



Legislative proposal to phase out the local trade in ivory and progress of Government's efforts on nature conservation and marine conservation re: LC Paper No. CB(1)705/16-17(05)

Anthony James to: panel_ea@legco.gov.hk

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To the Chairman and the Honorable Members of the Legislative Council Panel on Environmental Affairs

Hong Kong must do its share to really protect elephants[i],[ii]

If science and knowledge were the basis for international conservation policies, the approach to elephant protection and conservation by the world's relevant NGOs (i.e. the international conservation groups) and the governments of countries which have the privileged responsibility for the stewardship of the remaining herds of elephants and the government's whose citizens fuel the demand for illegal ivory products would be completely different to what we have now. This 'new order' of international conservation policies would include amongst other measures, the unilaterally closing of all markets for elephant products, and ban all international trade in elephant products.

Such a step is not without precedent for numerous governments around the world have closed markets and imposed trade bans on the dealings of a number of other species (e.g. different governments of the world have banned the trade and dealing in marine mammal products including white-coated harp seal (*Pagophilus groenlandicus*) pups, blue-backed hooded seal (*Cystophora cristata*) pups and the International Whaling Commission has had a moratorium on commercial whaling since 1986/87)

Even if ivory markets were banned immediately poaching and illegal trade would continue in the short term, because the demand for the illegal product would ensure that this market now established would be extremely difficult to close down, but that should not deter Hong Kong from playing its efforts to reduce poaching levels as quickly as possible. Hong Kong can play a role in this deterrence by phasing out the local trade in ivory products. The demand for ivory in China, has risen and continues to rise, and Hong Kong as the gateway for much trade between the China and the west, can lead by example and ban all remaining 'legal' vestiges of the barbaric trade for elephant ivory,

By banning all aspects of the remaining of the 'legal' trade in elephant ivory, Hong Kong could then turn the resources it now allocates to policing the 'legal' trade to massive public education programs in Hong Kong for both local residents and Mainland tourist to reduce the burgeoning demand for ivory.

Just about everything associated with elephants is uncertain, not just their future. For example, the world conservation groups are uncertain about how many of the species currently survive. These NGOs do not even have accurate information about the current distribution of elephants in large parts of their presumed range. What these groups do know however, is that elephant tusks and carved ivory are frequently seized in illegal international trade.

But the trade in elephant ivory is so murky because of the secret, illicit and therefore non-transparent ways in which corrupt governments and government officials, and foreign nationals who currently help to facilitate illegal activities, make the trade in illegal ivory untraceable as they blend illegal ivory into the trade of 'legal' ivory. Therefore, if the NGOs have no idea about the provenance of 'legal' ivory they have even less ideas about the provenance of the seized ivory,

including the number of dead elephants involved, whether the ivory came from poached animals, from animals that died of natural causes or from animals that died during culling operations. In no case can NGOs be sure when the elephants actually died. This year? Last year? Or sometime in the more distant past. The extent of the current demand and its very real potential for growth remains unknown and, is very likely, unknowable because of the corruption involved in the trade of ivory, placing incredible pressures on the survival of the remaining elephant herds. Furthermore, elephants, particularly in Africa, have to contend with the uncertainties associated with civil unrest and military conflicts. They also have to contend with the new environmental uncertainties associated with global warming. If ever there were a compelling case for implementing a precautionary approach to protect and conserve a unique and threatened group of animals, it would surely include the case for conserving our remaining elephant herds.

Therefore responsible governments such as Hong Kong, are confronted with an illegal trade that is easily blended with the 'legal' trade and which, when compounded by scientific uncertainty associated with the paucity of available data means that there is no way a 'legal' ivory trade can be supported or regulated by a government that cares about conservation and the survival of an endangered species. Therefore the 'legal' must be phased out, and Hong Kong must play its part in this by banning all aspects of the remaining 'legal' trade in elephant ivory and its artifacts because only through moral judgment and political choice can we, as a morally responsible society, take the steps necessary to safeguard the future of elephants.

Dr Anthony James
BVSc (Hons), MSc, MANZCVSc, MRCVS

[i] Elephants & Ivory

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<http://www.ifaw.org/united-states/news/download-elephants-ivory-highlights-stubborn-hurdles-still-remaining-elephant-conservation> and https://issuu.com/ifaw/docs/elephants_and_ivory_issue

[ii] In Hong Kong, we know burning ivory will help to save elephants

<http://www.ifaw.org/united-states/news/hong-kong-we-know-burning-ivory-will-help-save-elephants>