



## CITES & LIVELIHOODS CASE STUDY 2022

# Community-based harvest and trade of Vicuña fibre in Peru

## SPECIES, USE AND TRADE

Vicuña are small camelids that inhabit the Andean mountains of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador and Peru. Since the Spanish Conquest, but particularly in the last century, they have been subject to unsustainable hunting with the species nearing extinction in the 1960s. Between 1937 and 1965, Peru traded approximately 1,270 kg of vicuña fibre (originating from the equivalent of approx. 6000 hunted vicuña) with the UK as the main destination market. During this period the vicuña population fell from 400,000 in the 1950s, to around 10,000 by 1967. In 1969, Peru and Bolivia, under the newly established Convention for Vicuña Conservation, agreed to ban all hunting and sale of vicuña for a period of ten years. The species was listed on CITES Appendix I in 1975 and all international trade banned.

While these interventions helped to reduce pressure from illegal hunting on vicuña, competition for grazing with local farmers' alpaca and llama herds meant that there was little local incentive for them to conserve the species. In 1979, the ban on commercial trade in vicuña fibre was lifted under the Vicuña Convention and was replaced by strictly regulated management and in 1980, the Peruvian

government granted local communities the rights to benefit from the trade in vicuña fibre following strong political pressure from local communities for access to a potentially valuable resource. In 1987 Certain vicuña populations from Peru were transferred to CITES Appendix II and in 1995 all the Peruvian populations were transferred.

Fibre production from wild vicuña involves a community based *chaccu* – where the vicuña are herded into a confined area which is funnel-shaped resulting in one at a time being presented for shearing. Shearing may be done manually or using a machine and the animals are then released. The fibre is then cleaned and sorted according to quality before being shipped. Peru is the main exporter of the Andean countries with Italy the main destination market (accounting for 89% of exports). During 2021, 5,503,094 kg of fibre was exported – 40% by community associations and 60 by intermediaries and textile companies. Most of the fibre is exported with limited added value (over 65% is semi de-haired (cleaned)).

## LIVELIHOOD BENEFITS

Most of the time, men are responsible for shearing and women participate in the moving of vicuñas towards the funnel, gathering the fibre in bags, cleaning and packing. Manual cleaning and de-hairing of fibre generates additional community jobs, especially for women. Manual dehairing of 1 kg of vicuña fibre requires 1 month work and earns US\$75 (approx. \$2.5/day). The nature of the work has raised concerns about the working conditions of the women particularly in terms of eye strain and air pollution from the dust.

The revenue generated by the sale of vicuña fibre can be substantial when large volumes of fibre are sold (although this is not the case for all communities). The community of Lucanas in Peru produces 1,200 kg of vicuña fibre per year from its own animals, and 300 kg from a programme designed to increase vicuña numbers. According to Lucanas's leaders,



PERU



VICUÑA  
(*Vicugna vicugna*)



APPENDIX II



LEAST CONCERN



Vicuñas in Tolconi peasant community, Peru. **Photo:** Petra Diltthey.

the sale of fibre contributes to the community's social development, providing food supplements for the elderly, payments to the church, funding for education, and purchases of machinery such as tractors. Revenues are also generated from the sale of vicuñas to other communities for repopulation programmes and for tourist chaccus.

Nevertheless, community representatives complain that they receive insufficient financial benefit from the vicuña trade, capturing only 2-6% of the final retail price of vicuña products. Communities generally have very weak bargaining power due to the limited number of buyers, but also most of the value addition occurs in the destination countries rather than range states. There is thus a desire both within communities and the Vicuña Convention to find ways to increase prices paid for the fibre, and to add value at the local level.

Vicuñas in Tolconi peasant community, Peru.  
Photo: Petra Dilthey.

## CONSERVATION IMPACTS

The recovery of the vicuña from near extinction in the 1970s to the thriving levels of population today is well known conservation success story. Granting communities rights to shear and sell fibre from live animals, coupled with the opportunities provided by a legal international market, gave rise to the phrase "a sheared vicuña is a saved vicuña" ("una vicuña esquilada, una vicuña salvada").

In Peru vicuña numbers increased from a low of 10,000 in 1969 to over 200,000 in 2012. In 2008, IUCN reclassified the animal from Endangered to "Least Concern" on its Red List.

Poaching levels have recently increased in response to high prices, relatively weak controls and light penalties in place. However, the numbers are very low in proportion to the total population.

## LESSONS LEARNT AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

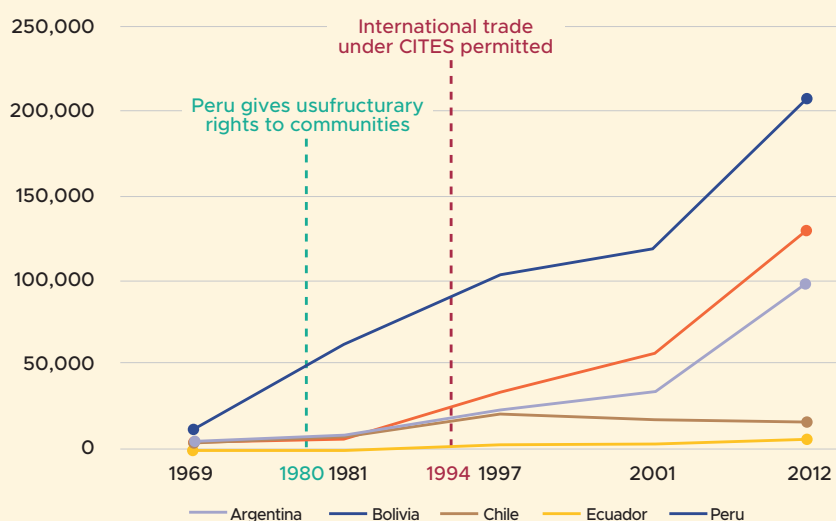
The story of the recovery of the vicuña population in Peru and other Andean countries highlights the importance of ensuring that local people have a strong incentive for conservation. Granting communities the right to capture, shear and sell the fibre from wild vicuñas generates five times the value of hunting and killing the animals.

Nevertheless to maintain the incentive to conserve vicuñas it will be critical to further enhance community benefits as there is a continuous threat of poaching. In addition to strengthening law enforcement against poaching, enhancing local benefits could be achieved

by organising communities into associations to increase their bargaining power. It will also be important to explore more value addition opportunities at the national and local level including manufacturing clothing, yarn and handicrafts. Simplified regulations for exporting vicuña fibre would also enhance market access for communities.

The significance of the the Vicuña Convention in supporting conservation and enhancing regional coordination should also not be understated and it will be critical to ensure that the Parties continue to meet regularly to ensure the gains made to date are not lost.

**Case study based on a report by** Alexander Kasterine and Gabriela Lichtenstein with additional information provided by Pilar Tuppia Villacorta. **Edited by** Dilys Roe.



**Figure:** Changes in Vicuña numbers following national and international policy interventions.

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