

Submission

**Re Phasing out the Local Hong Kong Trade in Ivory Trade
for the Hong Kong Legislative Council Panel on Environmental Affairs**

Reference: LC Paper No. CB (1)705/16-17(05)

By way of introduction, my name is Virginia Woolf and I am the founder of New Zealanders for Endangered Wildlife. I am an English teacher and live in Auckland, New Zealand and have been actively involved in wildlife issues for the past 5 years.

In particular, I am deeply concerned about the plight of the African elephant as a result of ongoing ivory legal and illegal trading and the urgent need for global legislative measures, including tightening of loopholes here in New Zealand, to protect and save the iconic elephant for now and for posterity before it is too late. To that end, I have been the Auckland co-ordinator for the GMFER global march movement for elephants, rhinos and also lions to help raise awareness and take action as well as petitioning and lobbying the New Zealand government over our involvement (albeit small) in ivory and rhino horn trade issues.

In 2015, I spent some time in Kenya and while on safari, I was alarmed to see how few elephants were there in reality compared to what had been the case even twenty or so years ago. I sponsor 4 baby elephants at the renowned David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust elephant orphanage in Kenya in an attempt to do my part to help the species survive as well as undertaking wildlife advocacy.

I would like to commend the Hong Kong government, through the legislative council panel, for discussing the ivory trade issue and inviting submissions on the subject with the intent to use the legislative process to take steps to protect the elephant from the very real threat of extinction by 'phasing out the local trade in ivory and imposition of heavier penalties on smuggling and illegal trade of endangered species.' (para 6, pg 3) This is a crucial step in the right direction to conserve wild elephants which are rapidly declining in numbers throughout the African continent and confirmed by the 2016 'Great Elephant Census'.

I endorse the measures which you intend to take in the legislative proposal to phase out the local trade in ivory and for your intention to introduce the 'Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants (Amendment) Bill 2017 to effect a three-step plan 'The Plan' which includes 'banning the import and re-export of all elephant hunting trophies; banning the import and re-export of pre-Convention ivory and banning the possession for commercial purposes of all ivory including pre-Convention or post-Convention types'.

However, it concerns me that antique ivory is exempt from the proposed ban and will still be 'imported, re-exported and possessed for commercial purposes'. This is a loophole that unscrupulous traders will use to maintain the market in ivory given that wildlife trade criminals can fake ivory to make it look old.

According the recent BBC documentary series 'Saving Africa's Elephants: Hugh and the Ivory War', the presenter Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall and his contacts, went undercover in Hong Kong and discovered that so-called antique ivory, particularly from Europe, was helping to keep the local ivory market buoyant. The traders were claiming that their ivory met the appropriate regulations but they could not prove conclusively that it was legally sourced so were very nervous while negotiations were underway about the ivory items in question available for sale. Available for purchase, were many carved ivory items and tusks of dubious origin suspected to be from freshly poached elephants mixed with the allegedly pre-ban and 'old' ivory stock.

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No doubt DNA testing could be used to source origins but that would most likely be an expensive process. Therefore, apart from some stringent exceptions permitted under CITES such as ivory used for scientific studies, education and law enforcement, in my view, All ivory trading must be banned including so-called antique items.

Here in New Zealand, there is antique ivory for sale but very little interest is shown in purchasing it. The market for antique ivory would therefore appear to be confined to a privileged, wealthy elite who may well buy such items for status and an investment perhaps banking on extinction and in the hope that ivory trade markets will again flourish.

It is indeed important that those involved in ivory carving, as a means to making a living, are encouraged to find alternatives as the continuation of ivory carving factories and outlets is helping to fuel demand.

Given that mainland China intends to close down legal ivory trading this year, it will be crucial for Hong Kong to do the same, particularly given the close proximity, so that those involved in the local trade get a very clear message that Hong Kong cannot become an alternative conduit for any trade in ivory.

Although 'stepping up enforcement actions against the illegal trade' is important, it is infinitely preferable for the trade in ivory to be banned as soon as possible. Despite all the best intentions of enforcement agencies, illegal ivory is constantly being smuggled and finding its way into markets where it is sold mixed in with legal ivory. Therefore, I do not support the ivory traders wanting ivory trading to continue under the pretext of catering for 'tourists'. I strongly support the legislative proposal to 'phase out the local ivory trade and to increase maximum penalties stipulated in the Ordinance' and wholeheartedly agree with the green groups that the 'total ban should be effected as soon as possible'. (para 19, pg 8)

'When the buying stops, the killing can too' (Wild Aid maxim)

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Tuesday, 23 May 2017