



PORT ELIZABETH OFFICE

2 Lawrence Street, Central Hill, 6001, Port Elizabeth. PO Box 12444, Centrahil, 6006. Tel 041 585 9606 Fax to email 086 614 9701
Email peadmin@wessa.co.za www.wessa.org.za

WESSA Position Statement: Trade in Elephant Ivory

This position statement is based on the principles of sustainable utilisation and the Precautionary Principle, and reflects the Vision; Mission; Aim; Style and Values of WESSA. It was developed in the lead up to the IUCN World Conservation Congress 2016 vote on whether domestic ivory trade should be globally banned. WESSA voted for the ban, which was adopted as a majority decision.

This position statement recognises that the socio-economic and environmental landscapes are complex and so must make space for continuous change and emergence.

Contact:

Morgan Griffiths
WESSA Environmental Governance Programme Manager
Tel: 041 585 9606
Email: morgan.griffiths@wessa.co.za

Position statement date:

27 September 2016

INTRODUCTION

WESSA has been actively involved in African Elephant conservation since the early years of our Society. We were the proponents for the creation of the Kruger National Park in order to protect species that were being decimated through hunting, including elephants, and specifically campaigned for the creation of the Addo Elephant National Park, to conserve the last remaining elephants in the Eastern Cape. Currently WESSA is running its Elephants Alive! Programme, which includes an elephant population control study in Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Game Reserve. As the scourge of elephant poaching is growing in South Africa, WESSA is wanting to position itself as a key NGO advocating for the conservation and protection of elephants in Southern Africa.

Elephant poaching is at crisis proportions across Africa, driven by high prices for ivory in consumer states:

- The 2015 Great Elephant Census has estimated that 70% of African forest elephant population has been wiped out in the past 10 years. And the savanna elephant population has declined by 30% in the past seven years.
- The IUCN African Elephant Specialist Group estimated that by 2012, only a total of around 440,000 African elephants remain from the 1979 estimated minimum population of 1.3 million elephants. In 2008, the IUCN listed Asian elephants as 'Endangered' due to a 50% population decline over the past 60–75 years; with a remaining population of estimated to be around 40,000–50,000.
- Up to 30,000 African elephants are killed each year for their tusks; that's one every 15 minutes, a rate that populations cannot sustain.
- In the aftermath of CITES-approved 'once-off' sales of ivory stockpiles in 1997, 2002 and 2008; poaching rates escalated sharply across Africa, attributed to stimulated consumer demand for ivory trinkets and carvings.
- Kruger National Park has recorded a recent spike in poaching, with 22 poached in 2015 and 36 to date in 2016!
- The illegal wildlife trade has become the fourth most lucrative transnational crime after drugs, arms and human trafficking, worth as much as \$20 billion per year.
- The illegal international trade in ivory is controlled by highly organised and adaptive international crime syndicates, facilitated by local corruption and driven by complex supply and demand relationships.
- Elephants are currently listed under Appendix 2 of CITES, which allows for regulated domestic trade but with a current ban on international trade.
- A number of countries, such as South Africa and Japan, have legal, regulated domestic trade in ivory. This domestic trade is claimed to be based on stockpiles acquired prior to the CITES international trade ban, from mammoth ivory or from the 1997, 2002 and 2008 'once-off' sales. But domestic stockpile regulations have been heavily criticised for its various loopholes which have allowed significant amounts of poached ivory to fraudulently enter these stockpiles.
- The issue of a total ivory trade ban is a highly contentious issue within and between range and consumer states, and global conservation community. Range states South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Zambia are arguing for regulated trade in ivory, along with Japan, so that they can sell their stockpiles to fund conservation and support community development projects. Opposing them are 29 other range states, the two main historical consumer states: the USA and China, which have both recently banned their domestic ivory trade, and nearly all the international NGOs working in the elephant conservation space. Their argument is that while they recognise that funds could be realised for conservation through ivory sales, their best hope of reducing global elephant poaching is to put an end to all ivory trade and consumer demand for ivory.
- At the 2016 IUCN World Conservation Congress, the over-whelming majority of the global conservation community voted in support of a global ban on all domestic trade in elephant ivory. The IUCN now calls on all nations to legislate against domestic elephant ivory trade, although not including legitimate hunting trophies.

