



HM Government



Wilton Park



Report

**Post 2020 Wildlife Trade: current challenges and opportunities for demand reduction**

Thursday 18 March 2021 | WP1867V1



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In association with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)

### Executive Summary

1. The COVID-19 pandemic is the most recent signal of our urgent need to reset our dysfunctional and unsustainable relationship with nature. Tackling biodiversity loss, alongside the other global environmental challenges of climate change, ocean pollution and zoonotic disease, is arguably the defining challenge of our age.
2. The recent Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) Global Assessment highlighted that over-exploitation of natural resources is second only to land-use change as a driver of biodiversity loss. Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) is both a symptom of that over-exploitation and is itself a driver of the loss of biodiversity.
3. Good progress is being made on developing demand reduction initiatives, following commitments made through recent Resolutions at Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Conferences of Parties (COPs), and through ongoing work with TRAFFIC to develop guidance for the development and implementation of well-targeted demand reduction strategies, including looking at behaviour change. There is now a need to evaluate what is working. Opportunities exist for countries to use upcoming forums, such as CoP 15 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Conservation Congress, the 38th Summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the Asia-Pacific Economic Forum (APEC) 2021, to explore how successful approaches can be scaled up and new initiatives introduced to test new approaches.
4. Research has shown that a combination of activities to restrict choice, including through law enforcement, alongside use of messaging and influencers, has helped shape consumer attitudes. Some good messaging campaigns exist, but on balance there tends to be more focus on law enforcement. Cultural practices of some consumers can be sensitive issues to address, and therefore difficult to change.
5. IWT is multi-faceted, with many different markets, motivations, and potential opportunities for intervention. The criminals exploiting these illegal markets are highly sophisticated and their activities are increasingly based online. Law enforcement agencies must increase the risk for criminals; greater regional and global cooperation is needed to coordinate law enforcement activities across borders and ensure consistent high penalties for offenders.

6. There is a need to educate consumers about the many impacts of IWT, including public health and economic impacts. Such education needs to move beyond general awareness raising to employ behaviour change approaches, including market research and targeted audience-specific messaging. It is important to consider how expertise from social scientists and the private sector may be utilised in these activities.
7. The value of wildlife and natural systems is often perceived as low and limited to direct economic and utilitarian values. It is important for both policymakers and consumers to understand not only the wider direct impacts of the unsustainable over-exploitation of natural systems – the current COVID-19 pandemic, for example, has so far cost millions of lives and trillions of dollars – but also the full range and value of direct and indirect ecosystem services.

## Introduction

8. Recent research by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES, 2019) has shown that over-exploitation of natural resources is the second biggest cause of biodiversity loss, after land-use change. Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT), and demand for the associated products, are symptoms of this over-exploitation and themselves drivers of biodiversity loss. In the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic, and vital global discussions this year about how we need to protect our environment and biodiversity into the future, tackling the demand for IWT products should be recognised and addressed as an important component of the overall problem.
9. This online meeting brought together senior government representatives from across Asia, as well as selected experts in this field, for an open discussion on ways in which the current situation may impact efforts to reduce the demand for IWT products. Based on country and regional experiences and through a sharing of good practice, the meeting aimed to identify:
  - what participants saw as the main challenges and opportunities for demand reduction initiatives
  - prospects for understanding consumer behaviour, collaborating, and establishing partnerships to develop a broader suite of regional demand reduction initiatives
  - ways in which to maximise links with key international events in 2021, in particular the Biodiversity CoP 15, but also beyond.

## Key points from opening remarks

10. The Rt Hon Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park, Minister for Pacific and the Environment at the UK's FCDO and Defra, opened the discussion by highlighting the significant role played by IWT, alongside habitat loss for commodity production and other factors, in the current biodiversity crisis that threatens many animal and plant species. He recognised that the common thread in these factors is humanity's dysfunctional and damaging relationship with the natural world. Lord Goldsmith highlighted that IWT plays a significant role in environmental crime, the fourth largest crime globally, also threatens public health through zoonotic diseases and causes disproportionate harm to people living in poverty. Poaching and the illegal wildlife trade has been estimated to be worth up to £17 billion a year, rising to £143 billion if illegal logging and fishing are included<sup>1</sup>. He described tackling IWT as one of the defining challenges of our age.

