

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



Sixty-ninth meeting of the Standing Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 27 November -1 December 2017

Species specific matters

Elephants (Elephantidae spp.)

ELEPHANT CONSERVATION, ILLEGAL KILLING AND IVORY TRADE

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.

Report on the conservation status of African and Asian elephants, trade in elephant specimens, the African Elephant Action Plan, and MIKE and ETIS

Background

2. At its 17th meeting (CoP17, Johannesburg, 2016), the Conference of the Parties adopted amendments to Resolution Conf. 10.10 (Rev. CoP17) on *Trade in elephant specimens*. The provisions being reported on in this section of the document are those directed to the Secretariat in paragraphs 11 and 18, as shown below. They concern reporting to the Standing Committee on trade in elephant specimens. Issues relating to paragraph 16 of the same Resolution are covered in document SC69 Doc. 29.3.

Regarding trade in elephant specimens

11. *DIRECTS the Secretariat, pending the necessary external funding, to:*
 - a) *report on information and analyses provided by MIKE and ETIS at each meeting of the Conference of the Parties and, subject to the availability of adequate new MIKE or ETIS data, at relevant meetings of the Standing Committee; and, in collaboration with TRAFFIC as appropriate, provide other reports, updates or information on MIKE and ETIS as required by the Conference of the Parties, the Standing Committee, the MIKE and ETIS Technical Advisory Group (TAG) or Parties;*
 - b) *prior to relevant meetings of the Standing Committee, invite the United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) to provide an overview of trade in elephant specimens as recorded in the CITES database; the IUCN Species Survival Commission (IUCN/SSC) African and Asian Elephant Specialist Groups to submit any new and relevant information on the conservation status of elephants, pertinent conservation actions and management strategies; and African elephant range States to provide information on progress made in the implementation of the African Elephant Action Plan; and*
 - c) *on the basis of the information specified in paragraphs a) and b) above, recommend actions for consideration by the Conference of the Parties or the Standing Committee;*
18. *DIRECTS the Secretariat to report at each regular meeting of the Standing Committee on any apparent problems in the implementation of this Resolution or in the control or traceability of trade in elephant specimens, and to assist the Standing Committee in its reporting to the Conference of the Parties;*

3. In compliance with paragraph 11 b) of Resolution Conf. 10.10 (Rev. CoP17), the Secretariat invited UNEP-WCMC, IUCN and the Chair of the African Elephant Fund Steering Committee (Kenya) to provide new and relevant information concerning the trade in and conservation of elephants. The Secretariat is grateful for the submissions received. Adequate new MIKE and ETIS data were available to the Secretariat and TRAFFIC respectively to report on information and analyses thereof at the present meeting.
4. The contributions were integrated into a single report, which is presented in the Annex to the present document. It gives an overview of the status, threats and conservation actions concerning African elephants (*Loxodonta africana*) and Asian elephants (*Elephas maximus*); Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE); legal trade in ivory; the African Elephant Fund and the implementation of the African Elephant Action Plan; and illegal trade in elephant specimens (ETIS).

