

September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017

Hon Kenneth Leung  
Chairperson  
Bills Committee  
Legislative Council  
Hong Kong

Re: CAP 586 Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants (Amendment) Bill 2017

Dear Hon. Kenneth Leung,

I am writing for and on behalf of the Veterinary Specialty Hospital of Hong Kong (VSH Hong Kong) in support of the Government's Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants (Amendment) Bill 2017.

VSH is a specialty referral and emergency animal health care centre in Wan Chai, Hong Kong. We are dedicated to providing advanced, human-level medical care to our animal patients. As leaders and experts in the veterinary profession, our specialists and staff provide education, training, and awareness of animal health topics to the entire region, striving to elevate the level of care that animals throughout Asia are afforded. As such, we understand the enormous societal importance of animal welfare and conservation.

The people of Hong Kong love their animals as family members. Pet parents in Hong Kong go to unbelievable lengths to provide care and comfort to the animals in their homes, and regularly extend that compassion to ALL animals. Hong Kong people fight against animal cruelty, feed animals when they're hungry and take them in when they are wet and cold. It is my firm belief that the people of Hong Kong, and in particular the pet owners who seek expert medical care for their own pets, loathe to see the destroying of an elephant for the creation of a trinket or a statue. The Hong Kong people I see every day would cringe at the image of an elephant being murdered for the illegal harvesting of her ivory.

VSH Hong Kong strongly supports the proposed amendments under the CAP 586 Amendment Bill. With particular focus, we support:

- The complete and expedited ban on the ivory trade, and
- Harsher penalties for those involved in the illegal trade.

Further,

- We do not support any form of financial compensation for ivory traders.



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1. A complete and expedited ban on all ivory trade should be enacted.

The ivory trade represents a serious animal welfare issue while simultaneously threatening the conservation of one of the world's most iconic species.

Regulating the trade in ivory does not save the lives of elephants. History and current events have both revealed that even regulated trade simply increases demand for ivory, driving up illegal killing of elephants and smuggling of elephant tusks.

Elephant populations declined in the 1980s due to high demand for ivory products. Although at that time the ivory trade was legal, most ivory was harvested via illegal poaching, as much of it is today. A worldwide ban on ivory trade in 1989 resulted in the start of recovery for elephant populations – but it also resonated with the public, raising awareness about the threat of extinction and how quickly it can arise in the face of ivory demand. CITES auctions of stockpiled “legal” ivory in 1999 and 2008 inadvertently introduced new demand for ivory, adding fuel to the poaching and smuggling industry as illegal ivory could easily be intermixed with “legal” stock. The result has been devastating losses of both human AND elephant lives. Legal sale of ivory nearly wiped out elephant populations in the 1980's, and it will do so today unless it is completely halted.

2. Financial compensation for ivory traders should not be offered.

Compensation for ivory traders sends a message to anyone who may have the potential to earn money from illegal trading: that the possibility of gaining wealth through poaching, stockpiling, smuggling, or selling ivory on the illegal market DOES still exist.

Ivory eligible for legal trade has provided a cover for an expansive network of criminal trade. Illegal ivory is virtually indistinguishable from legal ivory, and illegal ivory is used to replace legal stock with no means to differentiate the two. Fraud is unavoidable and cannot be effectively policed or controlled. Any compensation or additional loopholes in policy will allow the cycle of this criminal trade to continue indefinitely.

Ivory craftsmen and traders have had more than ample time and opportunity to leave the trade. Instead, the market is full of illegal ivory products. Further, with demand for ivory products still soaring, ongoing criminal trade loopholes and the potential to generate revenue will result in the recruitment of a new generation of craftsmen.

3. The penalties for smuggling and trading ivory must be severe and actively enforced.

Criminalizing the ivory trade is not enough on its own. Penalties for illegal smuggling and trade must be harsh enough to deter criminals from engaging in the illegal activity. Without harsh penalties, the illegal trade will continue as the potential for financial gain outweighs the risk of legal repercussion.



With any flexibility or allowances short of a complete ivory ban, or without harsh penalties for wildlife crime, the message to poachers, smugglers, or to countries looking to gain revenue from ivory is that the potential for ivory-generated income DOES still exist. This message must be stopped. Policing illegal poachers is expensive and dangerous. With ongoing threats to elephant populations come synchronous threats to tourism dollars. And critically, elephants, because of relentless poaching for their ivory, are now in danger of extinction within our lifetime. The only way to protect and conserve elephants is to completely and permanently abolish the ivory trade. A complete ban on the ivory trade in Hong Kong with serious penalties for wildlife crime and no possibility for ivory-generated revenue is, therefore, critically important.

The demand for ivory cannot be changed overnight. It may take generations to completely eliminate the desire for ivory products, as education, awareness, and compassion finally surpass greed and materialism. What we CAN do now is stop legal ivory trade, and enforce punishment for illegal ivory trade that is severe enough for poachers, smugglers and traders to choose not take the risk. We can ensure that there is no further income generated from elephant ivory in Hong Kong. Your support of the proposed amendments and a complete ban on the ivory trade in Hong Kong represents Hong Kong's dedication and commitment to forward progress, to the salvation of the world's elephants, and to animal welfare in general.

Sincerely Yours,



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