

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

30 May 2018

Via e-mail: [le.committee@aph.gov.au](mailto:le.committee@aph.gov.au)

Dear Committee Secretary,

I am writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) – and our hundreds of thousands of members and supporters – in response to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement's inquiry into the trade in elephant ivory and rhinoceros horns.

### **Legal Trade Perpetuates Illegal Trade**

Australia currently permits the domestic buying and selling of elephant ivory and rhino horns obtained from a vintage source, such as antique carved arts. However, there is significant evidence that the legal trade goes hand in hand with the illegal one, providing cover for the distribution of ivory and horns from newly poached animals and sustaining the remaining market demand.

Over a nine-month period in 2016, more than 2,400 ivory items were found for sale at 153 auctions conducted by 17 auction houses, according to an audit undertaken by the International Fund for Animal Welfare. (Investigators also discovered seven rhino horn items for sale at five auction houses.) Only 8 per cent of those auction houses had documentation showing the age of the ivory items they were selling. The current situation, in which ivory items can be openly and legally traded in Australia, including through huge collections in auction houses, provides a bottleneck through which illegal ivory can be fed into the market. It's therefore not difficult to see why, in the last decade alone, 322 imported and 79 exported ivory items have been confiscated by Australian authorities – and these figures are clearly just the tip of the iceberg that is the total amount traded.

It's clear that the current legislative provision falls significantly short and that loopholes need to be closed as a matter of priority. As long as the trade continues in Australia, we'll see the poaching of elephants and rhinos in other parts of the world.

### **Elephants and Rhinos Face Extinction**

Africa's elephants are in crisis. The Great Elephant Census conducted in 2016 found that almost one-third of the population – 144,000 animals – had died between 2007 and 2014. The population had fallen to approximately 350,000 by 2016 and continues to decline year after year. Poachers are slaughtering these majestic animals to steal their tusks and

#### Affiliates:

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- PETA Asia
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supply ivory to organised criminal gangs, who sell it on the illegal market. In addition to wiping these animals from the face of the Earth, the trade in ivory funds corruption and terrorist organisations such as Boko Haram.

Rhino populations are also collapsing as a result of poaching. The criminal trade in their horns has soared by 9,000 per cent since 2007 in South Africa alone, and, like the trade in ivory, it fuels mafias and known terrorist organisations, which rake in huge sums of money through poaching and trafficking.

### **Domestic Bans Spread Across the Globe**

In recent years, there has been growing international pressure to shut down the trade in ivory in order to protect elephants and rhinos. China introduced a total ban and closed its carving workshops at the end of 2017, and Hong Kong – home to the largest ivory retail market in the world – announced a ban on its domestic trade in January 2018. Most recently, the UK government introduced an almost-complete ban on the domestic ivory trade in March, with certain targeted exemptions. It's noteworthy that Britain deemed the arguments in favour of saving elephants from extinction more important than maintaining the antiques trade.

In summary, PETA supports a complete ban on the domestic trade in elephant ivory and rhino horns in order to save these iconic species from extinction. By adopting these measures, Australia would send a strong message to the world that it respects animals and takes defending their interests seriously.

Should you require additional information, I can be reached at

Yours sincerely,

Mimi Bekhechi  
Head of Campaigns

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