Features of the report in the Annex

5. In 2016, 37 **African elephant** range States are thought to hold 415,428 (\pm 20,111) elephants, with an additional 117,127 to 135,384 elephants in areas not systematically surveyed. This is estimated to represent a decline of some 111,000 elephants over ten years. A comparable comprehensive assessment of African elephant numbers, published by IUCN in 2007, had indicated that there were between 472,269 and 689,671 elephants on the African continent. Poaching losses are still being reported across the continent. However, in the medium to long-term, human expansion into elephant habitats, civil unrest and climate change are likely to constitute the greatest threats to the survival of the species. Rising human-elephant conflicts are a symptom of rapid land transformation and human growth, and only likely to continue to increase. This calls for landscape planning to support the coexistence of elephants and humans across the elephant range in Africa.
6. The 13 range States of **Asian elephants** hold a current estimated 44,281 to 49,731 elephants. The major threats to the Asian elephant continues to be habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation to cater to the need of growing economies and increasing human populations. This has increased the human-elephant conflict in most range States, with hundreds of people and elephants killed annually because of such conflicts. There is the urgent need to safeguard and secure corridors connecting the fragmented habitat to minimize human-elephant conflict. The wild Asian elephant population of Vietnam, which steeply declined over the last two decades, is considered to be the most threatened.
7. There are some 60 designated **MIKE** sites in Africa, which together hold an estimated 30 to 40% of the African elephant population, and 27 sites in Asia (it is unclear what proportion of the total Asian elephant population is represented in these sites).
8. Overall, reported poaching levels continue to pose a risk to the survival of African elephants, with the overall poaching trends in 2016 suggesting more elephants continue to die from poaching than from natural causes. At the sub-regional level, Proportion of Illegally Killed Elephants (PIKE) levels in Eastern Africa in 2016 is now likely to be below the levels recorded in that sub-region in 2008, principally due to lower levels of poaching recorded at selected MIKE sites in Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania. With only seven sites reporting data for 2016, West Africa remains a cause for concern in terms of data quantity and quality, making reliable inference on trends impossible for the sub-region.
9. MIKE evaluations of relative poaching levels of African elephants are available since 2003. They show a steady increase in annual levels of illegal killing of African elephants starting in 2006, peaking in 2011, and levelling off and slightly declining thereafter. The estimated poaching rate in 2016 remains high – that is, above a PIKE value of 0.5 (i.e. more elephants die from poaching than die from natural causes). This may imply that, overall, elephant populations in African MIKE sites have probably continued to decline in 2016.
10. It is difficult to estimate poaching impacts at the site level, especially where few data exist, bias in reported PIKE levels seem to occur, or climate conditions, e.g. drought, varied dramatically. However, among sites that have reported 20 or more carcasses in 2016 and where the site-level PIKE can be taken to be relatively reliable, those of concern (taken as those with a PIKE of 0.7 or higher) include: Odzala-Koukoua National Park (Congo), Minkébé (Gabon), Niassa National Reserve (Mozambique), Garamba National Park (Democratic Republic of the Congo) and Gourma (Mali).
11. On the other hand, PIKE values decreased from 2015 to 2016 by more than 10% in several sites. This includes for example two MIKE sites in the United Republic of Tanzania (Ruaha Rungwa where PIKE dropped by 37%; and Selous-Mikumi, where it dropped by 35%). Tanzania's MIKE National Coordinator communicated that this may be due to government actions, including the launch of a National Anti-Poaching Strategy in October 2014, and arrests of several high-profile poachers and traffickers.

