



Endangered Wildlife Trust

Perspective on the Legal Trade of African Elephant Ivory

The Endangered Wildlife Trust's (EWT) mission is to conserve threatened species and ecosystems in southern Africa to the benefit of all people.

This position represents the EWT's view on the legal trade of African Elephant ivory. The EWT is deeply concerned by the upsurge in elephant poaching in recent years, and the latest population census which shows that African Elephant populations decreased by an estimated 144,000 during 2007–2014. Today only some 350,000 African Elephants remain on the continent ⁱ and these numbers continue to decline rapidly, while elephant poaching rates are higher than they have been for at least 25 years.

We acknowledge the importance of African Elephants as drivers of tourism, and that they thereby provide support towards the economic stability of African Elephant range countries. Elephants are also “ecosystem engineers” and play a critical role in the shape and functioning of Africa's savannahs and forests.

Legal trade in ivory must, first and foremost, result in clear, undisputable and measurable positive benefits for the conservation of elephants. We see no compelling evidence for this. We also note, with increasing concern,

that:

- Despite the once-off, CITES-approved, international sale of 107 tonnes of ivory during 2008 from Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe (collectively) to China and Japan, consumer demand for ivory remains high and poaching of African Elephants continues.^{ii/iii}

- Ivory continues to be traded illegally, and even under the guise of the legal ivory trade. Several sources and reports indicate that some ivory traders use legally sourced ivory to launder illegal ivory. This is facilitated by the current lack of traceability in the movement of elephant ivory and the poor detection rates of illegal elephant ivory on the black market. This illustrates that existing measures put in place to control and manage legal ivory flows are ineffective in curbing illegal trade.^{iv/v}
- The increasing and detrimental occurrence of ivory poaching-related poisoning incidents has a widespread impact on other threatened wildlife, particularly five Critically Endangered vulture species, in the African landscape.^{vi/vii}
- Strategies and capacity to enforce existing regulations to curb poaching and elephant ivory trafficking are ineffective, as evidenced by the ongoing occurrence of large ivory seizures^{viii}, and require strengthening in order to prevent the laundering of illegal ivory.



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- The illegal elephant ivory trade has been linked to transnational criminal syndicates and terrorist groups, although the veracity of claims about the latter have been disputed.^{ix} This increases state security risks, whilst fuelling ongoing corruption and social decay.^{x/xi}

Given these concerns, the EWT is, at this time, opposed to the commercial trade in elephant ivory. The EWT recognises that most elephant range states are under increasing pressure from elephant poaching syndicates, whilst no consumer markets are adequately controlled or managed in countries where the demand for ivory remains high. The involvement of organised transnational crime networks in wildlife trafficking has exacerbated the challenges facing range states in curbing poaching and shutting down illegal wildlife trade routes. The EWT recognises that a small number of elephant range states may be able to effectively control their highly limited domestic ivory trade markets, but our concern remains with the global trade in elephant ivory and the lack of adequate controls between and within the countries where demand for ivory remains unsustainably high.

The EWT acknowledges that consumptive use of natural resources forms an important aspect of many elephant range states' conservation management plans and the EWT supports the principles of consumptive utilisation of wildlife resources to the benefit of wildlife and people. However, the EWT bases its position on all wildlife trade on the premise that this trade does not threaten their survival in the wild. The EWT's position on elephant ivory is founded on our concerns over the current lack of traceability in the movement of elephant ivory, the poor detection rates of illegal elephant ivory on the black market, the lack of adequate controls and compliance measures and – fundamentally – the continued rapid decline in elephant populations. This does not contradict our position on the tenets of sustainable use and its role in the effective conservation of many species.

The EWT supports the notion that a legal trade in elephant ivory can only be contemplated when a demonstrably effective, enforceable and conservation-based management and compliance system is in place which is fully enforced by source, transit and consumer countries^{xii/xiii}. The EWT further acknowledges that trade bans alone are not effective for the conservation of a species, and that rigorous compliance strategies, supported by well capacitated and resourced agencies, a robust legal framework, a scrupulous enforcement and judicial system and effective demand management campaigns, all play a critical role. Given the evidence to hand, the EWT remains concerned that legalisation of the trade in elephant ivory will not support the conservation of wild elephants across their range, but instead lead to increased poaching.

*The EWT bases its perspectives on the best available information and data available at the time.
Our positions and opinions may change as more information and data become available.*



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