

Conserving Africa's remaining elephants and ending the threat of ivory trade: the African Elephant Coalition's five proposals for CITES

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Abstract

Elephant populations across Africa have been hit hard in recent years by illegal killing for the ivory trade; countries in West, Central and East Africa have seen high levels of poaching since at least the mid-2000s, with most countries in Southern Africa now also experiencing the impact of wildlife crime. With a small minority of range States pressing for international sales of elephants and elephant products including renewed trade in ivory, and with domestic sales and accumulation of stockpiles hinting at the possibility of a future international trade, the signals are, at best, confusing to would-be consumers and, at worst, potentially encouraging to criminal networks. In order to reverse this dangerous drift and to protect Africa's dwindling and threatened population of elephants, a suite of five complementary proposals has been submitted by African range States from the 29-member African Elephant Coalition and additional co-sponsors to the Conference of Parties (CoP17) of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES) to be held in Johannesburg during 24 September–5 October 2016. Existing CITES controls on elephant products in international trade are partial, confusing and conditional. The five proposals should be seen as a carefully formulated and measured package for decisive change in the agenda for elephants, shifting from the current mixed message to a unified one aimed at streamlining anti-poaching and anti-trafficking enforcement, lowering market demand for ivory and securing an enduring CITES framework for the species' future. The proposals are: (1) Listing all elephant populations in CITES Appendix I; (2) Closure of domestic ivory markets; (3) Destruction and management of ivory stockpiles; (4) Ending the Decision-Making Mechanism for a trade in ivory (DMM); and (5) Restricting the export of live elephants. This paper provides an evidence-based justification and summary of these proposals.

Introduction

Long-term threats to elephants include habitat loss through human land use expansion and fencing of movement corridors; however, for the last several years the most acute threat facing the species has been poaching for ivory. Catastrophic losses were seen during the 1970s and 1980s when poaching was rampant over much of Africa, and in the past decade elephant populations have again been hit by an escalation of poaching across the continent. Several lines of evidence point to killing for the ivory trade as the primary reason for the recent dramatic decline in elephant numbers:

- Declines have been documented by three sources of information on population numbers

and trends: the African Elephant Database (AED), a collation of surveys and estimates from all range States maintained by the IUCN SSC; the Great Elephant Census (GEC), a Paul G Allen programme of continent-wide aerial surveys conducted during 2014-15 led by Elephants Without Borders in collaboration with numerous national governments and NGOs; and independent analyses by researchers.

- Rates of illegal killing indexed by PIKE (Proportion of Illegally Killed Elephants), based on data collected at a series of key sites around the continent and collated by the CITES Monitoring Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) programme, continue to show overall poaching rates higher than the level at which elephant populations are considered “sustainable”.
- Continuing seizures of large amounts of ivory in illegal trade are recorded in the CITES Elephant Trade Information System (ETIS) compiled by TRAFFIC.
- Data on the legal trade held in a database of the World Conservation Monitoring Centre of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP-WCMC) shows considerable discrepancies between reports of trophy exports and imports.

These sources confirm that countries in West, Central and Eastern Africa have for several years experienced intense pressure from ivory poachers, while elephants in Southern Africa are also now experiencing depredation by criminal syndicates. According to the CITES Secretariat (CITES 2016c), the threat to elephant populations persists: *“Despite the slight decline and stabilisation recorded since 2011, estimated poaching rates overall remain higher than the normal growth rate of elephant populations, or above the sustainability threshold, meaning the elephant population overall is likely to have continued to decline in 2015.”*

The current controls under CITES contain contradictory elements which confuse the international picture on elephant conservation status and policy actions to address the threat of ivory trade.

These include:

- The ‘split-listing’ of African elephants between Appendix I and Appendix II. The majority of African elephant populations are listed in Appendix I, banning international commercial trade in elephants and their parts (including ivory), while four populations (Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe) are listed in Appendix II, allowing international trade in elephants and their parts subject to certain conditions.
- International ivory trade is restricted with a moratorium in effect until 2017, but CITES allows regulated domestic markets to continue.
- Clear measures are lacking to encourage the destruction of stockpiles. Ivory from management and confiscations accumulates, leaks into trade and fuels speculation about future sales.
- Throughout the moratorium, CITES has been negotiating a Decision-Making Mechanism for a trade in ivory (DMM), which would potentially allow international trade in ivory to resume.
- Exports of live elephants from Africa to captive collections continue.

