



Ministry of Defence

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D/MST/4/5/2/17

17th September 2012

I am very much aware of the campaign, spearheaded by the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), aimed at persuading the Government to procure an alternative ceremonial cap for the Foot Guards Regiments that is not constructed from animal fur.

The bearskin cap has been associated with the Guards Division since a Royal Warrant was issued by King George III in 1768 which ordered the replacing of the "Mitre" cap with a cap made from the skin of a black bear. To this day, these caps continue to be issued to Officers and Other Ranks of the Foot Guards to be worn during the execution of their public duties, including the guarding of Royal residences and during ceremonial occasions such as The Queen's Birthday Parade and the State Opening of Parliament.

Around 1,900 caps are in service with the Foot Guards, and each pelt can be expected to last for around 50 years undergoing a number of restorations during that time. The purchase of new pelts is therefore kept to a minimum. Pelts are sourced from Canada and come from animals culled as part of a programme to manage the wild population licensed by the Canadian Government. No bear is ever hunted to order and the MOD only has access to stock made available by the Canadian authorities following a cull.

Over the years the MOD has consistently adopted a neutral position on the use of real fur in ceremonial clothing. Like my predecessors, I am entirely open to the use of faux fur where this provides a suitable and affordable alternative. However, in the case of bearskins, this cannot be to the detriment of the iconic image of a Guardsman in ceremonial uniform and no alternative has yet been identified that matches the impressive properties and visual appearance of black bear fur. The economic challenges that the country faces means that I cannot justify investing taxpayer's money in the hope of developing a replacement for an entirely serviceable accoutrement.

In July 2010 my predecessor, Peter Luff MP met with representatives from PETA to discuss this issue. During that meeting he agreed to provide a number of sample pelts and caps in order to aid PETA in the development of their own faux alternative. These samples were subsequently provided. In addition, Mr Luff agreed to the MOD trialling PETA's alternative cap once examples were available. No firm timescale was set for this work to complete and I remain willing to honour this offer. Nevertheless, to date PETA have been unable to supply a cap for trials to begin. It is regrettable that, in the interim, PETA have continued to pursue their campaign in public without any acknowledgement of the Department's cooperation with them.

PHILIP DUNNE MP