12. The report in the Annex also contains an analysis of MIKE data for Asian elephants, showing a steady increase in average levels of illegal killing of elephants between 2003 and 2006, followed by a decreasing trend up to 2008. The mean PIKE values from 2008 to 2013 remained relatively flat but seemed to take an upward turn thereafter. It is important to note that the illegally killed elephants include elephants killed in conflict situations, which account for a substantial proportion of the total. For instance, 40% of the illegally killed elephants reported between 2007 and 2013 were females, which do not carry ivory.
13. The analysis of **trade records for elephant specimens contained in the CITES trade database** suggest that no exporting Party appeared to have exceeded their quota for hunting trophies of *Loxodonta africana* in 2014 or 2015. But standardisation in reporting is crucial to assess compliance with the provisions of the Convention. The most recent version of the *Guidelines for the preparation and submission of CITES annual reports*, updated in January 2017, includes further clarifications on the reporting of hunting trophies.
14. Progress is reported by the **African Elephant Fund** steering committee (AEFSC) in overseeing the implementation of the African Elephant Action Plan (AEAP) and managing the Africa Elephant Fund (AEF). The AEF keeps growing, with a new contribution of 1 million Euro from the European Union, and further commitments from the Governments of Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands.
15. **ETIS** data has been collected since 1989. Despite the provision in Annex 1 of Resolution Conf. 10.10 (Rev. CoP17), it remains a concern that the majority of CITES Parties are delivering elephant product seizure data for inclusion in ETIS very late, jeopardizing timely analysis. There is also cause for concern about the quality and completeness of data sets for many important countries.
16. The Transaction Index of ETIS provides a relative measure of global illegal ivory trade activity in the decade ending in 2016, with 2007 set to 100 to serve as the baseline. Overall, the Transaction Index shows that illegal ivory trade activity has continued at the same relative high levels over the last six years. Further ETIS analysis suggests that there has been little apparent change in the level of illegal ivory trade transactions globally when comparing the periods 2011-2013 and 2014-2016, and that an increasing quantity of ivory is involved in these transactions. This pattern contrasts with the gradual downward trend observed for elephant poaching since 2011 through the MIKE programme. This could perhaps be due to time lags between poaching elephants and trafficking their ivory, or the entry into the illegal trade of stockpiles.
17. The Weight Index of ETIS shows the total estimated weight of the ivory in illegal trade. The current analysis shows that the steady upward trend in terms of the total estimated weight of the ivory in illegal trade continues. This analysis suggests that 2016 is the year in which the most ivory by weight was illegally traded. An upward trend is unbroken since 2008, and the overall weight of ivory in illegal trade now is nearly three times greater than was observed in 2007.
18. Raw ETIS data suggests that exports from Africa of commercial consignments of worked ivory products popular in Asian markets may be increasing. Also, quoting a recent TRAFFIC assessment of the ivory trade in Central Africa, the ETIS report states that ivory processing in Africa for export of finished products to Asia is increasing. The scale of these illegal ivory processing operations in Africa needs to be assessed through further research and investigations.
19. For all countries along the trade chain, awareness concerning commercial-scale movements of worked ivory needs to improve. In particular, strategies for targeting worked ivory illegally moved by air as check-in or carry-on baggage, or by couriers need to be improved.
20. Trends since 2000 show that both the number and weight of reported large-scale ivory seizures (500+ kg) substantially increased from 2009 onwards, with the largest number occurring in 2016 (i.e. 22), although with the lowest weight in six years. Explanations could be a reduction of the size of large shipments owing to economic losses when seized; a greater diversification in the types of ivory illegally traded, and the modes of transport applied; and local market developments.
21. Concerning the call in Resolution Conf. 10.10 (Rev. CoP17) for Parties to forensically examine large-scale ivory seizures of 500 kg or more, the ETIS report suggests that only 10% were apparently being tested to determine origin and age.
22. Finally, the ETIS report identifies a number of countries in connection with the greatest numbers of seizures and quantities of worked ivory products moving out of Africa. The ETIS report concludes that still more may need to be done to curtail ivory trafficking and illegal ivory markets.

Observations by the Secretariat

23. The information contained in the report in the Annex is compelling, pertinent and up to date, containing: the latest conservation status data on African elephants, based on a new full African Elephant Status Report (2016), the first of its kind since 2007; a section on Asian elephants, incorporating information compiled at recent expert workshops in India (2016) and Indonesia (2017); and substantial new trends analyses of the illegal killing of, and trade in elephants, based on updates of MIKE data (16,1790 carcass records) and ETIS data (27,525 records of illegally traded elephant specimens, of which 24,969 seizures of ivory).
24. The Secretariat concurs with the views expressed by most contributors to the report that for CITES-related matters, emphasis does not need to be put on new or additional measures, but on more effective and timely implementation of the recommendations concerning elephants that the Conference of the Parties already agreed to, specifically those detailed in the Resolution Conf. 10.10 (Rev. CoP17), which was comprehensively reviewed at CoP17 to include a number of additional measures directed to the Parties to reduce illegal killing of, and trade elephants, and improved their conservation status.

