

Deciding the Tiger's Future

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With recent estimates of the wild population at just around 3,200, the Tiger is arguably the world's most high profile endangered species, with illegal trade in its parts posing one of the main threats to its continued survival. Asian big cat range States have a long history of efforts to stop illegal trade in Tiger parts and products. For example, through the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), countries have agreed to prohibit international commercial trade in Tigers and also agreed upon a number of measures to eliminate domestic markets and illegal trade in Tiger parts and products, through Resolution Conf. 12.5. Range States have adopted strict legislation to protect the species and control the trade, and a number have even developed national Tiger action plans in an attempt to seriously address the issue of Tiger conservation.

However, worrying gaps, weaknesses and problems still exist and urgent remedial measures are needed to address what can only be described as a crisis situation for many vulnerable Tiger populations. While seizures are reported regularly, in some countries only a very few successful prosecutions for illegal Tiger trade have occurred or the penalties involved have not been severe enough to serve as a strong deterrent. Various TRAFFIC studies have noted deficiencies in legislation in a number of range States that do not prohibit trade in Asian big cat parts and derivatives, or products claiming to contain such parts and derivatives. The status of Tiger product stocks and the controls over such stocks is unclear in many countries.

Even where legislation does prohibit illegal Tiger trade and penalties are severe, such measures are often let down by lack of law enforcement effort or a shortage of the capacity for such law enforcement. Many of the landscapes where the Tiger still exists are seeing continued declines in tiger populations due to poaching of tigers and their prey, habitat encroachment and human-tiger conflict. Surveys by TRAFFIC and others in the past few years have revealed the continued existence of substantial markets for Tiger parts and products, with these products being openly available for sale, despite Tigers being fully protected in national legislation. Tiger products are still being traded illegally in many countries in a wide variety of forms, from processed medicinals, raw skins and bones, frozen carcasses and pieces of meat, stuffed specimens, to skin and tooth souvenir curios. A substantial and ongoing illegal trade is still evident and there is also considerable variation in smuggling methods and the professionalism of those involved.

Tiger trade markets, being illegal, are difficult to study, but recent market surveys by TRAFFIC as well as research on consumer attitudes and the drivers of Tiger trade have indicated that a healthy demand for Tiger products still exists. For example, a TRAFFIC report in 2008 produced in collaboration with the World Bank, *What's driving the wildlife trade? A review of expert opinion on economic and social drivers of the wildlife trade in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam*, included a case study of Tiger trade. While all four countries examined have strong legislation to protect Tigers, illegal trade continues unabated. The report emphasizes that most Tiger poaching is done by professionals, and demand is driven by wealthy consumers. Demand in some of these countries is also exacerbated by rapid economic development and a growing affluence among consumers now able to afford such commodities.

Major studies of consumer attitudes toward Tiger products undertaken by TRAFFIC in China and Vietnam showed that high percentages of respondents continue to use Tiger products, despite knowing it was illegal to buy or sell these products. Consumers also showed a preference for wild Tiger products to

those made from captive-bred animals, motivated by the belief that wild animals are “unpolluted,” “precious,” and “special,” as well as having nutritional and curative properties.

National implementation of trade controls

A number of key elements are crucial for the control of Tiger trade including the adoption of comprehensive legislation and enforcement controls, the establishment of anti-poaching teams and specialized enforcement units, the use of innovative enforcement methods, adequate control of stocks, consumer awareness campaigns, and bilateral and multilateral cooperation among range States and consumer States. Many of these key elements have been addressed in the measures recommended in CITES Resolution Conf. 12.5. This Resolution was the subject of a performance review by the TRAFFIC Network in 2007 and 2009. The review found that implementation by 13 key range States had been uneven, with about half scoring Fair to Good and the other half Fair to Poor. Similar results were obtained as far as overall progress implementing the individual elements of the Resolution, with countries having made good progress implementing fewer than half of the measures (see Table below). Progress was poor in areas including targeted public awareness campaigns, as well as issues of national legislation, administration and adjudication of trade bans.

Implementation Fair to Good	Point score	Implementation Fair to Poor	Point score
Join and implement CITES	2.69	Multilateral, bilateral and transboundary cooperation	1.92
Prevent illegal trade from <i>ex situ</i> sources	2.38	Regional wildlife trade control workshops	1.92
Public awareness and education campaigns for conservation	2.31	Legislative bans prohibiting international and national trade, with deterrent penalties	1.85
Establish anti-poaching units and share intelligence	2.23	Prohibit medicinal use and promote substitutes	1.83
Support and participate in international ABC conservation	2.15	Defined administrative trade control responsibilities	1.77
Research into poaching motives and solutions	2.0	Strengthened and innovative enforcement	1.77
		Public awareness and education targeting skin markets	1.67
		Prioritize prosecution of wildlife crimes	1.62
		Consolidate and control and destroy stockpiles	1.54
		Partner with traditional medicine communities to eliminate demand	1.33

Grade points: 3 = Good; 2 = Fair; 1 = Poor

Countries which scored Fair to Good on implementation tended to have seen a recent reduction in poaching and commercial trade, whereas the opposite tendency is evident for those scoring Fair to Poor. **Enforcement efforts in tiger habitats must be strengthened with increased anti-poaching patrols and concerted efforts to tackle illegal trade by targeting the different parts of the trade chain - from poachers to consumers.**

Monitoring implementation through regular reporting

Monitoring this suite of Tiger trade controls is therefore essential to ensure that the collective impact of actions taken to stem illegal trade can be measured and proven to be effective, with alternative actions being taken where they are not. The conservation benefits of an annual independent reporting mechanism to monitor the status and conservation of endangered species can be clearly illustrated with the example

of African and Asian rhinoceroses. At the 14th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES in June 2007, IUCN and TRAFFIC provided Parties with a report on the status, conservation and trade in African and Asian rhinoceroses, painting a very bleak picture, with sharp increases in the volume of rhino horn entering illegal trade and poaching in certain countries. Parties at CoP14 agreed to respond with a series of decisions requiring range States to declare the status of their stocks of rhinoceros horns and examine the implementation of CITES in the range States where illegal poaching of rhinoceroses appeared to have increased and posed a significant threat to populations of rhinoceroses.