*"If we continue to destabilise and degrade the natural world around us, then we must expect human and economic costs that dwarf even this appalling [COVID] pandemic." – Lord Goldsmith*

<sup>1</sup> <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/7662/->

The\_rise\_of\_environmental\_crime\_A\_growing\_threat\_to\_natural\_resources\_peace%2C\_development\_and\_security-2016environmental\_crimes.pdf.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y

*“The task of tackling wildlife trafficking is a complex challenge because of the wide range of motivations behind the demand for illegal wildlife and their products. [...] It will, therefore, take a holistic approach to end wildlife trafficking and wildlife crime.” - Secretary-General Higuero*

*“A collective call from countries in the Asian region will send a strong message to halt our destructive and unsustainable activities in all ecosystems on our planet.” - Secretary-General Higuero*

*“Many activities to date have focused on raising public awareness of the plight of endangered species [...] rather than reducing demand by changing consumer behaviour.”*

11. Lord Goldsmith described the significant steps the UK Government is taking to protect biodiversity, for example putting nature at the heart of its response to climate change through its presidency of COP26. This includes leading global alliances to tackle environmental challenges such as ocean pollution and tackling IWT by introducing tough legislation on trade in illegal wildlife products, including the ban on ivory. He highlighted the Leaders’ Pledge for Nature, which includes commitments on IWT, and recognised the important role of demand reduction in tackling IWT, alongside law enforcement and support for impacted communities. Lord Goldsmith encouraged everyone to make 2021 the year in which we catalyse a decade of action to reset our relationship with the natural world.
12. Ivonne Higuero, Secretary-General of CITES, described CITES as the fundamental framework governing trade in wildlife species, a trade that can legally and sustainably benefit both national economies and the livelihoods of people living close to nature, but when carried out illegally impacts over 7,000 species of animals and plants and depletes our most valuable ecosystems, as well as exposing people to public health risks. She recognised that IWT involves a diverse range of motivations, and so tackling IWT demands a holistic approach, including law enforcement and proportionate punishment for criminals alongside demand reduction and conservation incentives for rural communities.
13. The Secretary-General highlighted the resolutions adopted and guidance developed at CITES COPs 17 and 18, in 2016 and 2019 respectively, and subsequently. This guidance, developed with TRAFFIC, will inform the development of well-targeted demand reduction strategies, including market research and, importantly, messaging targeted at key audiences. She recognised that growing economies in Asia had, in some cases, led to increased demand, but that successful campaigns such as the Chi campaign in Vietnam and Green Collection initiative in China are having results. The Secretary-General called for all parties to use the opportunity of the devastating COVID-19 pandemic to reconsider our unsustainable relationship with nature, implement new demand reduction initiatives, and take advantage of upcoming forums to gather support for further commitment to reducing demand for IWT products.

## **Plenary session – current initiatives, successes and challenges**

14. One national example identified IWT as the primary driver of biodiversity loss, as well as a clear risk to public health, and highlighted national action planning as a successful response to IWT. As an example of best practice, a national action plan on the trade in ivory had raised public awareness of elephant conservation using both online and offline media. A need for greater international cooperation is a challenge, as is raising awareness of penalties for IWT. Forums such as ASEAN provide important opportunities for overcoming challenges and promoting behaviour change approaches to tackling IWT.
15. Another ongoing initiative is the development of demand reduction strategies in several countries within the context of CITES. It is important to recognise the difference between awareness raising and behaviour change: the latter includes detailed insights into consumer behaviour that are particularly valuable when dealing with, for example, deep-rooted cultural beliefs. CITES partners and Government officials in key countries are already being trained in these approaches. An important question arising from these initiatives is if and how the private sector may be included to further improve effectiveness.
16. There is a need to educate consumers of wildlife products, as well as policymakers. Public understanding needs to include both the biodiversity and public health impacts of IWT, and public health budgets also need to reflect that understanding, based on demonstrable links between IWT and zoonotic diseases.