POLICY STATEMENT ON INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC TRADE IN ELEPHANT IVORY

WESSA recognizes the intrinsic value of wildlife, the importance of wildlife to humanity, and views wildlife and people as interrelated components of an ecological-cultural-economic complex. We recognise that wildlife may be used in consumptive or non-consumptive manner, and our stance does not preclude the management of animal populations or use of animals for food or other cultural uses, as long as the loss of life is justified, sustainable, and achieved through humane methods. WESSA upholds the principle of sustainable utilisation of natural resources.

At the Southern African regional level, WESSA recognises that South Africa, Botswana and Namibia have done well to conserve and protect their national elephant herds. We also recognise that these countries' stockpiles of ivory, from recovered poached ivory and natural mortality, represent a potential source of funds for the conservation agencies of these nations. WESSA is sympathetic to these agencies' plight in facing increasing budgetary constraints, as well as increased pressure to show tangible monetary benefits from conservation to the growing human populations outside the protected area fencelines. This social context is further complicated with colonial and/or apartheid resettlement policies and restitution claims.

It is WESSA's considered opinion that the long-term conservation of the remaining African and Asian elephant herds requires the cessation of all trade in elephant ivory. WESSA supports the view of the 27 elephant range states and the global conservation community that elephant poaching can best be minimised through a global ivory market reduction strategy, which is dependent on eliminating all legal consumer access. This requires a continuation of the international trade ban and a move by all states to adopt the IUCN motion to ban all domestic ivory trade. WESSA's position is based on our sustainable use policy and the latest elephant population data, in that we do not hold that further trade in elephant ivory is sustainable at the global scale.

WESSA understands that various range and consumer states are advocating a highly-regulated trade mechanism. WESSA holds that any further 'once-off' sales and domestic trade carries an unacceptable high risk of being corrupted by the poaching syndicates and illegal ivory traders, and that re-opening international trade will encourage a growth in ivory consumer demand and hence poaching. The increased rates of elephant poaching in the wake of the CITES-approved 'once-off' sales of elephant ivory in 1999, 2002 and 2008 confirm this risk. The USA and China, supported by France, have stated that there is no realistic mechanism of preventing significant amounts of poached ivory entering the legal trade system, which is why they have now instituted a near-total ban on domestic ivory trade¹

WESSA calls on the National Department of Environmental Affairs to uphold and support the IUCN motion to ban all domestic ivory trade and to promulgate legislation to this effect.

REFERENCES & RESOURCES

Links to other WESSA policies and position statements:

- Sustainable Utilisation of Natural Resources
- Rhino Horn Trade Proposal
- Biodiversity

¹ the 'near-total' refers to the exception for trade in articles that contain small amounts of ivory, such as antique musical instruments and museum items

- Animals Rights Groups/Humane Societies

Legislation and Policy:

- National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act 10 of 2004. Government Notice No. 700, Gazette No. 26436, Commencement date: 1 September 2004 – unless otherwise indicated.
- Statutes and agreements of CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora).

Other:

- Nadal, A. & Aguayo, F. 2014. Legalizing Ivory Trade: taking to New Heights a Dangerous Policy Proposal. National Geographic, article first published online 22 October 2014, www.nationalgeographic.com
- Schneider, J. 2008. “Reducing the Illicit Trade in Endangered Wildlife: The Market Reduction Approach” Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice Vol 24 (3): 274-295.
- Wittemyer, G. et al. 2014. Illegal killing for ivory drives global decline in African elephants. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 111(36), pp: 13117–13121.
- Chase, M.J et al, 2016. Continent-wide survey reveals massive decline in African savannah elephants [The Great African Elephant Census Report]. Journal of Conservation Biology, 2016 (PeerJ 4:e2354 <https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.2354>)
- Reports of the IUCN African Elephant Specialist Group.
- Orr, T. 2016. Re-thinking the Application of ‘Sustainable Use’ Policies for African Elephants in a Changed World. South African Institute of International Affairs Occasional Paper 214, pp: 34.