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To All CoP13 Delegates and Observers

## **UPDATE ON ACTIONS REGARDING IVORY SALES IN THE UK**

1. Since the publication of the IFAW report "*Elephants on the High Street*" we have spent a considerable time speaking to the antiques trade, to trade associations, to auctioneers associations and in general awareness raising issues associated with ivory and the antiques business.

2. In addition we have commissioned research into the possibilities of "aging" alleged antique ivory and spoken at some length to the head of the National Wildlife Criminal Intelligence Unit to see what the real extent of the problem is and what if anything can be done about, in particular, internet sales.

3. Specific examples of work undertaken are as follows

- Staff from the CITES licensing unit spent several days at the recent Olympia Antiques Fair. They were able to take the opportunity to speak to an enormous number of antique dealers and generally to spread the gospel concerning CITES controls and in particular how such controls impinged on the ivory trade.
- An article on CITES controls was drafted and put in the Antiques Traders Gazette - this is the most widely read trade publication within the antiques business.
- A publicity leaflet has been produced and will shortly be distributed to the trade associations and to applicants and enquirers with antique queries
- Work has been undertaken with Dr John Wetton of the FSS to look at ways to accurately "age" ivory. He has proved that it is technically possible to do so and if a court requested evidence it would be possible to carry out scientific tests. However it would be expensive and is not really a practical solution to the average enquirer. It will be far better to rely on the expertise of an independent expert who could age items by their style of carving, provenance etc All of the major trade associations have agreed to this and would be happy to supply expertise if called upon.

- Officials have held meetings with the head of the National Wildlife Criminal Intelligence Unit (NWCUIU) and have agreed ways in which Defra officials can monitor internet sales and report possible CITES sales infringements to the Unit. This way they can build up an intelligence picture and possibly spot systematic illegal activity. The head of the NWCUIU has also had meetings with the e-Bay UK Management and has found them to be extremely co-operative. As a result of this meeting the warning re sales of endangered species on the e-Bay site has been strengthened.

4. We have not appointed an "ivory expert" to the panel of wildlife inspectors as following advice from the antiques industry it is not considered likely that we would find one person who would have the necessary expertise in all of the differing forms and objects which contain ivory. It would seem better to utilise all of the expertise which the trade associations have at their disposal and to call upon it as and when required.

5. All of the above is positive however it is also important to keep the overall picture in perspective and not drag off too many resources which would be better targeted elsewhere. Despite the IFAW report there is no credible evidence of a large illegal market in ivory products in the UK. Almost all of the seizures which have come to light have been what could be termed "technical offences" rather than truly illegal ivory being sold by criminal elements. The public and indeed antique dealers do not understand that antique items such as snooker balls which have recently been re-carved into walking stick handles for example no longer qualify under the antiques derogation. An extremely long established and reputable umbrella and walking stick manufacturer in London had been conducting such a trade for some years without being aware that they were committing an offence. As soon as they were informed of the law they were happy to comply and there is no real conservation problem in such cases. Equally the Metropolitan Police found examples where whole elephant tusks were being sold at a street market but again the tusks were quite clearly "antique" and only failed to qualify for the derogation because they were not carved i.e. "unworked". This type of case can be cited as examples of illegal ivory trade but they are not really the conservation problem that the bald figures might suggest.

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