

Legal opinion would support Swiss ban

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A foundation that advocates for better treatment of animals under Swiss law says there is precedent to support a legal ban on the nation's imports of all fur products.

The Zurich-based Foundation for Animals in the Law is preparing to issue a legal opinion arguing in favor of such a ban that it says could be supported under certain exemption clauses for protecting the life and health animals along with public morality under several international treaties.

But the foundation's proposed ban runs counter to the more general provisions of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which covers international trade in goods, and some bilateral Swiss-European Union treaties.

Andreas Rüttimann, a lawyer at the foundation, told the Swiss newspaper NZZ am Sonntag that animal welfare in Switzerland is a long tradition and the World Trade Organisation has expressly acknowledged that the protection of animals is an integral part of public morality.

Therefore, an import ban on fur would not infringe any Switzerland's international trade obligations, he said, and there is further precedent in a recent decision by a WTO panel for an import ban on seal products, which the EU had adopted.

Legal debate



A small dog peeks out of a dog bag next to a person in a fur coat in February 2017 at a horse race that takes place every winter in St. Moritz (Keystone)

The more than 440 tons of fur imported to Switzerland last year represents a resurgence in its use as a fashionable item with jackets and hats.

A Bern-based [umbrella group](#) for Swiss fur traders and furriers says it strives to satisfy consumers who expect high animal welfare standards.

Swiss Fur says it promotes using only the furs of the country's native red fox as a fashion item, since tens of thousands a year are killed as part of federal population controls.

Fur farms are banned in Switzerland, along with animal traps and the use of poisons. And since 2013, all furs and fur products sold in Switzerland also must carry a label informing consumers about what type of animal it came from, where the animal was located and how it was kept and hunted.

Some parliamentarians, such as Pascale Bruderer Wyss of the centre-left [Social Democratic Party](#), have asked the cabinet to look into a possible ban. Rüttiman says import labels do not go far enough.

"The aim of the fur declaration decree was also to reduce the import of animal fur," he said. "The import figures show, however, that this goal was clearly missed."

Rüttiman's foundation says it plans to publish its legal opinion soon. Meantime, the Federal Office of Food Safety and Veterinary Affairs (BLV) has been studying the issue for the cabinet to decide.

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OUTFOXING FASHION

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By [Susan Misicka](#)

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