

PETER GIBSON MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

June 2023

Dear Constituent,

Thank you for your email about the phasing out of experiments on animals and the use of fur for bearskin caps.

I would like to reassure you that the UK's rigorous regulatory system ensures that no animal testing or research takes place if a non-animal alternative exists that would achieve the scientific outcomes sought. The National Centre for the 3Rs (NC3Rs) is the UK's leading scientific-based organisation dedicated to replacing, refining, and reducing the use of animals in scientific research and testing. The NC3Rs supports the research community to use the latest science and technology to replace animal studies, providing new approaches for biomedical research, and avoiding the time and cost associated with animal models.

Without animal testing, it is highly likely that a large number of potentially dangerous new medicines would be tested in healthy volunteers and patients in clinical trials. This would be completely unacceptable. That said, I welcome the Government's commitment to the development of non-animal technologies. Such technologies have the potential to reduce the reliance on the use of animals, improve the efficiency of drug research and development, and deliver safer, cheaper, and more effective medicines to patients. Ministers have also stressed that they continue to actively support and fund the development and dissemination of techniques that replace, reduce, and refine the use of animals in research.

With regard to your concerns about the wearing of bearskin caps, I know that Guardsmen take great pride in wearing the bearskin cap, which is an iconic image of Britain, and the Ministry of Defence (MOD) is very sparing in the acquisitions that it makes. Individual soldiers do not possess their own hats, rather they are cared for and shared within the Household Division and, despite their constant use, every effort is made to carefully prolong the longevity of each ceremonial cap. On account of this, they usually last for more than a decade, with some having been in use for as long as 60 years.

That said, I can assure you that the MOD would like to find an alternative material to bearskin should one prove acceptable. This is a commitment the MOD takes very seriously. The MOD have not to date seen evidence that a suitable faux fur product exists to be considered as an alternative. Until that material is sourced and proven, I can assure you that the UK goes to great lengths to ensure that the pelts that make the King's Guards caps are procured in the most responsible way possible.

Member of Parliament for Darlington

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Let me be clear, bears are never hunted to order for the MOD. Bear pelts used for the King's Guards' ceremonial caps are sourced exclusively from Canada precisely because it is a regulated market and a declared party to the convention on international trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora.

I can assure you that the Government is committed to protecting and upholding the rights of animals.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again. If you would like to keep up to date with my activities as your Member of Parliament then please subscribe to my Darlington Matters newsletter using this link: www.petergibson.org/signup

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Peter Gibson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

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