

EU May Ban Cat and Dog Fur Imports for Fluffy Toys

BRUSSELS - The European Union may ban imports of dog and cat fur used in fluffy toys, especially from Asian countries where producers are accused of maltreating the animals, the EU consumer protection chief said on Monday.

Animal rights activists say Asian firms kill some two million cats and dogs every year for their fur, which they send to Europe under false labels stating they are exotic Asian species or fake fur for soft toys, blankets and trim on hoods.

Five EU countries -- Belgium, Denmark, France, Greece and Italy -- have banned such fur imports, but the 25-member bloc itself has no such ban. The United States and Australia also ban the fur imports.

"We received some fairly horrible images of the suffering of cats and dogs," Luxembourg Agriculture Minister Fernand Boden told a news conference, representing the current EU president. "We really don't want to see that sort of thing in the future."

EU Health and Consumer Protection Commissioner Markos Kyprianou, speaking to reporters during an EU agriculture ministers meeting, said the EU might consider banning imports of such fur -- a move sought for years by members such as Sweden, whose farm minister raised the issue again on Monday.

The main problem is finding a proper legal basis for banning cat and dog fur imports, Kyprianou said. "From the political point of view the will is there, but we have to find the legal basis."

In the past, the Commission has said that the EU cannot reject imports merely on animal welfare grounds.

The Commission could propose "a complete ban on trade or a ban on (false) labelling, either voluntary or compulsory," Kyprianou said.

"This fur is used for items that aren't fur coats: linings, fluffy toys and so on. It's not a question of a fraud of presenting mink coats when it's cat, but using items where the consumer doesn't know where they come from or the methods used."

Story by Jeremy Smith

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