



**Our mission is to abolish the Extinction Economy worldwide so that wildlife may live.™**  
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**OUR FORMAL STATEMENT TO THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE  
GOVERNMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA FOR STRONG SUPPORT TO PROHIBIT  
THE IMPORT AND EXPORT OF IVORY FOR SALE WITHIN, AND TO AND FROM THE  
COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA, GIVEN ON WORLD ELEPHANT DAY, 12 AUGUST 2019**

Tusk Task Force is the wildlife conservation non-profit NGO with its global HQ in Seattle, USA with Transparency Registry No. 056368329093-73 in the European Union. We have over 5,000+ stakeholders (supporters, partners, and donors) worldwide, including hundreds in the Commonwealth of Australia. Our mission is to abolish all exploitation of wildlife to end the Extinction Economy worldwide by providing strategic and tactical resources—advocacy, intelligence, and protection—to all stakeholders that defend them so that wildlife may live.

We join a consortium of many organisations and individuals worldwide—including Australia's [For The Love of Wildlife](#) and [Nature Needs More](#)—concerned about the global consequences of wildlife trafficking, and today, along with all our stakeholders, we strongly urge the Australian Government to close the loopholes in domestic ivory market and to ban the import and export of all raw and worked ivory items in the Commonwealth with limited and categorical exemptions.

As the Minister for the Environment already knows, legal domestic markets of ivory, including within Australia, encourages illegal trade by serving as a cover for trade in illicit ivory as antiques among others.<sup>1</sup> As such, ivory remains on sale—within Australia—most particularly in urban and metropolitan markets, auctions, antique shops and online which contributes to the surge<sup>2</sup> in African<sup>3</sup> (*Loxodonta Africana*) and Asian<sup>4</sup> (*Elephas maximus*) elephant<sup>5</sup> poaching and ivory trafficking—driven by the continued growing demand from Asia.

We believe that the continued domestic market of ivory in Australia is unethical from a universal governance and moral standpoint, in addition to the global detrimental impact, as highlighted by the following:

- African Savannah elephant populations declined by 30 percent (equal to 144,000 elephants) across 18 countries in Africa from 2007 to 2014, according to the Great Elephant Census<sup>6</sup> published last year, which leaves their remaining numbers at just over 350,000.
- The current rate of decline is 8 percent per year, primarily due to poaching, driven by the demand from Asia. For a specific country example highlighting the profound impact of wildlife trafficking, the elephant population declined 6 percent overall in Zimbabwe but dropped by 74 percent within one specific region, according to the census.

<sup>1</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement: Inquiry into the trade of elephant ivory and rhinoceros horn*. September 2018, p. 3, 1.12

<sup>2</sup> *Commission Staff Working Document: Analysis and Evidence in support of the EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking*. Brussels, 26.2.2016

<sup>3</sup> International Union of the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), *Loxodonta Africana*, <http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/12392/0> (accessed 30 July 2019)

<sup>4</sup> CITES, *Illegal Trade in Live Asian Elephants: A review of current legislative, regulatory, enforcement, and other measures across range States*, CoP17, Doc.57, 2016, p. [9].

<sup>5</sup> There are two species of elephants—the African Elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) and the Asian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*). There are two subspecies of African elephant, the bush elephant and the forest elephant. There are three subspecies of Asian elephant, the Indian, Sumatran and Sri Lankan elephants.

<sup>6</sup> Chase et al. (2016), *Continent-wide survey reveals massive decline in African savannah elephants*. PeerJ 4:e2354; DOI 10.7717/peerj.2354

