



Ministry
of Defence

Army Policy & Secretariat
Army Headquarters
IDL 24 Blenheim Building
Marlborough Lines
Andover
Hampshire, SP11 8HJ
United Kingdom

ArmySec/Equip/Cloth/FOI2021/00692

E-mail: ArmySec-Group@mod.gov.uk

Website: www.army.mod.uk

16 February 2021

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your email of 21 January in which you requested the following information:

“How many ceremonial caps made from bearskin were purchased in 2020?”

What was the overall cost of the ceremonial caps made from bearskin that were purchased in 2020?

The MOD has stated that the bear fur used for the ceremonial caps is obtained from a “licensed cull” that is sanctioned by the Canadian government. Please provide clarification as to the following points:

- Is this cull conducted by or contracted by the Canadian government, and are pelts from this cull made available to the MOD and its cap makers as part of this special arrangement or through a pre-order contract?*
- Does this “licensed cull” involve allocation by the Canadian government of hunting tags or permits to licensed hunters – up to a quota – as is typical for hunting seasons of any other animal?*

The bear fur used for the ceremonial caps is treated to halt the natural putrefaction process and dyed to ensure a uniform colour. Please provide a breakdown of the ingredients involved in both these processes.

Government guidance states, “General dress codes which conflict with religious or belief requirements may constitute indirect discrimination under the Equality Act unless they can be justified.” Given that the cap is purely ornamental, and following the ruling that ethical veganism is a belief protected by law in the UK, please confirm the following:

- The MOD respects and fully supports any serving guards who don’t want to wear the ceremonial bearskin cap for ethical reasons.*
- A faux-fur alternative to the bearskin cap is available to any guard who conscientiously objects to wearing fur.*

Like the overwhelming majority of the British public, Her Majesty the Queen has now rejected real fur in favour of faux fur. In view of Her Majesty’s role as commander-in-chief, head of the Armed Forces, and namesake of five Queen’s Guards’ regiments that wear the bearskin caps, is the Defence Council under any obligation – official or moral – to reflect the ethical standards of Her Majesty?”

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act). A search for the information has now been completed within the Ministry of Defence (MOD), and I can confirm that some information in scope of your request is held. I answer each question in turn below.

How many ceremonial caps made from bearskin were purchased in 2020?

What was the overall cost of the ceremonial caps made from bearskin that were purchased in 2020?

110 ceremonial bearskin caps were purchased by the MOD in 2020 at a cost of £145,000.

The MOD has stated that the bear fur used for the ceremonial caps is obtained from a “licenced cull” that is sanctioned by the Canadian government. Please provide clarification as to the following points:

- **Is this cull conducted by or contracted by the Canadian government, and are pelts from this cull made available to the MOD and its cap makers as part of this special arrangement or through a pre-order contract?**
- **Does this “licensed cull” involve allocation by the Canadian government of hunting tags or permits to licensed hunters – up to a quota – as is typical for hunting seasons of any other animal?**

No information in scope of this element of your request is held by the department. Under Section 16 of the Act (Advice and Assistance) it may be helpful for you to note that the MOD receives the final product from our contracted suppliers and is not involved with the licensed cull sanctioned by the Canadian government.

The bear fur used for the ceremonial caps is treated to halt the natural putrefaction process and dyed to ensure a uniform colour. Please provide a breakdown of the ingredients involved in both these processes.

No information in scope of this element of your request is held by the department. Under Section 16 I can advise that the fur is purchased from the Canadian authorities by the supplier who produces the ceremonial caps for defence. The MOD is not involved with the processes described.

Government guidance states, “General dress codes which conflict with religious or belief requirements may constitute indirect discrimination under the Equality Act unless they can be justified.” Given that the cap is purely ornamental, and following the ruling that ethical veganism is a belief protected by law in the UK, please confirm the following:

- **The MOD respects and fully supports any serving guards who don’t want to wear the ceremonial bearskin cap for ethical reasons.**
- **A faux-fur alternative to the bearskin cap is available to any guard who conscientiously objects to wearing fur.**

No information in scope of this element of your request is held by the department. Under Section 16 of the Act, I can advise that no suitable faux alternative is currently available, and, according to our records, there has been no such objection to the wearing of the bearskin. It may also be helpful for me to explain that the Army takes considerable steps to adjust the equipment, dietary provisions and work environment of its soldiers to reflect their religious and lifestyle choices where practical.


Like the overwhelming majority of the British public, Her Majesty the Queen has now rejected real fur in favour of faux fur. In view of Her Majesty’s role as commander-in-chief, head of the Armed Forces, and namesake of five Queen’s Guards’ regiments that wear the bearskin caps, is the Defence Council under any obligation – official or moral – to reflect the ethical standards of Her Majesty?

No information in scope of this element of the request is held by the department. Under Section 16 I can advise that the Defence Council have not received any such request from the Royal Household.

If you have any queries regarding the content of this letter, please contact this office in the first instance. Following this, if you wish to complain about the handling of your request, or the content of this response, you can request an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, Ground Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail CIO-FOI-IR@mod.gov.uk). Please note that any request for an internal review should be made within 40 working days of the date of this response.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may raise your complaint directly to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not normally investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website at <https://ico.org.uk/>.

Yours sincerely,


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