All these current arrangements drive home the message that international trade in elephants and their ivory is acceptable on economic and conservation grounds; that it is only partially and temporarily risky for Africa's elephant populations; and that it should continue or resume in the not-too-distant future. By doing so, they sustain the market of potential consumers, as well as middlemen and traders, and poachers, that continues to drive populations down at national, regional and continental levels.

A package of five complementary proposals to protect elephants that has been submitted to CITES by members of the African Elephant Coalition (AEC) deserves serious consideration by the conservation science community. The proposals are backed by the AEC, which includes 26 African elephant range States (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria,

Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Togo and Uganda) and three non-range States (Burundi, Comoros, Mauritania), along with Sri Lanka.

These proposals form a carefully formulated and measured package that – taken together - will decisively change the agenda for elephants, ending the current confusion of conflicting signals and half measures under CITES and enabling more effective enforcement on the ground to combat poaching and trafficking networks.

We present these proposals and their rationale below.

Elephant population status, trends and threats

There is abundant evidence that elephant populations are being damaged across the continent and that illegal killing for the international ivory trade remains the current primary and serious threat.

Status and trends

The major source of data on elephant population sizes and trends is the African Elephant Database (AED), with results reported to 31 December 2013. Data for savanna elephant populations that will be directly comparable on an Africa-wide basis was collected during 2014-15 through the Great Elephant Census (GEC). Some national-level results from the GEC have already been released, and a complete analysis of the savanna elephant findings is underway. The GEC data is also being contributed to the AED in order to produce an updated status report of the species, which will be released prior to the 17th Conference of the Parties (CoP17) of CITES.

The estimate for total elephant numbers in Africa in the AED's 'definite' and 'probable' categories, reported by 31 December 2013, was 473,386. The totals for the four regions were: Central Africa = 59,587 (12.6% of all African elephants); Eastern Africa = 102,303 (21.6%); Southern Africa = 301,052 (63.6%); West Africa = 10,444 (2.2%).

The online report (AED 2013) noted that the total number of African elephants (in its definite and probable categories) fell by about 15% from 2006 to 2013 and, while some variation in methodology may have affected the detection of specific trends, there “*appears to be a genuine reduction in a number of populations counted using consistent techniques*”. These declines have been attributed (CITES 2016a) primarily to poaching for ivory, with habitat loss and fragmentation due to land use change and competition by people also posing both immediate and longer-term threats.

While recent declines have been notable across all regions of Africa, and addition of newly surveyed range areas sometimes masked the amount of total regional decline, it is apparent that the intensity of reduction is most acute in ‘hotspots’, such as those identified in Central Africa (Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad, Gabon), Eastern Africa (southern Tanzania) and Southern Africa (northern Mozambique, northern Zimbabwe).

A separate compilation and modelling of independent survey data for Central Africa (Maisels et al. 2013) has shown that for forest elephants “*population size declined by ca. 62% between 2002–2011, and the taxon lost 30% of its geographical range*” (p.1).

An independent analysis of trends across Africa (Wittemyer et al. 2014), using data from a study population in central Kenya to model the effects of poaching in other populations with known PIKE values, produced an estimate of a 3% reduction in the continental population for the single year of 2011, with unsustainable rates of offtake continuing to 2013.

Preliminary information from the GEC also confirms significant decreases. In Tanzania (Nyalandu 2015), the national elephant population appears to have declined by 60% since 2009, with higher losses in the important Malagarasi-Muyovosi (81%), Ruaha-Rungwa (76%) and Selous-Mikumi (66%) ecosystems. These survey results were unexpectedly dramatic in the Ruaha

area and a second survey of a slightly larger area around Ruaha in 2015 (STEP 2015) gave a higher population estimate, and lower rate of decline (54%); nevertheless, the rate of decline is still of great concern.

In contrast to results reported in the AED up to 2013, the more recent GEC results (GEC 2015) indicate Mozambique's elephant population has been reduced by poaching by almost 50% in the past five years, with some key areas in the northwest of the country experiencing declines of over 60%.

In Zambia, GEC-assisted surveys in September 2015 (GEC 2016) found the population total to be stable, but with large differences between different parts of the country. The country's two largest populations, in the Luangwa and Kafue ecosystems, are stable or possibly increasing, but in the Lower Zambezi area bordering Zimbabwe elephant numbers are falling, and in Sioma-Ngwezi National Park on the border with Angola and Namibia, elephant populations have declined by about 95% since 2004.

