



## CITES & LIVELIHOODS CASE STUDY 2019

# Vicuña fibre harvesting and trade in Bolivia

### SPECIES, USE AND TRADE

Vicuñas are wild camelids from high-altitude regions of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Peru and Ecuador. Their soft, warm and light fibre is internationally traded for high-value clothing. Bolivia holds almost one third of the global population.

Vicuña populations were decimated in the 20th century by “open-access” exploitation for fibre. From 1969, populations were fully legally protected from hunting and trade by national laws across their range, and all listed in CITES Appendix I in 1975. Subsequently, recovering populations have been progressively downlisted to enable sustainable use and international trade. Bolivia’s whole population has been in

Appendix II since 2002, and trade (to Argentina and Italy) commenced 2007.

All vicuña fibre from Bolivia is harvested by shearing of live wild animals by indigenous/local rural communities on their communal lands. This involves the chaku, a traditional practice from Incan times with religious and ceremonial aspects. A funnel is created with nets and wires and long lines of people slowly herd the vicuña into it, followed by shearing and release. All fibre is stockpiled for collective sale, with 85% of the sale price returned to communities.

Women participate actively in every stage of the process.



**VICUÑA**  
*Vicugna vicugna*



**APPENDIX I/  
II (POPULATION  
OF BOLIVIA IN  
APPENDIX II)**



**LEAST CONCERN**

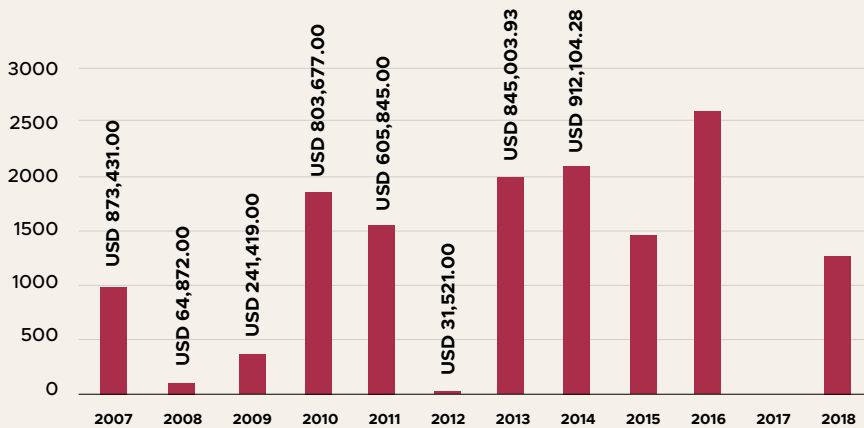


Fig 1. Exports of vicuña fibre from Bolivia (kg), showing value of trade returned to communities each year. Source: MMAyA.

### LIVELIHOOD BENEFITS

Communities gained over USD 3,720,000 (Int\$ 11,535,000) in income from vicuña trade between 2007 and 2014 (see Fig. 1). The number of families involved varies each year, from 1,572 to 3,005 over the last 5 years.

This is important income for these mountain communities, amongst the poorest and most isolated in Bolivia, living in remote high-altitude areas that are cold, arid and harsh. They have few government services and the lowest socio-economic indicators in the country.



There are few other sources for cash income generation: communities' main other livelihood activities are subsistence livestock and farming, with some tourism in some areas.

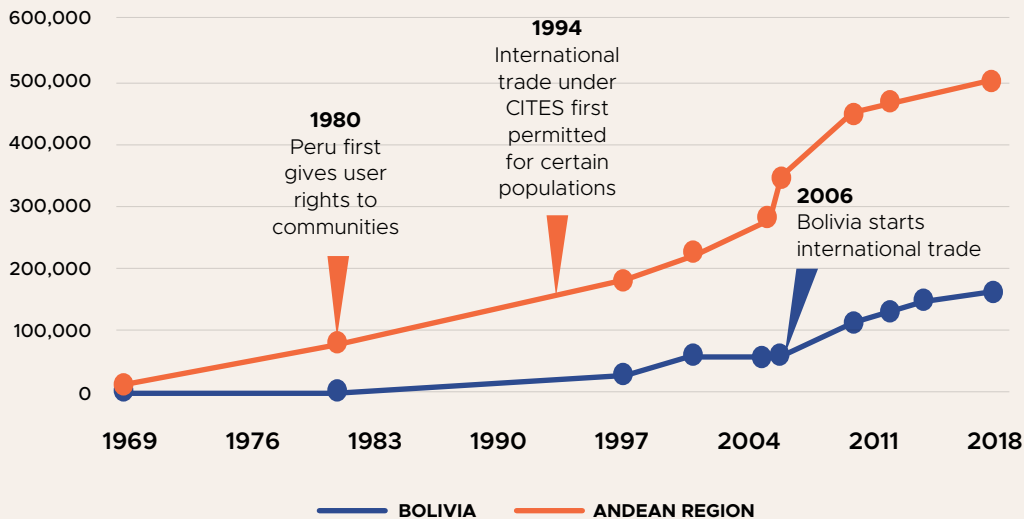
Broader benefits include strengthening communities' land tenure claims, maintaining people on traditional lands and averting urban migration, strengthening local/regional wildlife institutions, and fostering participation

in wildlife management. Communities have developed much stronger visibility and "voice" within national policy and government contexts. Ancient traditions and local knowledge have also been revitalised.

The potential to expand these benefits is very considerable: in 2018, only approximately 6% of the vicuña population was shorn for its fibre.



**IMAGE:** Chaku or vicuña herding in the community of Cañuhuma, Apolobamba ANMIN. **Photo:** WCS-Bolivia/Beltrán L.F., 2006.



**Fig 2.** Bolivian and Andean vicuña population trends.

## CONSERVATION IMPACTS

Vicuña populations have steadily grown across range countries since the late 1960s (see Fig 1), accelerating since the establishment of sustainable use through legal trade. Bolivia's population has increased from approximately 3,000 in 1969 to an estimated 163,331 in 2018 (Fig 1).

In most community-managed areas populations have continued to increase over the last decade, although in several populations have slightly declined over this period, due possibly to poaching, climate, or stochastic fluctuations in generally stable populations.

Vicuña have become an economic asset to

communities, rather than only a livestock competitor for pasture, reducing poaching and motivating communities to carry out anti-poaching and protection. These benefits have spread as vicuña trade benefits have motivated more communities to start management, extending protection across a large area that central governments cannot effectively police. Broader habitat benefits from decreased grazing are also promoted.

Without trade in vicuña fibre, it appears likely that communities would lose motivation and capacity to conserve the vicuña, and this could spark increased poaching and renewed decline.

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## LESSONS LEARNED

Trade of high-value vicuña products has effectively reduced poaching, human-wildlife conflict and rangeland degradation.

### SUCCESS FACTORS HERE INCLUDE:

- long-term support from NGOs, donors and the government
- building the skills and capacities of communities.

### CURRENT CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES INCLUDE:

- increasing community benefits through expanding communities involved, numbers sheared, increasing value-adding, and diversifying;
- boosting the voice, institutional strength, bargaining power and technical capacity of communities;
- creating a more enabling policy/regulatory environment;
- promoting integrated management of wildlife and livestock;
- addressing poaching and illegal trade.

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For the full case study see [cites.org/eng/prog/livelihoods](http://cites.org/eng/prog/livelihoods)