

# Send in the Tartan Army

Below: Tartan remains in fashion but is it made in Scotland?

It is time to protect our tartan from cheap imitations and ensure weaving jobs stay in Scotland

Words Louise Gray

It could be the best thing that has happened to tartan since Vivienne Westwood draped the iconic cloth over the most beautiful women in the world and brought the pattern back into fashion in the 1980s.

The Scottish Tartan Authority (STA) want tartan produced in Scotland to be given special protection under European Union Law.

Food and drink products are already covered by European rules in a bid to thwart imitations. For example Stornoway black pudding, Arbroath smokies or Cornish pasties.

So why not our most important non-food export, tartan?

The European protection could work in a number of ways. At the most extreme, it would mean that only plaid cloth produced in Scotland could be called 'tartan'. A slightly weaker law would allow tartan to come from around the world, but only textiles produced in Scotland could be 'Scottish tartan'. Another option is to protect tartan through an Act of Parliament, either via the Scottish Government in Holyrood or the British Government in Westminster.

This would create a Scottish Tartan Mark that could only be carried on cloth produced in Scotland. Harris Tweed already has a similar system.

It may sound like needless fuss. Surely most tartan comes from Scotland? Not any more.

Low cost manufacturing around the world means that tartan has become a victim of its own success. As demand has grown, manufacturers have set up factories in China and India, where

labour is far cheaper. Flimsy imitations labelled 'Scottish Tartan' sell as kilts for a tenner on the Royal Mile.

This is bad for the industry because low quality cloth is reaching the market as 'Scottish tartan' and sully the name of the brand. If only cloth produced in Scotland was allowed to be called Scottish tartan it would ensure consistently high quality.

But the most important reason to protect Scottish tartan is because otherwise it may die out. In the last 50 years in Scotland the number of companies weaving tartan has fallen from 32 to five.

The STA want to keep jobs in Scotland, not only in high tech factories producing the best cloth in the world for lower prices, but also in artisan skills.

Income from a boost in the industry would go towards funding scholars, apprentices, dyers and weavers and even a Tartan Centre.

In the modern world it is impossible for Scotland to compete with countries like China in terms of manufacturing cost. What we do have is history, skills and an authenticity that no one can imitate. It is as important as Stilton cheese or Champagne and it should be protected. 🐕

*The number of companies weaving tartan in Scotland is down to just five*

