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Ask Leo

Your ethical dilemmas sorted

Leo Hickman
Thursday June 28, 2007
[The Guardian](#)

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If the recently announced European ban on cat- and dog-fur imports doesn't actually come into force until the end of next year, how can I guarantee now I'm not buying something containing cat or dog "product"?
Shelley Long, Middlesex

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Without having an expensive and somewhat cumbersome DNA testing kit to hand, there is no way of telling with certainty that something you are eyeing up in the high street doesn't contain the coat of Tiddles' or Rover's faraway cousin. Obviously, avoiding any item of clothing with a fur detail is a necessary and principled start, but cheap fur has not only found its way on to the - a particularly unfortunate phrase this, I know - catwalk but also into shops in the form of cuddly toys. Well, this is what campaign groups such as Respect for Animals and Humane Society International claim, even though they admit that, to date, they have not found hard evidence of this in the UK, only continental Europe.

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There still remains an unfortunate administrative loophole whereby cat- and dog-fur imports can enter Europe unaudited via the "other fur" tick box on the import forms. Only species such as fox, mink and rabbit have their own specific classification for customs officials to scrutinise and tot up.

The new ban can only be applauded, but it says a lot about our sensibilities that it stops at cats and dogs. The campaigners who have lobbied for years for it to be passed readily admit that the politicians would only support a ban that has widespread public support, which meant, for example, that rabbits, despite being popular pets, were not included as they don't tug quite as hard at our heartstrings as our canine and feline friends. It gives the impression that our empathy stops at the cat flap.

Dozens of equally contentious animal products will remain on the market. It now seems likely that seal products will be the next battleground. Expect sellers of sealskin sporrans to be the new target of campaign groups, as well as purveyors of omega-3 fatty acids made of "marine oil", a term that conveniently disguises the fact that seal, or even dolphin, oil might have been used.

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