*“We need new ways of doing things: 20th century approaches are not working in the 21st century.”*

17. It is essential to recognise the sophistication of the criminal networks involved in IWT, to agree internationally on comparable and serious penalties for offenders, and to increase the risk for criminals. This involves careful planning of which sectors on which to focus law enforcement activities, such as transport and/or banks, and in particular to recognise that while some enforcement efforts adopt conventional approaches, IWT is increasing taking place in cyberspace, using encrypted messaging systems.
18. It is important to recognise the diversity within IWT and between different countries and regions, and to look at what works in different contexts.

### **Feedback from breakout groups**

19. **Demand-reduction initiatives could target specific groups to be more effective.** Audiences may divide into persuadable and non-persuadable groups, and it may be valuable to concentrate efforts on those groups that are more open to change. Young people are one such group, which suggests a focus on school curriculums and Internet/social media platforms, through young leaders and influencers. Tourists are another important group. Monitoring and evaluation is essential to test the effectiveness of targeting such groups.
20. **Multi-faceted regional and global cooperation is vital.** Commensurate and strong penalties for IWT are essential. Collaboration across disciplines is also needed. One approach could be to build on existing conservation initiatives through ASEAN and including the “Flyway Network”. Global cooperation is also essential, with some focus on tourists who often travel to and within the region to buy IWT products.
21. **Traditional Medicine (TM) messaging needs to target key audiences and vary for differing TM markets.** Messages around TM need to reach people in rural areas as well as cities, and particularly young people, with practitioners acting as messengers. Moreover, better targeting of messaging within the diverse TM markets could be effective. The TM market is particularly unique, with approaches to engagement differing widely depending on the species/product of concern.
22. **Public messaging needs to better convey the true value of wildlife and natural systems.** The value of wildlife is still perceived as being low. The eventual exit from the current COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the upcoming COPs and other forums, can be used to highlight the public health and economic value of wildlife and to build momentum and sustainability for future action.
23. **IWT interventions could more effectively target the diverse markets that comprise the illegal trade.** IWT includes many different trades, which may have significantly different audiences, motivations, solutions, and possible intervention points along supply chains. Targeted country and species-specific strategies could be helpful, coupled with greater regional cooperation in this space.
24. **Demand-reduction initiatives could be improved by accessing wider expertise and capturing lessons learned.** There is a key role in demand-reduction initiatives for behaviour change specialists and social scientists; these initiatives must be informed by consumer research to target campaigns effectively. It is important to capture and learn lessons from ongoing initiatives in the region.

### **Concluding remarks**

25. This year the planet faces the triple challenge of COVID-19, climate change and biodiversity loss. As Zoom meetings have been a short-term solution to the social distancing necessitated by pandemic, so many of our previous strategies to tackle IWT have served us well in short term. But what are needed now are long-term solutions, addressing not only the mechanisms of IWT but also its root causes.

26. IWT takes place across borders, and participants expressed strong desire and need to collaborate on demand-reduction across borders – ASEAN is ideally placed to facilitate trans-border cooperation.
27. Many interesting points were raised: the existing scientific evidence showing effectiveness of a dual focus on enforcement and behaviour change acknowledged, but the balance of demand-reduction initiatives in the region falls within the law enforcement domain; acknowledgement that cultural beliefs can make behaviour change hard, but the possibility exists to target more receptive audiences such as young people – and then measure the impact of such initiatives; and the striking comment that wildlife is not valued highly – therefore can we extend the perceived value of wildlife beyond direct economic and utility value?
28. 2021 needs to be Year of Action, with great opportunities to share best practice, understand how successful initiatives can be scaled up and take forward the ‘collective call for action’ seen here today, through the CITES collaboration with TRAFFIC and upcoming forums at CBD, IUCN and ASEAN.

**Jon Taylor**

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