



## Hong Kong Government Urged to do More to Fight Wildlife Crime

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**Hong Kong, December 16** – The government is not doing enough to regulate the trade in endangered species through Hong Kong, with dire consequences for wildlife globally, according to a paper released Wednesday by 14 NGOs and concerned individuals.

“We must own up to the fact that we have become a global wildlife trafficking hub”, said Gloria Chang of Greenpeace. “We urge the government to do more to stop wildlife crime”.

Hong Kong's Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department earlier this year announced 10 new measures to curb the illegal trade in ivory but in their joint paper, “Wildlife Crime, Is Hong Kong Doing Enough?”, the NGOs said these actions were not enough to stop the trafficking.

Among several urgent responses, the group called for an ivory trade ban. Elephant populations have declined dramatically in recent years. Wildlife groups estimate that between 30,000 and 35,000 elephants are illegally killed each year for their ivory tusks. That is about 96 per day, or one elephant every 15 minutes.

The global demand for wildlife products is highest in Asia, where growing affluence has fueled an unprecedented rise in the trafficking of threatened species. Hong Kong is the largest surveyed retail city market for ivory products.

“Public sentiment and legislators are behind an ivory ban – there is much more Hong Kong could do. For example, the Chief Executive can take the lead and turn the momentum into law and strike a major blow to the global illegal wildlife trade”, said Cheryl Lo, Senior Wildlife Crime Officer WWF-Hong Kong.

She referred to a December 3 motion introduced by Hong Kong lawmaker Elizabeth Quat and passed unanimously by the city's Legislative Council urging more government action to stem wildlife trafficking.

The Hong Kong Wildlife Trade Working Group paper also urged the government to recognize that the illegal trade in endangered species is on par with the trafficking of narcotics, human trafficking and firearms and that punishments should be meted out accordingly.

Harvesting, transportation and import of threatened fauna and flora is now recognized to involve transnational organized crime networks. Black market prices for illegal wildlife products exceed,



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sometimes vastly, the monies paid for cocaine or gold.

The value of all transnational organized environmental crime is estimated at between USD 70 billion and USD213 billion annually. The illegal trade in flora and fauna is valued at USD7-23 billion, with illegal fisheries at USD11 billion to USD30 billion and illegal logging and forest crime at USD30 billion to USD100 billion.

In Hong Kong, government data show a significant increase between 2010 and 2014 in the illegal trade in endangered species. While in 2010, there were seizures amounting to 3.4 tonnes of wildlife products, by the end of last year, that number had reached 138 tonnes. Customs and Excise officials estimate that seizures represent only 10 percent of illegal trade through the city.

Meanwhile, Hong Kong's Environment Bureau statistics show that between 2010 and June 2014, the number of cases involving the illegal import and export of species listed with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) increased by 350%.

“Hong Kong has a clear responsibility to use its role as a trade hub to support international efforts to control trade in threatened species”, said Professor Yvonne Sadovy, of the Swire Institute of Marine Science at the School of Biological Sciences, The University of Hong Kong.

International actions to stop wildlife smuggling, alliances and enforcement collaborations are gaining momentum. Among these, the United States and China are stepping up efforts to combat wildlife crime.

But, as wildlife trade statistics have risen, the Hong Kong government so far has failed to increase enforcement resources relative to the scale and complexity of the problem, according to the NGOs.

And despite the growing volumes of illegal threatened wildlife consignments, the government has continued to refuse to acknowledge that Hong Kong is a wildlife trafficking hub, they said.

“A lot more inter-departmental cooperation is needed to stamp out wildlife crime in Hong Kong and we need stiffer penalties”, said WildAid’s Alex Hofford. “The Hong Kong Police should take a leading role by investigating the Hong Kong Chinese nationals suspected of being the true masterminds behind wildlife crime including the African elephant and rhino poaching crisis. Only the Hong Kong Police, not AFCD, have the firepower and muscle to run far-reaching criminal, forensic and financial investigations that can obtain the crucial evidence needed to bring the organized crime kingpins living in our midst to justice”,

The paper calls for relevant Hong Kong authorities to work together closely and consistently on cases to help stem the illegal trade.

Hong Kong has enacted the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance (Cap



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586) to give effect to CITES.

Hong Kong has active trade in many wildlife products including elephant ivory, shark fin, live reef food fish (including the CITES App II listed Napoleon, or humphead, wrasse), pangolins or their scales, totoaba swim bladder, exotic pets, rhino horn, manta ray gill rakers, as well as the related poaching and the possible laundering of threatened native species.

But these represent a small percentage of the threatened plants and animals commonly imported into the city for local trade, transhipped or re-exported to other destinations in Asia.

Currently, Hong Kong has no relevant legislation specifically aimed at controlling the import of threatened animals not listed within CITES, such as marine fishes. Many of these are illegally or unsustainably sourced in their country of origin.

Of particular concern, the group said, is the lack of deterrent sentencing meted out by the courts to those found to have smuggled threatened species into Hong Kong in contravention of Cap 586. Cases are tried in the Magistracy and carry a maximum sentence of 2 years imprisonment.

“We believe that the HKSAR Government could and should be a leader in combating wildlife crime not just regionally, but globally”, the paper says. “It is in a position to demonstrate to the local/international community and the criminal syndicates behind the multibillion dollar illegal wildlife trade, that although Hong Kong is a free port, it has zero tolerance for wildlife crime. By not taking this opportunity, its reputation as Asia’s World City will be at risk”.

Among the organizations and individuals contributing to the paper:

- ADM Capital Foundation
- BLOOM Association (HK)
- Civic Exchange
- Greenpeace
- Hong Kong Bird Watching Society
- Hong Kong for Pangolins
- Hong Kong Shark Foundation
- Professor Yvonne Sadovy, of the Swire Institute of Marine Science at the School of Biological Sciences, The University of Hong Kong.
- Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden
- Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
- Amanda Whitfort, associate professor, Faculty of Law, The University of Hong Kong
- WildAid
- Dr. Rebecca W.Y. Wong, a visiting fellow with the City University’s Department of Public Policy
- WWF-Hong Kong.

**Contacts:**



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Professor Yvonne Sadovy, HKU school of Biological Sciences: [yjsadovy@hku.hk](mailto:yjsadovy@hku.hk) / ph: +852 2299 0603  
Gloria Chang, Greenpeace: [gloria.chang@greenpeace.org](mailto:gloria.chang@greenpeace.org) / ph: +852 6076 6781  
Alex Hofford, WildAid: [alexhofford@gmail.com](mailto:alexhofford@gmail.com) / ph: +852 9635 7214  
Wing Ka Yuen, WWF-Hong Kong: [media@wwf.org.hk](mailto:media@wwf.org.hk) / ph: +852 2161 9651  
Sandra Wong, SPCA, [sandra.wong@spca.hk](mailto:sandra.wong@spca.hk): / ph: +852 6624 3979

**Wildlife trade Photographs can be downloaded here:**

<http://we.tl/ck9MkzTJK0>

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Or:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/g9df5ulottucian/AADMWJnFB1YciJF4DFNmP9BOa?dl=0>