Increasing trends were reported in the AED for the relatively small populations of Namibia and South Africa, but these were offset by the stabilization of previously growing numbers in Botswana and the suggestion of a decrease of some 18% in Zimbabwe. A summary of surveys conducted together with the GEC recently in Zimbabwe (ZPWMA 2014) reported a nationwide decline of some 7% from 2001 to 2014, with dramatic rates of decrease in the north (key populations have declined by 40%, in the Zambezi Valley, and 75%, in Sebungwe, since 2001), and stable or increasing numbers in the northwest and south of the country.

The populations of the four Appendix II countries, i.e. Botswana (Somerville 2015), Namibia (Njini 2015), South Africa (Torchia 2015) and Zimbabwe (Latham 2015), have all experienced increased levels of elephant poaching in the last year or two. While still at relatively low levels, these incidences signal that poaching syndicates are turning their attention to these range States, which are no longer immune to the poaching that has been occurring elsewhere in Africa.

Threats

Data from the MIKE programme indicated that, by 2011, poaching had reached the highest levels since the programme began in 2002 (CITES 2013a), with a levelling off since then. It is estimated that in 2011 alone, illegal hunters claimed 40,000 elephants, and in just 3 years, between 2010 and 2012, 100,000 elephants were killed in Africa for their ivory (Wittemyer et al. 2014.)

All African elephant populations are now at risk. The MIKE analysis to the end of 2015, reported by the CITES Secretariat on 3 March 2016 (CITES 2016c) showed that poaching levels increased significantly from 2006 to a peak in 2011 in all four African sub-regions. While Central Africa had the highest levels of elephant poaching, PIKE levels were above 0.5 in all sub-regions, indicating that the elephant population is very likely to be in net decline.

The tension introduced by the split-listing of African elephants between Appendix I and Appendix II, the apparent lack of effective control of existing legal markets and the expectation that legal trade may be introduced are a powerful combination of forces that promotes and sustains the global ivory market.

A report by UNEP-WCMC on legal trade in elephant parts and derivatives for the period 2012–13 was provided to the 66th meeting of the CITES Standing Committee (SC66) (CITES 2016a). Reported legal trade in elephants directly from African range States came principally from hunting trophies (including tusks). Records show the direct export of 2,307 tusks and 19,838 kg of ivory while importing countries recorded the import of 1,414 tusks and 956 kg of ivory, an enormous discrepancy. Trade in tusks was primarily sourced from Zimbabwe, with smaller amounts exported by Mozambique. Namibia and South Africa also exported ivory as hunting trophies. This lack of coherence reveals there is very little or no effective monitoring of this legal

trade, with domestic markets poorly regulated and offering broad opportunities for laundering of poached ivory.

Data on the illicit ivory trade reinforces and extends the reports of poaching from MIKE field sites. Seizure data from ETIS (2013b) showed that illegal trade in ivory in 2011–12 was at its highest levels since records began in 1989. A 2014 report (Milliken 2014) by TRAFFIC echoed these findings and highlighted shifting trade routes and transit points, with most illegal ivory destined for China, although Thailand is also a destination, either in its own right or as an entry point to China. High levels of illegal trade and seizures continued, and continued to increase to 2013, the most recent year for which reasonably complete records are available. TRAFFIC informed the CITES Standing Committee (SC) in January 2016 that “*The estimated mean of illegal ivory trade activity in 2012 shows an increase over 2011 and increases further in 2013*” (CITES 2016a, p.26).

The report by TRAFFIC to SC65 in 2014 showed a clear increase in the number of seizures made before the ivory left the African continent (CITES 2014a). Large-scale ivory seizures were indicative that transnational organized crime is involved in the illicit ivory trade. The TRAFFIC report to SC66 notes that, while MIKE data appear to show a levelling off or slight decline in the illegal killing of elephants at sites across the continent, the illegal movement of trade in ivory has continued at record levels. Reasons for this difference may be due to time lags between poaching and the release into trade (and thus, seizures), and possible “leakage” from government stockpiles. There is also the potential for adaptation by criminal networks in response to increased vigilance by African port authorities.

Although the sales of ivory have been promoted as a source of revenue that would be used for elephant conservation, and as a means to satisfy—and thus reduce—demand for ivory, it appears that the opposite has occurred. Poaching has increased, and most dramatically in the years leading up to and following the second one-off sale in 2008. There is no evidence that revenue from ivory sales has made any significant impact on slowing the rate of attrition on the elephant population in any African country. In fact the main consequence of the sales has been to give the false impression to consumers that ivory trade has been, or will be legalized.

