

CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES
OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA



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PROPOSAL TO TRANSFER THE COMMON HIPPO (HIPPOPOTAMUS AMPHIBIUS)
FROM CITES APPENDIX II TO I (CITES COP19 PROP. 1

This document has been submitted by Benin, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Gabon, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo in relation with proposal CoP19 Prop.1*

1. During the week of 7 November 2022, the co-proponents provided the CITES Secretariat with a document to amend Proposal 1 to retain the common hippopotamus on Appendix II with the following annotation: “A zero export quota for wild specimens traded for commercial purposes.”

2. It is important to note that many terms are used for hippo teeth that are traded for commercial purposes. Information in the CITES Trade Database indicates that the following terms have been used instead of teeth: carvings, carvings- ivory, ivory pieces, jewelry, and jewelry-ivory, skulls, trophies, and tusks. The co-proponents’ annotation includes all such terms to avoid leaving open any loophole for trade in hippo teeth for commercial purposes.

3. It is also important to note that the co-proponents’ annotation will not apply to hippo specimens traded for other purposes such as personal or hunting trophy purposes.

4. The following are the co-proponents’ responses to comments received prior to their amendment of Proposal 1.

a) According to the most recent IUCN Red List Assessment, there has been a $\geq 30\%$ decline in the hippo population in the wild.

This statement is correct. The IUCN Red List Assessment categorized the common hippo as Vulnerable under criteria A4acd (Lewison & Pluháček, 2017). Vulnerable categorization means that the species is facing a high risk of extinction in the wild and has had a reduction in population size of $\geq 30\%$ over any 10 year or three generation period, whichever is longer (IUCN, 2001).

b) The $\geq 30\%$ rate of decrease is likely to be slowing because stable or increasing *H. amphibius* populations, mainly in southern and eastern Africa, make up a large proportion of the overall population.

The assertion that the hippo population decrease is “slowing” is not supported by fact (see point 5 below). As noted in the proposal, the IUCN Red List Assessment states that populations were decreasing or unknown in 25 of 38 (65%) hippo range States; trends were decreasing in 16, unknown in nine, stable in nine and increasing in

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only four (Lewison & Pluháček, 2017, Supplementary Information). Again, the proposal presents data and information that suggests hippopotamus populations may have decreased in several regions since they were last assessed by IUCN.

c) Hippo populations of Botswana, Tanzania and South Africa are increasing.

This statement is correct for Botswana but is incorrect for Tanzania and South Africa.

Regarding **Botswana**, IUCN & TRAFFIC (2022) stated that “Botswana’s total hippo population, estimated at 2,000–4,000 in 2016, was estimated at 11,231–15,233 in 2018 so that the country now contains one of the largest hippo populations in Africa.” Chase et al. (2018) found that the number of **hippos increased** between a survey conducted in 2014 (8,690 ± 608) and one conducted in 2018 (12,660 ± 881) using the same methodology. However, this increase is far lower than what is reported in IUCN & TRAFFIC (2022) publication, which apparently used the IUCN Red List Assessment population estimate for Botswana of 2,000-4,000 (Lewison & Pluháček, 2017); the source of this figure is not provided in the Assessment.

Regarding **Tanzania**, IUCN & TRAFFIC (2022) also stated, without providing citations to published reports, that “Recent population census estimates have also been reported in Tanzania (20,000 in 2016 to 26,152–36,020 in 2018)”. The 20,000 population estimate in 2016 provided by IUCN & TRAFFIC (2022) appears to be from the IUCN Red List Assessment (Lewison & Pluháček, 2017); however, the estimate in the Assessment is from a 2001 Tanzania Wildlife Research Institute (TAWIRI) report cited in the Assessment and is not from 2016. According to the Tanzania 2018 survey (TAWIRI, 2019), there was **no significant difference** between their 2014 estimate (23,243 ± 5,483) and 2018 estimate (31,086 ± 4,934) using the same methodology.

Regarding **South Africa**, the IUCN & TRAFFIC (2022) claim that South Africa’s hippo population increased from 7,000 in 2016 to 11,061 in 2018 is **without merit**. The 11,061 estimate was attributed by IUCN & TRAFFIC to 2018, however it was published in the 2016 Red list of Mammals of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland (Eksteen et al., 2016). This is the same year as the IUCN Red List Assessment for hippos (Lewison & Pluháček, 2017) occurred, so the two figures are from the same year and cannot be used to draw conclusions about the change in population size over time. In addition, the 11,061 population estimate in Eksteen et al. (2016) is from data that were associated with 2003-2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015. Therefore, these data are not current as of 2018 and do not represent an increase in population size from 2016 to 2018.

d) Trade is not considered a significant threat to the species.

According to the IUCN Red List Assessment, illegal and **unregulated hunting for ivory** (found in the canine teeth) is a “**primary threat**” to the species (Lewison & Pluháček, 2017). Ivory from poached hippos is laundered through the legal but poorly regulated international trade in hippo ivory.

In addition, as noted in the proposal, legal offtake at the national level in several range States appears to exceed 1% which can lead to population declines (Lewison, 2007; Lewison and Pluháček, 2017). Although TRAFFIC (2022) state that they received information from hippo experts that “offtake levels of less than 4% can be sustainable as long as specific sex or age categories are not targeted,” this information is not publicly available and so the scientific merit of this assertion cannot be evaluated. Furthermore, many hippo exporting countries do not appear to have specific age or sex offtake restrictions in place for hippos.

e) Previous concerns regarding implementation of the Appendix II listing have been addressed through the CITES Review of Significant Trade process, resulting in three range States establishing export quotas. Any future concerns regarding export levels of hippo products could also be addressed through the Review of Significant Trade process.

The Appendix II listing of the common hippopotamus has **not** resulted in a well-regulated international trade in hippo ivory, even after the species was included in the Review twice. Several countries active in the legal international hippo ivory trade were either not included in these Reviews (Uganda) or the Review did not result in recommended changes to management practices (Zambia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa). Regulation of trade under a CITES Appendix II listing has failed “to maintain that species throughout its range at a level consistent

with its role in the ecosystems in which it occurs and well above the level at which that species might become eligible for inclusion in Appendix I” (CITES Article IV, paragraph 3).

The key problem that Proposal 1 aims to address is that ivory from poached hippos is being laundered into the legal trade. Therefore, it is important to note that the Review does not address illegal trade. Proposal 1, as amended, would end legal trade in hippo specimens for commercial purposes, thus remove the opportunity for traffickers to launder illegally acquired hippo ivory into a legal trade. This would afford Parties with small or very small hippo populations to better protect their hippos from poachers.

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