

14 May 2018

Committee Secretary
Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Submission from Action for Elephants UK in support of a total ban on Australia's domestic trade in ivory and rhino horn

Action for Elephants UK is a grassroots group fighting to save elephants and to end poaching and the ivory trade that perpetuates it. We are writing to express our support for a total ban of Australia's trade in ivory and rhino horn.

Legal trade is a cover for illegal trade

It has been amply demonstrated that the existence of a legal ivory trade serves as a cover for illegal sales of ivory, while continuing to perpetuate the cycle of supply and demand. The current situation in Australia, where buyers and sellers can freely and legally trade ivory items, and where auction houses boast large collections of ivory items, is one giant loophole for illegal ivory to enter the market – including new ivory from recently poached elephants. (An IFAW report showed that only 8% of those auction houses had documentation proving the age of the thousands of ivory items they were selling.)

If the Australian government is genuinely concerned about the fate of African elephants, it must close this loophole once and for all – as other countries have done and to lead the way for more to follow – and bring in a total ban on all domestic trade in ivory and rhino horn. The current regulations are simply not fit for purpose and do nothing to combat the crisis.

African elephants and rhinos face extinction

Tens of thousands of elephants are still being slaughtered every year for their ivory. This rate of poaching is pushing African elephants ever closer to extinction, and the window of opportunity for saving them is rapidly shrinking. Since poaching for the ivory trade is the most pressing threat facing Africa's elephants, the closure of all ivory markets, both international and domestic, is critical for their survival.

In September 2016, the results of the **Great Elephant Census** – the first aerial census of Africa's elephant populations – revealed that one-third of Africa's elephants were wiped out in just seven years (2007 to 2014) – equivalent to 144,000 elephants. Between 2010 and 2012 alone, over 100,000 elephants were brutally slaughtered for their ivory. The poaching continues today across much of Africa, with some countries seeing an increase in illegal killings.

Rhinos are also in dire peril because of poaching for their horn, which has soared in recent years – in South Africa alone, by 9000% since 2007. Furthermore, the trade in ivory and horn is fuelled by organized criminal networks and widespread corruption; known terrorist groups are involved in both the poaching of elephants and rhinos and trafficking their body parts, reaping huge profits.

Domestic bans show the way

The past four years have seen an increase in international momentum to ban ivory: following a joint announcement on ivory bans by the USA and China in September 2015, the USA brought in a ban on ivory in July 2016, and China, against all the odds, brought in a total ban and the closure of its carving workshops by the end of 2017. In June 2017, Hong Kong – home to the world's biggest retail ivory market – launched a landmark bill to ban its domestic ivory trade, amid accusations that authorities were lagging behind China in phasing out the market.

In March this year, the UK government announced a near-total ban on the domestic ivory trade, with certain targeted exemptions. The arguments of the antiques trade, in fierce opposition to a total ban, were thankfully deemed of secondary importance to the extinction of one of the world's most critical keystone species. We hope the Australian government will come to the same conclusions in evaluating its own ban.

Against this backdrop of global momentum, we strongly urge the Australian government to enforce a total ban on the trade in ivory and rhino horn, thus sending a strong message internationally and domestically that these body parts of endangered animals have no part to play in the modern world. Without such action by Australia and all other countries with ivory and horn markets, elephants and rhinos will soon be on an irreversible trajectory to extinction.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Action for Elephants UK

<http://actionforelephantsuk.org/>

References:

Shocking IFAW report reveals how auction houses in Australia contribute to the illegal ivory trade

<https://www.ifaw.org/australia/news/shocking-ifaw-report-reveals-how-auction-houses-australia-contribute-illegal-ivory-trade>

Legal ivory sales drove dramatic increase in elephant poaching

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/jun/13/legal-ivory-sale-drove-dramatic-increase-in-elephant-poaching-study-shows>

A Legal Trade in Ivory Would Wipe Out Elephants

<https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2016/09/wildlife-legal-ivory-trade-not-sustainable-study/>

The ivory trade isn't just a disaster for elephants. It threatens our future too

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/aug/12/ivory-trade-elephants-future-forest-poachers>

The Great Elephant Census

<http://www.greatelephantcensus.com/>

Government confirms ban on UK ivory sales

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-confirms-uk-ban-on-ivory-sales>