At the same time, the growing strength of Asian economies, coupled with cultural values and state agencies' promotion of domestic markets (Nadal and Aguayo 2014), has allowed consumer demand to grow steadily, independently of ivory supply; the treatment of ivory markets as simple supply-and-demand systems is a risky over-simplification. With increasing demand, prices have soared, creating even greater incentives for poachers. Even if prices are reduced through a legal market, this may stimulate increased demand that will end up pushing prices upwards again. The criminal networks appear to operate as “multi-product firms” that are more versatile in reducing costs through scope economies (i.e. bundling of several products reduces the cost of producing them separately). The capacity of crime syndicates to circumvent controls is buttressed by their ability to operate in several markets at the same time. This also allows them to maintain their profitability and endure through all the phases of the business cycle, but elephant populations may not be able to do so.

Other factors that potentially contribute to increasing and sustaining poaching levels could include: an increase in the number of ivory consumers living and working in African nations (Martin and Vigne 2014); poverty, corruption and weak legislative enforcement of protection (Bennett 2015); porous borders that allow cheap and unhindered movement of contraband (Moyle 2014); and international conflicts (Douglas and Alie 2014).

It has proven difficult to establish simple, clear links between specific events, such as stockpile sales or moratorium decisions and changes in the levels of illegal killing (CITES 2013c). The specific effects of such discussions or actions on indices of consumer demand have not been studied, and it may be impossible to determine exact linkages. However, it does appear

undeniable that the total ban on ivory sales in 1989 had the effect of rapidly and dramatically reducing the killing of elephants. In contrast, given its temporary nature, the ‘moratorium’ on trade in ivory from Appendix II elephant populations for nine years from 2008 may have served as a signal to consumers that sales could be allowed after it ends in 2017, particularly since it was accompanied by an agreement to develop a decision-making mechanism for a process of trade in ivory (discussed below). More importantly, it was also an incentive for traders and processors to maintain their levels of operation and even to engage in new investments. These market participants have an economic interest in acting to develop the market, and do not simply respond to it. As with any business enterprise, these traders are potent drivers of the market's expansion. Business history shows that markets are proactively promoted and developed by firms and government agencies (see Chandler 1990).

The signal sent by restoring all African elephant populations to Appendix I would underpin the actions and announcements on international and domestic trade by the USA, China, Hong Kong SAR and the EU, and is expected to have a strong dampening effect on demand and a significant effect on the expectations of traders and processors who are key drivers of the market for ivory. This will bring about the desired objective of reducing illegal killing of elephants.

The AEC's five proposals to CITES

The African Elephant Coalition (AEC) was established in 2008 in Bamako, Mali. It comprises 29 member countries from Africa united by a common goal: “*a viable and healthy elephant population free of threats from international ivory trade*”. At its 6th meeting in November 2015 in Cotonou, Benin, the members released a Declaration agreeing, *inter alia*, to “*propose and support the listing of all African elephant populations on CITES Appendix I*” and to “*enact, implement and enforce legislation prohibiting domestic ivory trade and support all proposals and actions at international and national levels to close domestic ivory markets worldwide*” (AEC 2015). Subsequently, the Executive Committee of the AEC met in Uganda on 21–22 March 2016 and agreed a package of five complementary proposals on the basis of the Cotonou Declaration to protect elephants; these proposals were submitted to the CITES Secretariat for consideration at the CITES Conference of Parties (CoP17) to be held in Johannesburg, from 24 September to 5 October 2016. The 5 proposals are summarized below.

1. Listing all elephants in Appendix I

The listing of all African elephants in Appendix I in 1989 sent a clear signal to the world that all trade in ivory was illegal, shifting the risk-to-reward ratio in favour of elephants. Ivory markets collapsed and the ivory price crashed, immediately ending the prevailing poaching crisis and allowing elephant populations to recover. The down-listing of four southern African national populations to Appendix II (split-listing the continental population with two levels of protection under CITES), and subsequent sales of ivory stockpiles have not slowed poaching. If anything, these actions stimulated a renewed illegal trade in response to increasing demand, particularly in the context of the second sale, once again threatening the species with extinction. As US Secretary of State John Kerry described in a US Senate Committee Hearing in May 2012, the stockpile sales are likely to have “*whetted the appetite*” for ivory in consumer countries (US Senate 2012), and the risk-to-reward ratio has now shifted in favour of wildlife criminals.

