

OUR LAND IS OUR FUTURE

UNION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA INDIAN CHIEFS

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Honourable Adrian Dix
Minister of Health
Via Email Only: HLTH.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Honourable Katrine Conroy
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Honourable Ravi Kahlon
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Honourable John Horgan
Premier of the Province of British Columbia
Via Email: premier@gov.bc.ca

OPEN LETTER: Call to Impose a Moratorium on B.C. Industrial Mink Farming to Transition from Fur Farming and to Address COVID-19 Health Risks and Animal Welfare Concerns

Dear Premier and Ministers,

The Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) writes to bring your attention to the significant concerns around the BC mink industry and, in solidarity with the many organizations and members of the public who oppose the mass breeding and farming of wildlife species for fur, call upon you to impose an immediate moratorium on industrial mink farming with committed actions to phase out fur farming.

During a period in which mink farms have transformed into incubators of SARS-CoV-2 and have had their already untenable foundations weakened, we urge you to act with the future and long-term impacts in mind and address the considerable health-related risks and longstanding ethical issues of industrial mink farms. Now is the time to make the necessary regulatory and legislative changes to phase out an industry that the most Canadians considers inhumane, wasteful, and unnecessary.

Over the course of the pandemic, COVID-19 has spread rampantly at mink farms around the world as mink are particularly susceptible to the virus and, unlike other animal species that have contracted the virus, experience severe symptoms that can lead to death. Furthermore, there have been documented escapes in BC, as well as reports of the transfer of COVID to wild mink in the U.S. – all warning signs of the small but devastating risk farmed mink pose to wild populations. Outbreaks at mink farms have not only led to animal suffering and mass culling (as evidenced by Denmark’s drastic decision to cull all 15 million minks bred at its 1,139 mink farms) but have vastly increased the risk of mutations of the virus and its spread back to humans and other animal species. Consequently, as mink have become a substantial reservoir of the coronavirus, it is no surprise that in British Columbia dozens of workers and hundreds of animals have contracted and become sick. Last December, mink at two Fraser Valley farms tested positive for the coronavirus. As a result, 33 mink died of the virus and another 917 mink were culled at one farm, while 200 mink died of the virus and another 10,000 mink were culled at the other.

However, while other nations begin to accelerate plans to phase out and ban fur farms, and despite Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry expressing that the presence of SARS-CoV-2 virus on mink farms is of "great concern," we were alarmed that the provincial government announced last month the resumption of mink breeding at BC mink farms, including at one farm that is still under quarantine. It is deeply concerning that as the global community seems to be transitioning away from fur farms, B.C. continues on its trajectory of fur farming.

For years, animal welfare organizations and advocates have not only pointed to the ethical issues around mink farms but have also questioned the necessity and economic value of continuing fur farming. The BC SPCA reports that the BC mink industry is a small sector providing \$4.7 million in annual value of pelts for export and is an industry that does not support or contribute to the provincial government’s key priority of food security. While UBCIC supports the ethical harvesting of fur for cultural and ceremonial purposes, and for purposes that align with Indigenous ways and respect values of conservation and stewardship, UBCIC does not condone the industrial breeding, confinement and slaughtering of minks for international luxury markets especially as, notwithstanding the current public health risks, mink farms have long been implicated in cruel and inhumane fur farming practices that have led to unacceptable animal welfare outcomes. Evidence exists on both local and international scales regarding the unnecessary and deeply troubling suffering minks are subjected to – lifelong confinement in cramped and filthy cages which, during a pandemic, only promotes the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory viral infections.

As many countries having banned fur farming altogether, and with COVID-19 leading countries to accelerate their phasing out of mink farms, the time is now for the Province to follow suit and issue a moratorium on mink farming, including ensuring that this year be the last year breeding programs are allowed to resume at mink farms in B.C. Since mink are permitted to be farmed in BC through exemptions to the *BC Wildlife Act*’s prohibition on keeping of native wildlife, the UBCIC calls upon your government to leverage your *Together for Wildlife* strategy that involves "managing key threats to

wildlife and habitats, including invasive species, interspecies interactions, and disease” and commit to either of the following:

- Derogate the Fur Farming Regulation (under the Ministry of Agriculture), which would render fur farming a contravention of the Wildlife Act s. 33(1)
- Removing s. 33(3) of the Wildlife Act (under FLNRORD) so that possessing wildlife for the purposes of farming overall would not be possible

In implementing the proposed changes, the Province must consider the long-term viability and impacts of industrial fur farming and remember that we must treat mink not as objects at our disposal, but as living creatures that hold significant cultural value for First Nations and play an important role in our stories of Creation and systems of knowledge. As outlined in UBCIC’s mandate on hunting, we recognize the hunting and harvesting of wildlife as a powerful and sacred tradition that gives shape and meaning to life lived in a Nation’s territory, and that through Indigenous laws we sustainably regulate hunting, manage game, and protect wildlife species. UBCIC continues to support the ethical and sustainable hunting and harvesting of wild animals and advocates for their welfare and conservation.

As stewards and caretakers of our lands and waters, we want to work together to help ensure BC can live up to its obligations under its *Together for Wildlife* strategy and address the pressing COVID-19 health risks and ethical concerns that stem from a practice we have outgrown as a society.

We look forward to hearing from you on this work and we seek a meeting to advance this discussion.

On behalf of the UNION OF BC INDIAN CHIEFS



Grand Chief Stewart Phillip



Chief Don Tom
Vice-President



Kukpi7 Judy Wilson President
Secretary-Treasurer

CC: BC SPCA
The Fur-Bearers
Tom Eather, Deputy Minister, Agriculture, Food and Fisheries Chief
Veterinary Officer, Dr. Rayna Gunvaldsen
Dr. Bonnie Henry, Provincial Health Officer

