



## HESA Committee Submission CMBA

May 22, 2023

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### OVERVIEW

The Canada Mink Breeders Association (CMBA) is a not-for-profit association which provides leadership in research, best farming practices, marketing, and promotion of the mink farming sector both nationally and internationally. The CMBA represents over 70 farms across Canada, which play a vital role in the nearly \$100 million in economic contributions that the fur industry provides to the Canadian economy.

Mink farming contributes greatly to rural economies in Ontario and Eastern Canada through direct and indirect job creation and contributes to the circular agriculture economy in these regions.

Other agricultural sectors, as well as fishing and food processing industries, depend upon mink farms to accept *millions* of pounds of food wastes every year which may otherwise end up in landfills, creating environmental concerns. Mink farmers recycle this material into high quality mink feed.

Operating under strict animal welfare standards, mink farmers produce beautiful warm fur that is desired by markets internationally. Long-lasting natural fur is a biodegradable and environmentally-friendly alternative to synthetic fabrics which are non-biodegradable and end up in landfills, taking hundreds of years to decompose.

The CMBA works closely with Federal and Provincial governments to ensure that industry biosecurity measures are up-to-date and followed by its members.

While the CMBA fully supports taking a closer look at how Canada can be better prepared for future pandemics, there is grave concern that the scope of this legislation as presently written could pose a serious threat to the future of animal agriculture, the rural economies across Canada that depend on it, as well as Canada's food security.

**This submission seeks to shed light on the threat that Bill C-293 poses to *all* livestock sectors in its current form. Animal agriculture currently operates under a high level of biosecurity and regulation. Protective measures are taken to limit the risk of disease spread to livestock *and* public health. Biosecurity measures are reviewed and updated under the guidance of the CFIA and veterinary/health authorities as new science/information is available, or risks arise.**

### REGULATION

Canadian mink farmers abide by the animal welfare standards outlined in the *National Codes of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farmed Mink*, to ensure that animals are well cared for, and harvested humanely. The Code was developed under the auspices of the *National Farm Animal Care Council* with the collaboration of animal-welfare experts, veterinarians, scientists, producers and various government departments. The standards of this code were based on peer-reviewed scientific research findings. Farms are inspected by third-party auditors on a regular annual rotation through a globally recognized certification program, *Certifur Canada*.



Canadian mink farms practice biosecurity measures that are based on the National Farm-Level Biosecurity Standards that industry developed under the guidance of/collaboration with the CFIA, as well as veterinarians and other biosecurity experts. Biosecurity guidelines are routinely updated under the guidance of the CFIA, and veterinary/public health authorities.

Biosecurity planning and implementation helps to ensure that practices routinely carried out on farms limit any risk of disease transmission. Putting preventive measures in place to keep animals and staff healthy has been a long-standing and successful practice on Canadian livestock farms.

Mink farming is consistent with international agreements such as CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the IUCN (World Conservation Union).

## COVID-19 & ZONOTIC DISEASES

During the pandemic, the outbreak of COVID-19 in mink populations in Denmark spurred global conversations about the risk that mink pose to human health. In Denmark, 1,100 farms were producing more than 17 million mink in a region about the size of Vancouver Island. This allowed the virus to be transmitted from farm-to-farm very easily, unlike in Canada, where a small number of farms are spread across the vast country.

Due to COVID-19 concerns, a decision was made to cull all mink in Denmark. This was devastating for not only Denmark's mink industry – but also the global industry. It was later deemed to have been an unnecessary over-reaction. Danish mink farms are once again permitted to operate, and those that will not resume operations are being heavily financially compensated by government.

In Canada, while COVID-19 circulated rampantly in our human population, the virus was only transmitted to three small farms. This is a testament to not only the nature of Canada's mink farming sector, but also its farmers' commitment to biosecurity.

The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), the CDC, the USDA, the US National Veterinary Services Laboratory, all provided assurances that with a range of preventative measures - including infection prevention protocols and the development of preparedness and response strategies - mink run a very low risk to humans. These are precisely the precautions that Canadian mink farmers have been implementing to protect their animals, their own families, and the public.

The OIE does not propose mass culling of mink herds, let alone an end to mink farming.

In May, 2023, the *World Health Organization* announced that COVID-19 is no longer considered a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC).

A high level of regulations and practices are already in place within the Canadian mink farming sector – and *all* livestock sectors. These include controls on antibiotic access and use to reduce the risk of microbial resistance, as well as efforts to prevent the spread of zoonotic diseases and reduce the risk of transmission to human health. As new risks emerge and knowledge is gained, these sectors will continue to work with the CFIA and veterinary/health authorities to adjust biosecurity measures to maximize protection of our animals and public health.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

The CMBA is urging Committee to remove the following agricultural components from proposed Bill C-293:

Remove Clause 2(l)(ii)

(l) after consultation with the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, the Minister of Industry and provincial governments, provide for measures to

- (ii) regulate commercial activities that can contribute to pandemic risk, including industrial animal agriculture,

1. Remove Clause 2(l)(iii)

(l) after consultation with the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, the Minister of Industry and provincial governments, provide for measures to

- (iii) promote commercial activities that can help reduce pandemic risk, including the production of alternative proteins,

2. Remove Clause 2(l)(iv)

(l) after consultation with the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food, the Minister of Industry and provincial governments, provide for measures to

- (iv) phase out commercial activities that disproportionately contribute to pandemic risk, including activities that involve high-risk species;

3. Remove Clause 2(m)(ii)

(m) include the following information, to be provided by the Minister of the Environment:

- (ii) a summary of the measures the Minister of the Environment intends to take to reduce the risk that the commercial wildlife trade in Canada and abroad will lead to a pandemic, including measures to regulate or phase out live animal markets,



## SUMMARY

As Canada looks to better prepare for future pandemics and evaluate the steps that were taken to address COVID-19, it is imperative that we find ways of improving government response, including early messaging and warnings, stockpiling resources and PPE, and domestic vaccine production (for both humans and livestock).

The agricultural regulations currently established by all levels of government to protect animals and humans from disease transmission are stringent and protected Canadians during the COVID-19 pandemic. Preventative and protective measures will be properly adjusted under the guidance of Canada's biosecurity experts, as new threats arise, or science is available.

In its current form, Bill C-293 puts the future of animal agriculture at risk – and could be detrimental to the large population of people that depend on it for food, clothing and financial security.

