

BREEDING TIGERS FOR TRADE IN THEIR BODY PARTS AND DERIVATIVES THREATENS WILD TIGERS AND OTHER ASIAN BIG CATS

ACTION FOR PARTIES TO CITES AT CoP17

CoP17 Doc. 60.1

ADOPT the draft Decisions, which include assessing trade from and through tiger ‘farms’ and other facilities keeping or breeding tigers. *A CITES Working Group established at SC65 and chaired by China has proposed a suite of Decisions that, if adopted at CoP17, will lead to time-bound, country-specific actions to address tiger trade and tiger ‘farming’.*

CALL FOR the review of implementation of Res. Conf. 12.5 (Rev. CoP16) to pay special attention to Asian leopards. *Leopards are poached and trafficked as a substitute for tigers.*

CALL FOR implementation of Decision 14.69. *Trade in parts and derivatives of captive bred tigers continues to place wild tigers and other Asian big cats at risk.*

REJECT inclusion of Decision 14.69 in the review under Agenda Item 32 (Implementation of the Convention relating to captive-bred and ranched specimens). *Agenda Item 32 relates to the laundering of wild specimens, while Decision 14.69 relates to trade in parts and derivatives of captive bred tigers.*

CoP17 Doc. 60.2

ADOPT the draft Decisions proposed by India encouraging Parties to share images of seized tiger skins and carcasses. *This will significantly enhance international and national efforts to investigate the source of tigers in trade.*



Background

- Asian big cats are highly endangered, with fewer than 4,000 tigers left in the wild¹, while leopard populations in Asia are decreasing².
- China, Lao PDR, Vietnam and Cambodia have all “lost viable tiger populations in recent years”³.
- Since 2000, government authorities have seized at least 6,423 individual Asian big cats, 1,500 of which were tigers⁴.
- Leopards are the most traded Asian big cats, comprising 73 per cent of specimens seized.
- 2016 has seen a significant upsurge in tiger poaching and trade⁵.
- Tiger ‘farms’ and other facilities hold more than twice the number of tigers in the wild. There are more than 7,000 captive tigers in just four countries - China has reported they have between 5,000-6,000 captive tigers⁶, Thailand has reported 1,450⁷, while there are an estimated 500+ in Lao PDR and 241 in Vietnam. Tiger ‘farming’ is also taking place in South Africa with an estimated 280 tigers in captivity⁸.
- Tiger ‘farms’ range from small backyard operations to the large industrial facilities found in China. Some masquerade as zoos, circuses⁹ and sanctuaries, and are implicated in illegal trade, such as Thailand’s Tiger Temple¹⁰ and Star Tiger Zoo¹¹.
- All Asian big cats - tigers, leopards, snow leopards, clouded leopards and Asiatic lions - are listed on CITES Appendix I.
- In 2002, Res. Conf. 12.5 was adopted, calling for stockpiles of tiger parts and derivatives to be destroyed and for them to be prevented from entering illegal trade from or through tiger breeding facilities. Decision 14.69 was adopted in 2007 and stating clearly that “tigers should not be bred for trade”, called for tiger ‘farms’ to be phased-out.



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Trade in parts and derivatives of captive tigers threatens wild tigers

- Breeding tigers for domestic and international trade in their parts and derivatives neither reduces demand nor relieves pressure on wild populations.
- Perversely, captive breeding of tigers for trade in their parts and derivatives stimulates demand, undermines conservation efforts, counteracts demand-reduction initiatives and results in the poaching and trafficking of wild tigers and other big cats.
- Trade in tiger body parts from captive facilities in China, Thailand, Lao PDR and Vietnam is stimulating demand for skins as luxury home décor, bones for medicine and tonic wines, teeth and claws as jewelry, and meat as an exotic delicacy.
- Leopard¹², clouded leopard¹³ and snow leopard body parts are consumed for the same purposes. There has also been a surge in African lion bone trade, passed off to buyers as “tiger”, indicating growing demand¹⁴.
- Wild tigers, leopards and other big cats are poached and trafficked by organised criminal networks from India and Nepal into China across the Himalayas¹⁵, trafficked from Myanmar and Thailand to markets catering to Chinese consumers in Myanmar¹⁶ and Lao PDR¹⁷, and are poached in Indonesia for both domestic and Chinese demand¹⁸.
- In Vietnam, 9 out of 14 ‘farms’ and private zoos have been linked to illegal activities in relation to their tigers, including one that has recently imported more tigers from the EU¹⁹. Recent investigations in Vietnam reveal that up to 225 tigers were offered for sale over one year²⁰, many likely from captive sources.
- Breeding tigers to make tiger bone wine is about wealth not health. It is not a medicine, and tiger bone is no longer used by the mainstream Chinese medicine community. It is marketed as a bone-strengthening tonic and a prestigious gift available online and at China’s huge tiger ‘farms’²¹. In some retail locations, it is marketed as a virility product²².

- Consumers consider wild tiger bones far more potent than those of ‘farmed’ tigers^{23,24}, so even the massive ongoing legal supply of bones from captive tigers cannot satisfy the demand for wild tiger bones.
- China currently allows a legal trade in skins of captive tigers, and such parallel legal trade undermines enforcement efforts²⁵ by providing a means to launder skins from illegally killed wild tigers, and further stimulates demand²⁶.
- The majesty and power of the wild tiger means that the skins of wild tigers are also highly desirable among consumers. Combined with the fact that the skins of captive bred tigers cost more means ‘farming’ for their skins does not relieve pressure on the wild population.
- Some consumers would buy wine made with bones from the last wild tigers just as they would buy rare art - in essence, banking on extinction.
- ‘Farming’ tigers only benefits a small number of businesses and traders: wild tigers and the rest of the world are the losers.



Ending Tiger Trade

- Ending demand for tiger parts and derivatives requires sending a clear message of commitment to Zero Demand, to compliment the efforts of tiger range States in working towards Zero Poaching. Ending demand requires phasing out tiger ‘farms’, amending legislation to ban domestic trade in parts and derivatives and consolidating, auditing and destroying stockpiles of tiger parts and derivatives.
- Tigers bred in commercial operations, kept in large groups and/or handled by people for photo opportunities serve no conservation purpose. Members of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) have repeatedly recognised trade in captive tiger parts and derivatives as a threat to tiger conservation, and in September 2016 members voted overwhelmingly in favour of recognizing “tiger farming” as a “serious threat” to the conservation of Amur tigers and Amur leopards in the wild^{27,28}.
- There is overwhelming and growing support for ending tiger ‘farming’. Recently, 45 NGOs united to call upon governments that have failed to take the necessary action to phase out ‘farms’ to act NOW²⁹.
- Wild tiger populations face a better chance of recovery in range States that do not breed tigers for domestic and international trade (as evidenced in India, Nepal and the Russian Far East), compared to those range States where the tiger is seen as a commodity (e.g. China, Thailand, Lao PDR and Vietnam).
- The United States of America, which has thousands of tigers in private hands, has recently amended regulations to tighten up existing loopholes and is now considering a law banning private ownership of big cats.
- Polls repeatedly show a majority of people in China support national bans on trade in tiger parts and derivatives³⁰.
- The first step to phasing out tiger ‘farms’ is to stop further breeding. Committed governments can invite technical experts to assist in auditing the captive tiger population and developing an action plan for a phase-out, before the situation worsens further.

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