Trade in Asian elephants (*Elephas maximus*)

25. At CoP17, the following Decisions were adopted concerning Asian elephants:

Directed to Parties

17.217 *All Parties involved in the trade in live Asian elephants are encouraged to:*

- a) *undertake, as necessary, investigations into the illegal trade in live Asian elephants, and endeavour to enforce, and where necessary improve, national laws concerning international trade in specimens of Asian elephants with the explicit intention of preventing the illegal trade in live Asian elephants;*
- b) *develop strategies to manage captive Asian elephant populations;*
- c) *ensure that trade in, and cross-border movements of live Asian elephants are conducted in compliance with CITES, including the provisions in Article III, paragraph 3, for Asian elephants of wild origin;*
- d) *collaborate in the development and application of a regional system for registering, marking and tracing live Asian elephants, requesting as necessary assistance from experts, specialized agencies or the Secretariat; and*
- e) *at the request of the Secretariat, provide information on the implementation of this Decision for reporting by the Secretariat to the Standing Committee.*

Directed to the Secretariat

17.218 *The Secretariat shall:*

- a) *upon request and pending the availability of external funding, assist the range States of Asian elephants in their implementation of Decision 17.217; and*
 - b) *incorporate information provided by range States in accordance with Decision 17.217, paragraph e), together with other findings and recommendations concerning trade in live Asian elephants as appropriate, into its regular reporting to the Standing Committee on the implementation of Resolution Conf. 10.10 (Rev. CoP17) on Trade in elephant specimens.*
26. The Secretariat, through its MIKE programme in Asia, has drawn attention of Asian elephant range States to the provisions in Decision 17.217. To date, the Secretariat has not received requests from these range States for assistance in their implementation of Decision 17.217.
27. Concerning Decision 17.218, the Secretariat notes that all, but one, Asian elephant range States attended the second Asian elephant range States' meeting in Jakarta in April 2017 to discuss current conservation challenges, identify possible solutions and agree to enhance cooperation among Asian countries to conserve

elephants in the region. The issue of trade in live Asian elephants and managing captive Asian elephant populations was discussed in some detail on that occasion.

28. As recorded in the section on Asian elephants in the report in the Annex, cases of poaching and illegal capture of Asian elephants may have increased over the years in a few countries. Large numbers of captive elephants exist in range States, with an estimated population of approximately 15,000 elephants. The lack of a standardized elephant registration system seems to have provided cover for illicit trade in live Asian elephants and their body parts, including ivory. This needs to be addressed through appropriate registration systems, monitoring protocols for captive populations, and improved trans-boundary cooperation. At their meeting in 2017, the range States recognized the need to have a standardized elephant registration process (which is currently lacking), including DNA registration; guidelines for the management and welfare of captive elephants; disease management (including zoonotic diseases); training and capacity-building of staff and mahouts; and specific national policies to manage captive elephant populations.

Ivory stockpiles

29. Paragraph 6 of Resolution Conf. 10.10 (Rev. CoP17) urges Parties to maintain an inventory of government-held stockpiles of ivory and, where possible, of significant privately held stockpiles of ivory within their territory, and inform the Secretariat of the level of this stock each year before 28 February, indicating: the number of pieces and their weight per type of ivory (raw or worked); for relevant pieces, and if marked, their markings in accordance with the provisions of the Resolution; the source of the ivory; and the reasons for any significant changes in the stockpile compared to the preceding year.
30. On 23 January 2017, the Secretariat issued Notification to the Parties No. 2017/008 to remind Parties of the above reporting obligation. The table below shows the number of Parties making ivory stock declarations received in recent years. It should be noted however, that not all replies contained all the information requested in Resolution Conf. 10.10 (Rev. CoP17), and some did not provide the total amount of such stocks.

