspections will increase from one to two inspections annually. One inspection will focus primarily on compliance with both the general animal welfare requirements laid down in the European Communities (Welfare of farmed animals) Regulations 2010, (S.I. 311 of 2010) and also the specific housing requirements as outlined in the Council of Europe Recommendations on Fur Farming. The second inspection will deal with the harvesting of mink pelts on fur farms and the attendant animal welfare issues associated with this activity. These inspections would be predominantly unannounced.

The veterinary inspectorate has taken cognisance of the recommendations contained in the report prepared for FAWAC from the Scientific Advisory Committee on Animal Health and Welfare and will promote practical implementation. This report entitled *Welfare aspects of the slaughter of fur producing animals in Ireland* made recommendations on the following topics: Procedures, Methods, Training and Inspection. A synopsis of the FAWAC Report is at Appendix 3.

### ➤ **Enhanced Controls by Agricultural Inspectorate**

It is proposed when carrying out an inspection that the Inspecting officer should place greater emphasis on the farm's organic waste storage and management system and whether it needs to be enhanced. Where this is the case a 'Plan of Action' should be prepared by the Operator with strict timelines around when the remedial actions need to be carried out.

It is proposed that there should be stronger security at fur farms. The Must Rats Act deals with security in the context of keeping mink within the compound i.e. keeping the mink from escaping. It has now become apparent that enhanced security is required in addition i.e. security against trespassers gaining entry and releasing the mink to the wild. Therefore this is an aspect that the Inspector should focus on at future inspections.

It is also proposed that a new condition of a licence should be that each farm has an emergency plan in place to deal with an escape of mink to the wild. The Plan should involve (if required) the mobilisation of a large number of extra traps, placed within the perimeter fence and outside and, inter alia, involve the Gardai Síochána, DAFM representatives and National Parks and Wildlife rangers being contacted, immediately a major escape occurs. The Inspector should seek to see this Emergency Plan at inspection and be satisfied that the resources to allow the Plan to be implemented are available on the farm.

In summary the following enhanced controls will be implemented:

The Department's Veterinary Inspectorate inspection procedure will be intensified as follows:

- (i) The number of veterinary inspections to be increased based on risk
- (ii) Additional external veterinary monitoring in so far as is practical
- (iii) Provision of additional monitoring of the slaughter requirements.

The Department's Agricultural Inspectorate inspection procedure will be intensified as follows:

- (i) Inspector to place greater emphasis on inspecting the organic waste storage and management system on the farm. A plan of action will be required to be prepared by the Operator if enhancement is needed.

- (ii) Stronger security to be implemented at fur farms.
- (iii) Each farm to have an emergency plan in place to deal with escape of mink to the wild.

**The Review Group recommends that the DAFM Veterinary and Agricultural inspections and controls be doubled from the current level to allow for enhanced controls so that additional confidence can be gained in respect of compliance with animal health, animal welfare, environmental requirements, greater security on the farms and contingency planning. The Group recommends that the Department's programme of inspections include some unannounced inspections. In addition DAFM Veterinary controls should include a review of the checks carried out by the private veterinary practitioner engaged by the licence holders.**

### **Role of Private Veterinary Practitioners (PVPs)**

The Review Group examined the role of PVPs in protecting animal welfare standards on fur farms and considers there is scope for an increased role for PVPs in protecting animal welfare on these farms. This could be achieved by greater ongoing supervision of certain facilities and management practices on these fur farms. Checks and certification by the PVP of the effectiveness of the equipment used for killing the mink prior to the commencement of harvesting procedures should be implemented. Formalised standard operating procedures should be drawn up for the slaughter activities and these should comply with Council Regulation (EC) No. 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing. Technical animal welfare training should be provided by the PVP and this should be documented to assist verification. In addition, the nominated PVP should produce or verify a site plan of the mink housing and provide certification of compliance with the Council of Europe Recommendations with regard to space requirements for mink.