The proposal demonstrates that the Criteria (CITES 2013b) for listing all African elephants on Appendix I of CITES are met:

- Criterion C: There has been a recent, marked decline in elephant populations across the whole of Africa, of some 15% between 2006 and 2013.
- Criterion C(i): Widespread declines in elephant populations occurred during the intense periods of poaching in the 1970s and 1980s, followed by a period of relative stability and, in some areas, population growth in the 1990s and early 21st century.

- Criterion C(ii): With the rise in poaching, the declines have resumed and—unless urgent action is taken—are projected to continue on the basis of both the unsustainable levels of exploitation and the high vulnerability of elephant populations due to both *intrinsic factors* (limited capacity in many African countries to protect elephants in the face of high poaching pressure) and *extrinsic factors* (high demand for ivory in destination and transit countries, and the ability of criminal networks to operate and meet this demand).

This proposal seeks to unify African elephants and their range States in one listing by including all populations of *Loxodonta africana* (African elephant) in Appendix I through the transfer from Appendix II of the populations of Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Countries in West, Central and Eastern Africa have already experienced intense pressure from ivory poachers, while Southern Africa is also now experiencing the depredations of criminal syndicates (Cruise 2016). This proposal is therefore a call to all range States to unite in one listing for maximum protection under Appendix I of CITES, to send a clear message to the world of a cohesive mission to fight against extinction of African elephants.

2. Closure of domestic ivory markets

This proposal complements Proposal 1 through a recommendation from the CITES CoP to close all domestic markets for commercial trade in raw and worked ivory. It is widely recognized that any sales of ivory, including within legal domestic markets, are inherently likely to increase the risk to elephant populations and local communities, since domestic ivory markets, whether in range (where elephants are found in the wild), transit (through which ivory passes), or consumer (end destination) countries, create a significant opportunity for the laundering of illegal ivory under the guise of legality. A large number of initiatives on several fronts are currently aimed at reducing the extent of illegal international trade. At the same time, many range and consumer States have already announced that they have taken, are taking, or intend to take legislative and regulatory steps to close their legal domestic ivory markets.

Closing internal markets would eliminate the possibility and opportunities for the laundering of poached ivory, under the guise that it is antique, legally acquired or even from an extinct species such as mammoth. Many countries including 11 African range States and one non-range State (in the Elephant Protection Initiative - EPI: <http://www.elephantprotectioninitiative.org/>), China and the USA (White House 2015), Hong Kong SAR (Phila 2016) and EU member countries (European Commission 2016) have recently announced their commitment to close down domestic markets. The US government has since implemented a near-total closure of its domestic commercial ivory trade (USFWS 2016). The proposal extends that approach globally.

The problems of domestic markets are exemplified by Angola, which has the largest illegal market on the continent (Martin and Vigne 2014). There has been a huge increase in demand for worked ivory since 2005, attributed to the rising number of Chinese people working in Angola. Despite a scant 1,600 elephants remaining in Angola, the ivory on sale in Luanda in June 2005 was estimated (Milliken et al. 2006) to represent over 1,500 kg, thought to be largely from the forest elephants of Central African Republic or Democratic Republic of Congo. In April 2016, Angola announced a ban on the sale of ivory and ivory artefacts at the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment in Cairo, and joined the Elephant Protection Initiative (EPI), which focuses on protecting African elephants through measures such as closing domestic markets (Anon 2016).

3. Destruction and management of ivory stockpiles

Seizures of poached ivory have swollen official ivory stockpiles held in range, transit and consumer countries. Many CITES Parties have started to destroy stockpiles publicly, to send a signal about the threat that the ivory trade represents to the remaining populations of elephants. This proposal builds on two earlier papers submitted to the CITES Standing Committee meetings

in July 2014 (CITES 2014b) and January 2016 (CITES 2016b), which resulted in recognition of ivory destructions since 2011 and a recommendation for the preparation of guidance on management of stockpiles, to be acted upon by the Conference of the Parties (CoP). The proposal endorses stockpile destructions and commissions the CITES Secretariat to provide the best available technical guidance on stockpile inventories, audit, management and disposal, including DNA sampling to determine the origin of items in the stockpile.

