

The urgent need for an ivory ban Hong Kong

The discussion around the slaughter of elephants and the largely uncontrolled global trade in ivory is a high-profile conservation issue with Hong Kong firmly in the spotlight as a major trade hub, both legal and illegal. Given the increasingly serious condition of many elephant populations, the clear linkage of the trade with organized crime, the inability to control the trade into and through Hong Kong, and illegal, unregulated and unmonitored trade by some traders, it is clearly essential that Hong Kong acts quickly, firmly and decisively to bring this practice to a close.

Our laws have loopholes which have long been blatantly exploited by some traders and our limited enforcement capability means that law enforcement around this trade, despite existing legislation, is largely ineffective. It is well documented that laundering is continuing and widely known that some traders even encourage buyers to break the law by concealing the ivory they purchase when travelling internationally. Even relatively simple conditions, such as the public show of possession licences (a licence condition), have not been respected by many of our traders. The evidence for all of the above is clear and unambiguous, both in terms of the trade practices and **regarding the science which strongly supports a need for effective protection for these threatened species.**

A 'World Class' city should be much better than we currently are at controlling the trade, ensuring it is legal and being part of a civilized global community that supports biologically sustainable practices. Our commitments to CITES and also the Convention on Biological Diversity require us to act on this issue. Quite simply, the trade is out of control. The Hong Kong government, if it fails to act decisively and quickly to end this trade, is therefore complicit in the continuing illegal and sometimes extremely cruel practices associated with elephant hunting. Even those who try to safeguard the animals are being killed; the frontline wardens.

Need for urgent action

The need to act has now become urgent due to decades of ineffective action and the worsening status of many elephant populations. Also, as ivory gets harder to come by legally, there is more incentive for illegal trade. Two of the major global traders, China and the United States, are set to stop the trade shortly reflecting the clear need to act and urgency to do so. Traders have had almost 30 years to liquidate legal stocks acquired prior to 1989 with many traders evidently laundering newer (illegally obtained) ivory as pre-1989 stock; in other words treating new as old stock to continue their sales.

No need to compensate traders

The proposed ban has been a long time in coming and **there has been plenty of time for traders and plenty of indications from the government side of the proposed changes, their relevance and rationale.** There is a licensing system for the trade

which had the clear intention for those involved in the trade to liquidate remaining stocks. Responsible traders should long have developed an exit business plan, just as any other business facing changes would have done. In fact, the ivory trade has had a particularly long phase-out period and plenty of time for businesses to adjust since they have not been, legally, able to acquire new ivory for decades.

Given the extensive clear indications over a long period of time and a particularly long phase-out period for old ivory, and given the clear government intentions, it would be entirely inappropriate for the Hong Kong public to pay for the poor business practices and planning of ivory traders and I would expect a well-justified backlash from the public sector if any compensation were to be paid.

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