- Increase of elephant poaching has also been reported in wildlife areas located in India<sup>7</sup> and other Sub-Asian and East Asian countries (Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka) as the demand for ivory has been projected to increase.
- Beyond its impact on elephants and their benefits to biodiversity,<sup>8</sup> the bloody ivory trade has also been tied to organised crime, the murder of civilians and wildlife rangers in Africa, endangering regional security, creating instability in governance, increasing corruption, exacerbating poverty, diminishing economic opportunities, and destabilizing migration and border controls.<sup>9</sup>
- Statistics suggest an African elephant is killed every 20 minutes by highly professional criminal networks who smuggle the contraband of ivory where it continues to fetch a price of \$1,037 AUD (€593 or \$700 USD) per kilo.<sup>10</sup>
- Australia is one of the Asia's busiest transport hubs, making it an importer and exporter of ivory within the Asia Pacific region—with easy “low profile” conduit to Southeast Asia. With its airports handling huge numbers of international flights, many goods in transit pass through which unfortunately makes them ideal for smugglers seeking to market ivory globally and internally. To its credit however, Australia has one of the most professional and experienced CITES Customs Units (through the ABF) in the region<sup>11</sup> and this ban will only refine their processes and allow them to focus on other ways to deter wildlife trafficking.
- According to parliamentary committee deliberations last year, support for a domestic trade ban (with limited exemptions) was conveyed by the vast majority of submitters and witnesses to this issue. For example, all but one non-government witness supported a domestic trade ban (with exemptions) on ivory and rhino horn items. The committee also heard that failure to do so would result in an increased risk of criminal organisations exploiting Australia's weaker control framework and, if Australia fails to implement a domestic trade ban, criminal actors involved in the global illegal trade could move their operations to Australia to exploit its weaker control framework, known as “displacement.”<sup>12</sup>
- While Australia's contribution to the ivory market is “small” compared to China and Hong Kong, it may possibly indicate a higher level of criminal activity and a growing illicit market taking advantage of the existing loopholes on current legislation, and lack thereof, in the Commonwealth. This may be consistent to the reverse logic that the international illegal wildlife trade would decline if each country, under its domestic law, prohibited the “possession of wildlife that was illegally harvested in, or illegally traded from, anywhere in the world”<sup>13</sup> considering that illegal trafficking of wildlife run in-tandem and in-parallel with the legal trade.<sup>14</sup>
- Emphasising the global consequences of this trade, we can use just turn to Europe as an example of “displacement” for much of its trafficking there ends up everywhere in the world, including Australia. The European Commission's working document on ivory trafficking from last year concluded that there is an increased of buyers using forged pre-CITES certificates to re-export, making it difficult to distinguish legal pre-CITES or worked ivory from illegal ones for which export is banned. Logic dictates that this may also reflect a growing trade of illegal ivory trafficking parallel to legal ivory trafficking.<sup>15</sup>

Please allow us to highlight our argument from an intellectual and cultural “standpoint, as well.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-world-wildlife-day-clear-evidence-of-rise-in-elephant-poaching-in-india-2185442> (accessed 4 March 2016)

<sup>8</sup> Doughty, Christopher E. “Herbivores increase the global availability of nutrients over millions of years.” *Nature Ecology and Evolution*, 2017

<sup>9</sup> Interpol. (2015). Interpol Strategic Report: Environmental Crime and its Convergence with other serious crimes. Reference: 2015/999/OEC/ENS/SLO

<sup>10</sup> Dr. Giovanni Broussard, UNODC, *Proof Hansard*, 9 July 2018, p. 51.

<sup>11</sup> DoEE, Australia's stricter domestic measures, <http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/wildlife-trade/cites/stricter-measures> (accessed 10 August 2019).

<sup>12</sup> Mr. Gabriel Fava, Born Free Foundation, *Proof Hansard*, 3 July 2018, p. 29.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *World Wildlife Crime Report*, 2016, p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> Ms. Grace Ge Gabriel, IFAW, *Proof Hansard*, 3 July 2018, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> *Commission Staff Working Document: Analysis and Evidence in support of the EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking*. Brussels, 26.2.2016

The Commonwealth of Nations was created as a political and cultural bloc “to ensure future peace and an absence of conflict” for a more prosperous and safer British Commonwealth and beyond, so it is only fitting that the Commonwealth must also take an urgent leadership role in abolishing the bloody ivory trade which exacerbates conflicts and violence around the world—from Africa to Asia, and back. *Indeed, we know that this issue may also be personal for the minister having been born in Nigeria, where poaching<sup>16</sup> occurs on a daily basis.* With that being said, it is imperative that the British Commonwealth<sup>17</sup> must not relinquish its mutual goal to take complete responsibility, once and for all, to end its own role in the bloody ivory trade. By implementing the ban on ivory sales in Australia’s domestic market, the government will also free up resources to combat wildlife trafficking (which affects proper and stable governance and regional security) through CITES and other transnational collaborations abroad.