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017
Number of Parties	10	24	13	16

31. The Secretariat is aware of a number of thefts of ivory from government-held stocks in recent years and in order to avoid elevating potential security risks, it has not included details of the information that it has received from the Parties in the present document. Some Parties reported that no stockpiles existed in their territory and others provided lists of ivory tusks and pieces, but no total figure. However, the total amount of ivory stocks (governmental and private) declared in 2017 from all Parties was well over 400 tonnes. Since CoP17, Angola and Viet Nam reported to the Secretariat the destruction of some ivory stocks amounting to just over 3 tonnes in total. In accordance with Resolution Conf. 10.10 (Rev. CoP17), the Secretariat has made country-specific data from the ivory stock declarations of Parties available to MIKE and ETIS for analysis. The Secretariat notes the comments regarding stockpiles in the ETIS report contained in the Annex.
32. At CoP17, the Parties adopted Decision 17.171 which directed the Secretariat as follows:

Where appropriate, the Secretariat shall, in collaboration with Parties and subject to external funding:

- a) develop practical guidance for the management of ivory stockpiles, including their disposal, based on an analysis of best practices and in accordance with provisions in Resolutions Conf. 17.8 on Disposal of illegally traded and confiscated specimens of CITES-listed species and Conf. 10.10 (Rev. CoP17) on Trade in elephant specimens;*
- b) disseminate the guidance to the Parties and make it available on the CITES website; and*
- c) report on the implementation of this Decision as part of its regular reporting to the Standing Committee on the implementation of Resolution Conf. 10.10 (Rev. CoP17), prior to the 18th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.*

and Decision 17.172 directing the Standing Committee to make recommendations for consideration at the 18th meeting of the Conference of the Parties as appropriate.

33. To date, the Secretariat has not been able to locate external funding to analyze best practices for the management of ivory stockpiles, including their disposal, nor to develop practical guidance on the basis of such an analysis. The Secretariat has been approached by the non-governmental organization 'Stop Ivory' about an ivory stockpile management system which they have developed. The Secretariat believes that the system is capable of efficiently collecting all the data required of Parties under paragraph 6 e) of Resolution Conf. 10.10 (Rev. CoP17). Stop Ivory will be holding a side-event during the present meeting to demonstrate their system. The Secretariat would appreciate the comments of the Standing Committee about whether or not it should disseminate Stop Ivory's stockpile management system to the Parties and make it available on the CITES website.

MIKE and ETIS Subgroup of the Standing Committee

34. At the 68th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC68, Johannesburg, October 2016), the Secretariat explained that in the past, the Committee had established a MIKE and ETIS Subgroup to oversee these two programmes. According to its previously established terms of reference,
- a) *The MIKE and ETIS Subgroup will normally consist of eight members of the Standing Committee: two from Anglophone Africa, two from Francophone Africa, two from Asia and two from Europe or North America.*
 - b) *The members of the MIKE and ETIS Subgroup should be Party members (and in certain cases, alternate members) of the Standing Committee that are: a) involved in the on-the-ground implementation of the MIKE programme; b) funding or otherwise actively supporting MIKE or ETIS; or c) showing a particular interest in the implementation and developments of MIKE and ETIS.*

At SC68, the Standing Committee agreed to the following composition of the MIKE and ETIS Subgroup:

- *Four African elephant range States (2 anglophone and 2 francophone): Congo, Ethiopia, Niger and Namibia;*
- *Two Asian elephant range States: China and Indonesia; and*
- *Two representatives from Europe and North America: Belgium and Canada*

35. The MIKE and ETIS Subgroup intends to meet in the margins of the present meeting, and report back to the Standing Committee.

Recommendations

36. The Standing Committee is invited to:
- a) encourage Parties, in their implementation of CITES provisions concerning trade in elephant specimens that are contained in Resolution Conf. 10.10 (Rev. CoP17), to take account of the trends in illegal trade in ivory and other elephant specimens and poaching described in the report in the Annex to the present document;
 - b) note that the MIKE and ETIS Subgroup intends to meet in the margins of the present meeting, and report back later in the week;
 - c) remind Parties to use the UNEP-WCMC *Guidelines for the preparation and submission of CITES annual reports*, updated in January 2017, when reporting of trade in hunting trophies of *Loxodonta africana*;
 - d) recognize the contributions that several Parties have made to the African Elephant Fund, and the importance of the smooth operation and management of the Fund; and
 - e) advise the Secretariat whether or not it should disseminate the stockpile management system of the NGO 'Stop Ivory' to the Parties and make it available on the CITES website