**Recognising the primary responsibility for the farmer to ensure the health and welfare of the animals in his/her care, it is recommended that in order to ensure that the health and welfare of the animals is protected, licences should require increased direct engagement of PVP's on the part of fur farmers to provide professional input into operational practices. PVPs engaged by fur farmers should be requested to provide written verification of the effectiveness of the operational systems in place.**

## **Chapter 7**

### **Welfare Controls**

#### **WelFur**

The Review Group is aware of the initiative of the European Fur Breeders Association in introducing welfare standards for fur animals known as WelFur. EFBA launched this project in 2009, which is an extension of the European Commission's Welfare Quality project. The objective of WelFur is to introduce a certification program at farm level, based on welfare assessment protocols for the mink and fox species. There are four welfare principles to this - good feeding, good housing, good health and appropriate behaviour. There are also twelve specific welfare indicators. By measuring how a farm performs on each of these indicators, it is possible to show objectively the level of welfare compliance on any particular farm. Details of the Welfur Project are at Appendix 4.

#### **FAWAC's report entitled '*Welfare aspects of the slaughter of fur producing animals in Ireland*'**

The Review Group notes the recommendations in the FAWAC report entitled '*Welfare aspects of the slaughter of fur producing animals in Ireland*', which predate Council Regulation (EC) No. 1099/2009. The Group notes too the comments of the EFBA at time of publication of the report particularly the point that gas methods of both CO and CO<sub>2</sub> are allowed not only for fur-farmed animals but also for other species such as pigs and poultry. It is the Review Groups view that the methods outlined in Council Regulation (EC) No. 1099/2009 are based on many scientific references and the EU Commission has performed very detailed research on all the scientific literature on the subject. The Group notes that this new legislation will require any person involved in the killing of animals to take the necessary measures to avoid pain and minimise the distress and suffering of animals during the killing process, taking into account best practices in the field and the methods permitted under the Regulation. The Review Group also notes that the new Regulation requires people supervising the seasonal killing of fur animals to have a certificate of competence relevant to the operations they perform.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Recommendations**

**The Review Group having examined all aspects of fur farming within the context of the terms of reference and taking into account the arguments and points of view expressed in the submissions received, make the following recommendations:**

1. Recognising that fur farming is a lawful farming activity undertaken in many areas of the world, including in a number of EU Member States, and having considered all the submissions made, the legislative controls that currently exist and having evaluated the data assembled, the Review Group, on balance, did not find the arguments in favour of banning the farming of fur animals in Ireland compelling. For this reason the Group recommends that fur farming be allowed continue under licence and subject to enhanced official controls.
2. The Review Group considered the option to allow renewal of existing mink licences only with no new licences to be issued. It is the Group's view that to refuse an application for a mink farm licensed under the Musk Rats Act 1933 solely on the basis that the operator was not already in the business would be open to legal challenge.
3. It is the Review Group's view that fur farmers should be allowed to continue farming mink under licence. The Group recommends that licences be issued for a maximum five year period. Licences for a shorter period may be granted in situations where the operator is working to an agreed Plan of Action towards achieving full compliance with legislative requirements. The Review Group notes the extensive powers available to the Minister in legislation to enable him revoke licences where welfare standards are not met.
4. Whilst recognising that mink farms are subject to licence, it is recommended that all fur farming should be subject to licence by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. The new Animal Health and Welfare Bill should include a provision requiring new entrants (and existing licence holders) to fur farming to hold a licence.

5. It is recommended that the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine's Veterinary and Agricultural inspections be doubled from the current level to allow for enhanced controls so that additional confidence can be gained in respect of compliance with animal health, animal welfare, environmental requirements, greater security on the farms and contingency planning. Veterinary controls should include a review of the checks carried out by the private veterinary practitioner engaged by the licence holders.
6. The Review Group recommends that the Department's programme of inspections include some unannounced inspections.
7. Recognising the primary responsibility for the farmer to ensure the health and welfare of the animals, it is recommended that in order to ensure that the health and welfare of the animals is protected, licences should require increased direct engagement of private veterinary practitioners on the part of fur farmers to provide professional input into operational practices. Private veterinary practitioners engaged by fur farmers should be requested to provide written verification of the effectiveness of the operational systems in this regard.
8. The Review Group notes the FAWAC report entitled '*Welfare aspects of the slaughter of fur producing animals in Ireland*' and recommends that the fur industry takes cognisance of the FAWAC report.
9. At a minimum, operators must ensure on-going compliance with National and European legislation. However it is recommended that operators adopt best practice and embrace developments with respect to improved methods and systems for the killing of mink.
10. The Review Group recommends that Codes of Practice be established to promote sound welfare and management practices for the care of fur animals.