TRAFFIC recommends that a similar process for Asian big cats be implemented, where organizations such as the IUCN SSC Cat Specialist Group and TRAFFIC could consult range States and **report annually on progress with the implementation of CITES Resolution Conf 12.5 and other Asian big cat-related agreements, addressing specific elements such as legislation, control of illegal trade, status of stockpiles, captive breeding of Tigers and enforcement effort.** Such reports could formulate recommendations and remedial measures for consideration by the CITES Conference of the Parties and other international Tiger-related meetings, such as the planned International Tiger Summit.

The Global Tiger Workshop in Kathmandu has already initiated a process with range States gathering the kind information required for reporting in the form of National Input Documents. TRAFFIC believes there is an opportunity for this process to contribute greatly to the CITES reporting process, and to monitor progress on the implementation of Tiger conservation measures.

Trade data collection and analysis

Such regular reporting on progress can be significantly enhanced through accurate and timely trade data collection and analysis. A **Tiger trade monitoring system** has great potential to improve the information base for enforcers and decision makers. TRAFFIC has played a leading role in organizing, managing and analyzing other CITES species and regional trade databases, and has undertaken an in-depth exploration of the issues involved in creating a similar system for Tigers. An initial start could be the establishment of an Asian big cat seizures database to facilitate centralized reporting and lead in the future to a more comprehensive trade monitoring system.

TRAFFIC hopes that the potential establishment of such a system can be discussed at the Kathmandu workshop and that Tiger range States at the workshop can provide input on the structure and mechanics of such a system. It is crucially important that any proposed information systems be developed in consultation with range States and with the needs of the range States in mind.

Regional and international cooperation

There have been encouraging developments with Asian big cat range States improving cooperation among themselves, particularly in the **establishment of regional enforcement networks.** For example, the Wildlife Enforcement Network of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN-WEN) focuses on illegal wildlife trade in general, with the Tiger and other Asian big cats as a priority. In January 2009, it organized the *First Special Investigation Group Workshop on Pangolins and Big Cats.* Participants worked together towards the development of an improved intelligence sharing framework effective across the range of national protocols, laws and capacities within ASEAN, and connecting to other key nations, such as China and the United States. Participants also used the workshop to develop specific action plans for the initiation of investigations. Additional ASEAN-WEN Tiger-focused Special Investigation Group workshops are planned for 2010.

Steps towards closer regional cooperation initiative have also been initiated in South Asia. At the Eleventh Meeting of the Governing Council of the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme in 2008, environment ministers from the eight countries in South Asia issued the “Jaipur Declaration” supporting the development of a South Asia regional strategic plan on illegal wildlife trade and the establishment of a South Asia wildlife enforcement network (SAWEN). The four Tiger range States (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal) in South Asia participated in the Declaration, which also endorsed a South Asia regional strategic plan on illegal wildlife trade. This plan will focus on key areas of work, including co-operation and co-ordination; effective legislation, policies and law enforcement; sharing knowledge and effective dissemination of information; intelligence networks and early warning systems;

and capacity building. India, the range State with the largest Tiger population, also has bilateral agreements on Tiger conservation and trade control with Nepal and China.

Scope for further bilateral law enforcement cooperation exists between two other key range States - Russia and China. This could take the form of a **joint protocol with concrete steps to address illegal cross-border wildlife trade and enhanced enforcement collaboration, particularly related to Tigers.**

There is also the Global Tiger Forum – the world's only inter-governmental organization dedicated to Tiger conservation. If effectively strengthened, represented and supported by all Tiger range state governments and other Parties to GTF, the GTF has potential to significantly increase the coordination and cooperation of governments, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as scientists and global Tiger experts on issues pertaining to global Tiger conservation. To achieve this, the **GTF must develop a strategic action plan that commits the organization to specific goals, objectives, targets and activities that address the full range of issues and challenges facing Tiger conservation.** Amendments to the existing Statutes and Regulations of GTF also need to be made to creating an operating environment that is conducive for other range state governments to join and participate effectively in the management and operations of the organization.

An International Action Plan to End Tiger Trade

In addition to CITES, several major international dialogue processes related to Asian big cats will be concluded in 2009 and 2010, of which the Global Tiger Workshop in Kathmandu will be the first to be conducted. This workshop is an ideal opportunity for the international community to develop a Tiger trade control action plan which spells out steps for implementation of the goals put forward by these processes. The global outputs being developed by the Kathmandu workshop need to seriously address the issue of illegal Tiger trade in a strategic manner and an **International Action Plan to End Tiger Trade** could be an integral element in those outputs.

Such concerted international action requires political support and commitment at the highest levels from the Asian big cat range States. More effective co-operation to jointly address Tiger trade is unlikely to be achievable unless the agencies that implement and enforce Tiger trade controls, IGOs, NGOs and interested stakeholders can successfully motivate political will. Holding high-level ministerial segments or meetings at CITES CoPs and events such as the planned International Tiger Summit are excellent opportunities to bring the relevant government ministers together – and generate the high-level international commitment necessary to bring Tigers from the brink.

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