While the African Union (including members of the Commonwealth of Nations) has begun implementing a continent-wide strategy to close the ivory market there, so too must the rest of the British Commonwealth with the United Kingdom. Indeed, in an effort to close existing loopholes to curb the illegal wildlife trafficking from the EU, the British Government have stopped issuing ivory export certificates and have called on the rest of the European Union to make this a bloc-wide policy during Prime Minister May’s administration. While this is promising in diminishing the trade in Europe, Australia can follow the UK’s lead<sup>18</sup> and a ban would send the clearest possible signal that Australia’s objective is to be a regional leader in the fight against the ivory trade in Asia Pacific.

This principled urgency is especially profound considering the current United States presidential administration has forfeited its leadership on this issue. Recently, the Trump Administration has cancelled the previous administration’s Presidential Task Force<sup>19</sup> on national strategy against wildlife trafficking from 2014. As you already know, former President Obama’s previous adoption of this national strategy<sup>20</sup> was executed to mitigate the growing global security implications<sup>21</sup> of wildlife trafficking as a conduit to human trafficking, narcotics trade, weapons dealing, and slave labour. Interestingly, this provides an opening for Australia to take the mantle of leadership on this global security issue in the region.

Supported by our points above with compelling research and evidence,

We urge the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia to close the domestic ivory markets and to ban the import and export of all raw and worked ivory items in Australia subject to carefully defined separate exemptions for each category which includes: musical instruments which may contain ivory, items which are of significant (artistic, cultural, and historic) value, items which contain a small percentage (<5% or “de minimis”) of ivory and where the ivory is integral to the item, and ivory between accredited museums and universities within the Commonwealth for educational<sup>22</sup> purposes only. Overall, our appeal is to completely remove all legal and illegal commercial value on all ivory to remove all incentives in profiting from it, in Australia and abroad.

Together with the rest of the world against wildlife trafficking, we are grateful for the Minister for the Environment of the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia in considering our statement on this urgent wildlife conservation and global security issue for our strong support to close the loopholes in domestic ivory markets and to ban the import and export of all raw and worked ivory items in Australia, subject to carefully defined exemptions as outlined above.

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<sup>16</sup> “Defending Nigeria’s last elephants against poachers,” 25 March 2016, Phys.org, <https://phys.org/news/2016-03-defending-nigeria-elephants-poachers.html> (accessed on 12 August 2019)

<sup>17</sup> Her Excellency Menna Rawlings, British High Commissioner to Australia, *Proof Hansard*, 9 July 2018, p. 23

<sup>18</sup> UK government, ‘Government confirms UK ban on ivory sales,’ Press release, 3 April 2017, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-confirms-uk-ban-on-ivory-sales> (accessed 10 March 2019)

<sup>19</sup> *Executive Order 13648* to implement the *National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking*. Executive Office of the President; 02/11/2014

<sup>20</sup> *National Security Strategy of the United States*. Executive Office of the President; 02/11/2015

<sup>21</sup> *Defining transnational organized wildlife crime*, sourced from [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/wildlife/WLC16\\_Chapter\\_1.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/wildlife/WLC16_Chapter_1.pdf) (accessed on 25 December 2017)

<sup>22</sup> Dr. Rebecca Johnson, Australia Museum, Museums and Galleries Australia, and the Council of Heads of Australian Faunal Collections, *Proof Hansard*, 9 July 2018, p. 26.