



Clerk to Subcommittee on Issues Relating to the Development of Chinese Medicine
Legislative Council Secretariat
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central, Hong Kong

E-mail : sc_hs_dcm@legco.gov.hk

Born Free Foundation

Broadlands Business Campus
 Langhurstwood Road
 Horsham
 West Sussex
 RH12 4QP
 United Kingdom

01403 240170
info@bornfree.org.uk
www.bornfree.org.uk
 Charity No 1070906

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Dear Sir/Madam,

Subcommittee on Issues Relating to the Development of Chinese Medicine

Written submission by the Born Free Foundation

The Born Free Foundation is a UK-registered charity. We promote Compassionate Conservation to enhance the survival of threatened species in the wild and protect natural habitats while respecting the needs and safeguarding the welfare of individual animals. We seek to have a positive impact on animals in the wild and protect their ecosystems in perpetuity, for their own intrinsic value and for the critical roles they play within the natural world.

We welcome the opportunity to provide comments to Hong Kong Legislative Council's Subcommittee on Issues Relating to the Development of Chinese Medicine, for consideration at its forthcoming debate scheduled for the morning of Monday, 24th February 2020.

Chinese medicine has a long history, and provides the primary health service for millions of people. As such, enhancing the overall standard of the Chinese Medicine industry in Hong Kong through, *inter alia*, improved teaching, clinical training, scientific research and manufacturing standards, alongside associated assurance processes, should provide citizens with significant reassurance that they have access to the highest quality services.

However, we are concerned that there is no recognition in the background paper of the need to account for the impacts that the demand for Chinese medicines containing products derived from plants and animals have on species conservation, wider biodiversity, and animal welfare.

According to the Global Biodiversity Assessment published by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) in 2019, the current decline in nature is unprecedented in human history, with an estimated million species at risk of extinction. Direct exploitation, which includes overharvesting of wildlife for legal and illegal trade, is identified as the second most important driver of biodiversity loss. The report described the current global response to this crisis as insufficient, urged that transformative changes are needed to restore and protect nature, and asserted that opposition from vested interests can be overcome for the public good.¹

¹ <https://ipbes.net/news/ipbes-global-assessment-summary-policymakers-pdf>



Many species used in Chinese medicines, for which demand is significantly increasing, are threatened with extinction, and there have been numerous reports and publications in the scientific literature and popular media over recent years documenting concerns that this demand is contributing to species declines, with the risk of associated disruption to wider ecosystem health and stability.

The challenges to wildlife conservation presented by the use of endangered species in traditional medicines was highlighted by TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network, as far back as 1994². The negative impacts on animal species' conservation status, resulting from overexploitation to supply products for traditional medicines, has been well documented in respect of tigers, pangolins, rhinoceroses, wild water buffalo, Chinese alligator, Asian elephants, musk deer, sun bears, banteng, sea turtles and many others. Demand for traditional medicinal use has also be associated with over-harvesting of many species of plants.

In addition, the harvesting and farming of wild animals in order to derive body parts or products for traditional medicinal use, can have profound implications for the welfare of target animals. Many thousands of bears continue to languish in captive conditions that are clearly completely unsuitable for their welfare, for the purpose of bile extraction. Tigers and other big cats in intensive farms outnumber their wild counterparts, so that their bones and other body parts can be harvested, often illegally, for use on traditional medicines and tonics. Rhinoceros are frequently sedated by poaching gangs in Africa so their horns can be hacked off and trafficked into the traditional medicine trade, leaving the animals to suffer often prolonged and painful deaths. Many other species are extracted from the wild to be traded and transported live, in order to maintain their 'freshness', resulting in often extreme levels of animal suffering.

There is precedent for the consideration of the impacts of demand for Chinese medicine on threatened species. In 1993 rhino horn and tiger bone were removed from the traditional Chinese pharmacopoeia, and in 2010 the World Federation of Chinese Medical Societies released a statement urging members not to use tiger bone or any other parts from endangered species³. In addition, many reputable Chinese medicine practitioners now prescribe substitutes for animal-based remedies.

As referred to above, Hong Kong has long been associated with the illegal trade in wildlife as a consumer and transit destination⁴. The sourcing of ingredients for use in Chinese medicines is therefore of acute concern. Just two wildlife seizures by the Hong Kong Customs and Excise Department in early 2019 were valued at tens of millions of Hong Kong dollars, involving 24 rhino horns weighing 40kg⁵ and 8,300kg of pangolin scales⁶.

All necessary due diligence must therefore be applied by the Subcommittee in mandating appropriate protocols, restrictions and safeguards, to ensure that the expansion in use of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong does not further contribute to transnational organised crime and biodiversity loss, as well as to ensure legal and safe provenance.

We therefore urge the Subcommittee to prioritise the consideration of the impacts of demand for plant and animal products on biodiversity and animal welfare, in its deliberations. Since the Initiatives described are being mooted for government subsidy, we trust that the appropriate level of consideration regarding such potential impacts will be afforded by the Subcommittee.

² <https://www.traffic.org/site/assets/files/9711/endangered-species-and-patented-oriental-medicines.pdf>

³ <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/03/100312164653.htm>

⁴ Eg. <https://www.admcf.org/research-reports/trading-in-extinction-the-dark-side-of-hong-kongs-wildlife-trade/> (Chinese and English versions)

⁵ https://www.customs.gov.hk/en/publication_press/press/index_id_2451.html

⁶ <https://phys.org/news/2019-02-hong-kong-seizes-tonnes-pangolin.html>

Specifically, we urge the Subcommittee to:

- Consider removing all animal products from the pharmacopeia, or at the very least those which are derived from threatened or near-threatened species, and those which are produced, harvested and/or extracted inhumanely
- Restrict the use of products derived from plants to species that are not considered threatened with extinction or near-threatened, or that can be artificially propagated
- Include provisions within the proposed Chinese Medicine Development Fund for identifying plant-based alternatives to animal products for incorporation into Chinese medicines
- Ensure the development and application of rigid protocols to ensure a secure and legal chain of custody of ingredients and medicines, and a certification process whereby traders and manufacturers are vetted for prior offences prior to being registered for trade and production.
- Mandate the Government Chinese Medicines Testing Institute to include reference standards for the sustainability of products derived from plants and animals, and the humaneness of animal-derived products
- Include among the membership of the Chinese Medicine Council of Hong Kong experts in sustainability and animal welfare, and mandate the Council to restrict the licencing of proprietary Chinese medicines imported, manufactured or sold in Hong Kong, to those whose components meet the highest standards of environmental sustainability and animal welfare
- Ensure that the Chinese Medicine Development Committee incorporates consideration of the need for Chinese Medicine to be ecologically sustainable and humane, in its development of the direction and long term strategy for the future of Chinese Medicine in Hong Kong
- Endeavour to incorporate the prioritisation of ecological sustainability and humaneness of Chinese Medicine in the Memorandum on Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Chinese Medicine Co-operation

The current drive to reform the development of Chinese medicine provides a unique opportunity for Hong Kong to set out the conditions by which Chinese medicine in the territory can be not only safe, effective and widely available, but also legal, sustainable and humane, and to set an example the rest of the world can follow.

We trust these comments are helpful, and stand ready to provide clarification or further information as required. If you can acknowledge safe receipt of this document it would be very much appreciated.

Sincerely,



Dr Mark Jones, Head of Policy

For and on behalf of The Born Free Foundation