Economic arguments put forward for the release of ivory from stockpiles (and international trade with CITES permission) are that legalizing trade will drive down prices (Biggs et al. 2013; 't Sas-Rolfes et al. 2012); scarcity is claimed to increase prices, which then drives poaching. We suggest that rather than controlling demand by releasing ivory from stockpiles, an opening of trade risks triggering runaway demand (as seen in China and other consumer countries over the last decade). An analogous process is the legal trade in vicuña wool (McAllister et al. 2009). Making vicuña wool globally available increased commercial interest and thus increased demand and poaching (Nowak 2015).

4. Ending the Decision-Making Mechanism for a process of trade in Ivory (DMM)

One argument for sustaining a managed trade in ivory has been that a steady supply would meet demand and reduce price, thus decreasing the incentive to kill elephants. CITES has been debating the establishment of a Decision-Making Mechanism for a process of trade in ivory (DMM) for nearly 9 years but has made no progress.

Since the mandate for the DMM was agreed in 2007, poaching and illegal trafficking in ivory have escalated. Elephants now face a severe crisis in Africa as a result of the illegal ivory trade. The data gathered under the CITES MIKE and ETIS programmes demonstrate that poaching and illegal trade are reducing elephant populations continuously. Moreover, economic analysis demonstrates that re-opening legal trade through a mechanism such as the DMM would risk a runaway expansion of ivory trade with potentially devastating effects on elephants (Nadal and Aguayo 2014). Both the mathematics and the assumptions underlying the proposals for a DMM process were flawed; ivory production rates in elephant populations are strongly affected by age structure effects, making it likely that attempts to meet realistic levels of ivory demand will inevitably lead to over-exploitation and declines (Lusseau and Lee *personal communication*).

Unfortunately CITES fails to accurately monitor supply, particularly where trade is illegal; it fails to consider the impact of trade controls in realistic terms; and it does little to consider the complex nature of demand or contend with changing market dynamics (Challender et al. 2015).

It is vital that the CoP sends the clearest possible signal to poachers, traders and consumers that CITES is "closed for business" as far as the ivory trade is concerned. The Convention can then devote its efforts to halting illegal trade, curbing global and domestic demand for ivory, implementing the African Elephant Action Plan and protecting elephants in their habitats, rather than debating their further exploitation for legal trade. In January 2016, SC66 took a welcome interim step by agreeing that the Working Group on the DMM established in 2013 had been unable to conclude its work and to seek advice from the CoP on whether the mandate should or should not be extended.

It is the contention of the AEC that the DMM should be abandoned once and for all.

5. Prohibiting the export of live elephants

The capture of young African elephants for *ex situ* purposes (i.e. trade to other countries where they would live outside their natural habitat in captivity) causes trauma and psychological disruption, and high rates of mortality, injury and disease in captive conditions. According to

CITES trade data, between 2005 and 2014, 70 live wild-caught African elephants were exported from African range States to zoos and circuses, for educational and/or commercial purposes.

There is support in most of the African elephant range States for restricting trade in live African elephants taken from the wild for only *in situ* conservation purposes or to secure areas in the wild within their natural range, preferably involving the transfer of entire family groups.

The proposal would end the export of young African elephants outside their natural range, including export to zoos and other captive facilities 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.

Humane, ethical and conservation-appropriate considerations all point towards supporting this ban. Elephants are highly social animals and removal of elephants from their social groups both disrupts wild populations (Gobush et al. 2009) and has persisting detrimental effects on the physical and mental state of the elephants experiencing this disruption (Bradshaw et al. 2005; Shannon et al. 2015). Captive elephants, especially those forcibly removed from their families, do not thrive, experiencing excess mortality, reduced lifespan and increased disease burden (Clubb et al. 2008; Mason et al. 2009). Their muscular-skeletal and reproductive health is compromised, they exhibit abnormal repetitive behaviours (stereotypies) and they do harm to themselves and other animals (and, occasionally, people).

Conclusion

There is a unique window of opportunity at the CITES Conference this year for governments to end the ivory trade and provide a consistent framework to protect African elephants from unsustainable exploitation for non-essential uses. The evidence of the ivory trade's destructive impact is clear, and is likely to be clearer still as findings from the GEC, IUCN and other reports are published before CoP17. The package of five proposals backed by the majority of African elephant range States converges with the policies now being implemented by the USA, China, India, the European Union and many other Governments. Globally, a great many conservationists, scientists, and tourism and development experts, as well as the general public are clear that elephants are worth more alive than dead. 2016 is a pivotal year for elephants. The AEC has provided the leadership necessary to end the ivory trade and to secure the future of the species. It remains to be seen if the CITES Parties have the courage to support the AEC's package of five proposals at this critical point in time.

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