



THE FIVE PROPOSALS TO CITES COP 17 TO PROTECT ELEPHANTS

The Executive Committee of the African Elephant Coalition¹ met in Uganda from 21-22 March 2016 and agreed to a package of five complementary proposals to protect elephants for submission to the CITES² Conference (CoP17) to be held in Johannesburg, from 24 September to 5 October 2016. The 5 proposals have since been submitted by members of the Coalition and are summarized below.

I. LISTING ALL AFRICAN ELEPHANTS IN CITES APPENDIX I

This proposal will transfer African elephants in Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe to Appendix I of CITES. Then all elephants in Africa and Asia will enjoy the highest standard of protection under the Convention. All international ivory trade will be prohibited by international law. The current listing of southern African elephants in Appendix II – allowing trade – has stimulated poaching and smuggling of ivory. Elephant populations are declining significantly across most of Africa. A universal listing in Appendix I will outlaw the ivory trade, simplify enforcement and send a clear message to the world of a global determination to halt the extinction of African elephants.

II. CLOSURE OF DOMESTIC MARKETS FOR ELEPHANT IVORY

This proposal complements Proposal I with a Conference recommendation that all Governments with domestic ivory markets close these markets for commercial trade in raw and worked ivory. Domestic trade maintains demand for ivory and creates opportunities to launder poached ivory, often under the guise that it is antique or legally acquired. Many countries including China and the United States have already announced measures to close down domestic markets. The proposal extends that approach globally.

III. DESTROYING IVORY STOCKPILES

Seizures of poached ivory have swollen official ivory stockpiles held in source, transit and consumer countries. Many CITES Parties are destroying stockpiles publicly, to send a signal about outlawing ivory trade in order to save elephants. The proposal endorses stockpile destructions and requests the CITES Secretariat to provide the best available technical guidance on stockpile inventories, audit, management and disposal, including DNA sampling to determine its origin.

IV. ENDING THE DECISION-MAKING MECHANISM FOR LEGALISING TRADE IN IVORY

For nine years CITES has discussed a Decision-Making Mechanism (DMM) to open up a system of legal international trade in ivory. There is no prospect of agreement by Governments, while continuing the debate encourages poaching and stockpiling of ivory for future “legalized” trade. Economic analysis shows this would risk a runaway expansion of ivory trade with devastating effects on elephants. This proposal would end all CITES work on a DMM or equivalent mechanism.

V. PROHIBITING EXPORT OF LIVE AFRICAN ELEPHANTS

The proposal would end the export of African elephants outside their natural range, including export to zoos overseas. This would be consistent with IUCN findings that the removal of African elephants from the wild for captive use has no direct benefit for their conservation and indeed disrupts wild populations, as well as leading to high rates of mortality and disease in captivity.

¹ The Coalition was established in 2008 in Bamako, Mali. It comprises 27 member countries from Africa united by a common goal: “a viable and healthy elephant population free of threats from international ivory trade”.

² CITES is the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.