**Membership of Review Group**

Philip Carroll, Assistant Secretary General - Chairman

Brid Farrell, Assistant Principal Officer - Secretary

Martin Blake, Chief Veterinary Officer

Michael Sheridan, Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer

Dermot A Ryan, Deputy Chief Inspector

Dermot Murphy, Principal Officer

Gerry Greally, Senior Inspector

Niall O’Nuallain, Superintending Veterinary Inspector

Fintan Deere, Assistant Principal Officer

John Carty, Agriculture Inspector

### **Fur farming and its environmental implications**

The EFBA claim that fur farming is one of the most ecologically balanced systems in agriculture. The claim is supported by two studies:

MTT Agrifood (Finland) on the life cycle assessment of mink and fox pelts produced in Finland and DSS Management Consultants Inc. (Canada) on a comparative life cycle analysis: Natural Fur and Faux Fur. This latter report is the result of an extensive research effort designed to assemble the best information able to be obtained and that was used to develop comprehensive systematic life cycle models for natural and faux fur. MSS Consultant's research has been guided by the ISO standard for life cycle analysis and adheres to current best practice principles.

Both studies claim that **natural fur is a highly durable product** and may be used for 30 years or more whereas the useful life of faux fur is often less than 10 years. The result is that greater environmental demands are required to produce the amount of faux fur equivalent to long lasting natural fur. **Natural fur garments are often disassembled and the fur reused in new garments** reducing the demand for production of new fur and yielding significant environmental benefits. **Natural fur is produced using waste by-products of the fish and meat industry**, waste that would otherwise lead to environmental damage through the process of landfill. **Natural fur yields environmental benefits as waste from fur farms is often used in the production of biogas** (e.g. Denmark and Finland) **and organic derived fertilizers** that replace high energy fertilizers produced using chemical processes and mining. **The carbon footprint of natural fur production is relatively small** (28kg CO<sub>2</sub>-eq.per fur pelt).

## Appendix 3

### **FAWAC's Scientific Advisory Committee on Animal Health and Welfare**

The Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council (FAWAC) requested the Scientific Advisory Committee on Animal Health and Welfare (SACAHW) to examine practices relating to the slaughter of fur animals. A working group of SACAHW with expertise in this area was asked to examine practices relating to the slaughter of fur animals and the welfare implications of these practices based on scientific studies and to make recommendations accordingly. The working-group avoided consideration of the ethical aspects of fur farming and focused exclusively on the scientific assessment of the welfare of fur animals at the time of slaughter with the aim of producing scientifically based recommendations on how practices can be improved to enhance their welfare at this time. The working group in preparing its report examined contextual factors impinging on the welfare of fur animals at time of slaughter and the legislation – both National and European - governing the killing of fur animals. The group also looked at the welfare implications of permitted methods for killing fur animals and permitted methods not currently in use.

The working group presented its report to the SACAHW and this report was presented to the FAWAC in 2009.

The Report entitled Welfare aspects of the slaughter of fur producing animals in Ireland made recommendations in the following areas:

- Procedures – every effort should be made to minimise pain and distress to animals at time of killing
- Methods – use of carbon dioxide and use of carbon monoxide from exhaust gases is unacceptable. Carbon monoxide from a bottled source is the recommended method for killing mink. Intravenous injection of barbiturate (and not electrocution with cardiac arrest) is the method of choice for killing foxes
- Training – formal training for those involved in on-farm killing of fur animals should be introduced
- Inspection – on farm killing of fur animals should be subject to unannounced inspections by the competent authority.

