

Press release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WildAid launches sea turtle campaign in Hainan with actor Liu Ye

(May 23, 2018) Sanya, Hainan – In a new effort to protect increasingly endangered sea turtles in a region that has long been a focal point of the sea turtle trade, multiple Chinese government agencies are partnering with WildAid celebrity ambassador Liu Ye to announce new measures that will both protect habitat and reduce demand for sea turtle products.

The efforts are being spearheaded by the Fisheries Resource Management Bureau under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, establishing a new “Sea Turtle Alliance” comprising a wide range of government agencies, academic institutions, and NGOs related to the conservation of sea turtles. The alliance, formally established today in Sanya, Hainan will help focus a new emphasis on improving management of protected areas, combatting illegal trade, and increasing public awareness on the plight of endangered sea turtles. WildAid also released a new series of messages featuring actor Liu Ye and his wife Anais Martane that will be distributed throughout China this summer.

All seven species of sea turtles face a wide range of threats including habitat loss, ocean pollution and plastic debris, bycatch, and the consumption of their meat, eggs, and products made from their shells. All species are listed on CITES Appendix I, prohibiting any form of trade in their products. But a significant illegal trade continues around the world, primarily in Asia and Central America. Recent years have seen a high number of trade networks operating around the Coral Triangle, the South China Sea, and the border areas of China and Vietnam. Since 2013, a reported over 1100 live or sea turtles or their taxidermies have been confiscated from illegal smugglers on the open seas in the region. Hawksbill turtles are often sold as whole taxidermies or their shells are made into products including jewelry, musical instruments, and other collectables.

A WildAid survey of 1,500 people in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Beihai, and Sanya found that 17% of respondents have purchased sea turtle products in the past, and 22% expressed interest in purchasing the products in the future. Nearly half of consumers bought the products as souvenirs, with 69% of purchases taking place at domestic souvenir shops, the majority upon recommendation by their tour group guide. Only 57% of respondents knew that it was illegal to purchase sea turtle products in China.

Speaking at the event, actor Liu Ye said that “we can all do something really simple to help protect sea turtles, and that is simply not buying sea turtle products. We should all also reduce our use of plastics, and keep plastic waste away from coastlines.”

Once found throughout southern China, sea turtles are rapidly disappearing from its coastline, now only found in a handful of areas, including Hainan. As part of the sea turtle

alliance launch event, 10 sea turtles were released back into the wild with GPS trackers to help monitor their movements and improve conservation efforts. It was also announced that sea turtles would soon be uplisted in China from national level II to national level I protected species, helping place further emphasis on their conservation efforts.

As part of the launch event, Chinese Fisheries authorities also destroyed a stockpile of confiscated sea turtle products along with other illegal marine products including giant clams, corals, sea horses and more. WildAid China Chief Representative Steve Blake noted that “it’s encouraging to see these strengthened enforcement efforts, but we must also increase public awareness in China on the plight of sea turtles and the illegality of their products if we are going to stop the illegal trade and truly protect these animals.”

Media Assets:

[PSA link]

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About WildAid

WildAid is a non-profit organization with a mission to end the illegal wildlife trade in our lifetimes. While most wildlife conservation groups focus on protecting animals from poaching, WildAid primarily works to reduce global consumption of wildlife products such as shark fin, elephant ivory, rhino horn, and sea turtle products by persuading consumers and providing comprehensive marine enforcement. With an unrivaled portfolio of celebrity ambassadors - including Prince William and Yao Ming - and global network of media partners, WildAid leverages \$289 million in annual pro bono media support with a simple message: When the Buying Stops, the Killing Can Too. For more information, visit WildAid.org.