**WELFUR Report**

**WELFUR:** WelFur scientific project on animal welfare was launched in 2009 and continues to be a priority for the EFBA. The objective is to introduce a certification program at farm level that will guarantee excellent animal welfare on all fur-farms in Europe. It is one of the key objectives of the fur trade to guarantee to their consumers that they can buy fur that has been produced to high standards, by choosing garments that carry the Origin Assured (OA) label. This was introduced by the fur industry to ensure that consumers buying fur can immediately tell that it comes from a country where fur farming (including animal welfare) legislation is in force. Were production to be forced to move to countries whose regulations do not meet such standards, it would be fur animals themselves that would suffer.

Collectively, European fur breeders are committed to going even further than this, and are in the process of introducing welfare standards for fur animals known as WelFur. EFBA launched this project in 2009, which is an extension of the European Commission's Welfare Quality project. The objective of WelFur is to introduce a certification program at farm level, based on welfare assessment protocols for the mink and fox species. There are four welfare principles to this - good feeding, good housing, good health and appropriate behaviour- and twelve specific welfare indicators. By measuring how a farm performs on each of these indicators, it is possible to show objectively the level of welfare compliance on any particular farm.

**WelFur is based on scientific research from key partners who are:** The University of Eastern Finland, MTT Agrifood Finland, Aarhus University Denmark, Copenhagen University, Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, University of Utrecht and INRA Institute France. The University of Eastern Finland is leading the welfare protocol for the fox and Aarhus University is leading the welfare protocol for the mink. WelFur is to become the new public scientific reference for fur animals' welfare. The implementation at farm level began on a trial basis in 2011 and will be continued in 2012. EFBA aims to roll out the WelFur program to all our European fur farms from 2013. All five fur farms in Ireland will be bound by WelFur protocols with third party inspections three times per year and sanctions for breach.

The European Commission is currently revising the Action Plan on Animal Welfare 2011-2015 and feedback from DG SANCO officials indicate that they are investigating the introduction of an horizontal EU animal welfare law based on the use of outcome-based animal welfare indicators by species (reference to the Welfare Quality project), a new EU framework to increase credibility and visibility of voluntary schemes on animal welfare, a European network of reference centres and common requirements for competence of personnel handling animals. WelFur follows the spirit of these new EU proposals.

In Ireland the quality of mink pelt is directly related to the welfare of the animal itself. If a mink is not appropriately handled and not provided with the correct food and care, it will have a direct effect on its skin and pelt, the result of which is that it will not be accepted by the Auction Houses. In Europe, there are 2 auction houses, “Saga Furs” in Finland and “Kopenhagen Fur” in Denmark. Both are working under strict rules of grading standards and work only with European farms that meet a rigorous set of national and international standards guarding animal welfare.

## Appendix 5

### Acronyms used in this report

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| AI              | Agriculture Inspector   |
| APO             | Assistant Principal Officer   |
| CAFT            | Coalition to Abolish the Fur Trade                                    |
| CIWF            | Compassion In World Farming   |
| CO              | Carbon Monoxide   |
| CO <sub>2</sub> | Carbon Dioxide  |
| CVO             | Chief Veterinary Officer  |
| DAFM            | Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine                        |
| DCI             | Deputy Chief Inspector  |
| DCVO            | Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer                                       |
| DG SANCO        | Directorate General for Health & Consumer Affairs                     |
| EC              | European Communities  |
| EFBA            | European Fur Breeders Association                                     |
| EU              | European Union  |
| FAWAC           | Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council                                  |
| IFBA            | Irish Fur Breeders Association  |
| INRA            | French National Institute for Agricultural Research                   |
| ISO             | International Organisation for Standardisation                        |
| ISPCA           | Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals                |
| MTT Agrifood    | Maa-Ja Elintarviketalouden Tutkimuskeskus (Finnish Agrifood Research) |
| NPWS            | National Parks and Wildlife Service                                   |
| OA              | Origin Assured  |
| PO              | Principal Officer   |
| PVP             | Private Veterinary Practitioner                                       |
| SACAHW          | Scientific Advisory Committee on Animal Health and Welfare            |
| SI              | Senior Inspector  |

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| SI     | Statutory Instrument                         |
| SOP    | Standard Operating Practices                 |
| SVI    | Superintending Veterinary Inspector          |
| VI     | Veterinary Inspector                         |
| WelFur | Animal Welfare Project on Fur Farmed Species |

**END**