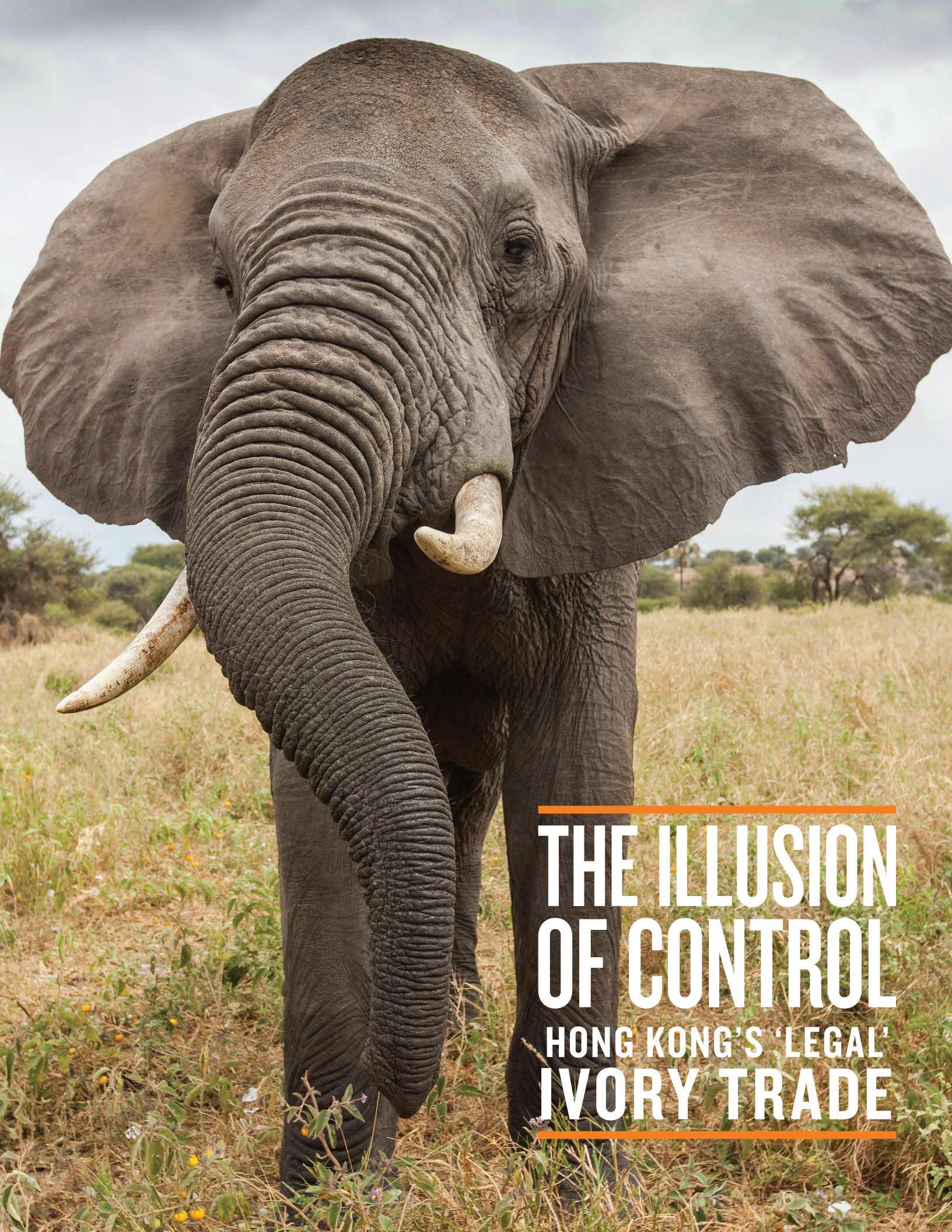

THE ILLUSION OF CONTROL

HONG KONG'S 'LEGAL' IVORY TRADE

ABOUT WILDAID

WildAid's mission is to end the illegal wildlife trade in our lifetime. We envision a world where people no longer buy wildlife products such as shark fin, elephant ivory and rhino horn. While most wildlife conservation groups focus on protecting animals from poaching, WildAid works to reduce global consumption of wildlife products by persuading consumers and strengthening enforcement. With an unrivaled portfolio of celebrity ambassadors and global network of media partners, WildAid leverages nearly $200 million in annual pro-bono media support. When the Buying Stops, the Killing Can Too.

www.wildaid.org

ABOUT AFRICAN WILDLIFE FOUNDATION

The African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) is a leading conservation organization focused solely on the African continent. AWF's programs and conservation strategies are based on sound science and designed to protect both the wild lands and wildlife of Africa and ensure a more sustainable future for Africa's people. Since its inception, AWF has protected endangered species and land, promoted conservation enterprises that benefit local African communities, and trained hundreds of African nationals in conservation—all to ensure the survival of Africa's unparalleled wildlife heritage.

www.awf.org

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EVERY YEAR UP TO

33,000 ELEPHANTS

ARE KILLED FOR THEIR IVORY ACROSS AFRICA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For more than a century, Hong Kong has been a hub for the global ivory trade. Due to the region's high overall trade volumes, easy access to mainland China, and lax regulation and supervision, this role continues, despite the 1989 international commercial ivory trade ban. Hong Kong has been the gateway through which the tusks of hundreds of thousands of poached elephants have been laundered—first en route to Japan, and more recently, to China. Officials claiming to regulate the trade provide a façade of legitimacy while making no physical link between the ivory itself and the paper trail with which they legitimize it. In short, Hong Kong has been the ivory poacher's and smuggler's laundry.

At the time of the 1989 ban, Hong Kong held 670 tonnes of ivory, much of it highly dubious in origin and laundered through the discredited quota system under the UN Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Rather than set a deadline for selling off this stock and closely monitoring its disbursement, Hong Kong's Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD), the government agency charged with implementing CITES, has continued to allow unregulated sales for 26 years, making no meaningful checks to ensure the ivory is from the original stock and not from recently poached elephants. Traders admit they routinely replenish stocks with newly poached ivory, as there is no system to connect any individual tusk or ivory product to required documentation. Essentially, the AFCD has provided unlimited license to launder poached ivory. Nearly all of Hong Kong's ivory vendors flout even the most basic regulation: the requirement that vendors clearly display licenses in their stores.

In international meetings, AFCD officials have defended—and even promoted—continued domestic trade, insisting that its system is airtight, when in fact nothing could be further from the truth.

It's clear that the AFCD lacks the resources, capability and desire to monitor the ivory trade, even superficially. Though long-term sales trends indicate that Hong Kong's stockpile should have been exhausted around 2004, 111.3 tonnes remain unsold, a figure that has barely changed in recent years, when demand for ivory has been the highest-ever, fueled by mainland China's economic growth. A recent study indicated that over 90% of the ivory sold in Hong Kong is purchased by tourists from the mainland (47 million visited in 2014), with unscrupulous vendors coaching them on how to successfully evade detection when smuggling it back to China.[1]

According to the latest figures, up to 33,000 elephants are poached each year for their ivory. In a recent poll, 75% of the Hong Kong public interviewed supported a ban on ivory sales.[2] China and the United States recently announced a joint commitment to ending all commercial ivory sales—a move that is undermined by Hong Kong's ongoing laundering and illegal exports.

WildAid recommends that the Hong Kong government take the following immediate actions:

1. Join China and the United States in announcing a ban on all domestic ivory trade.

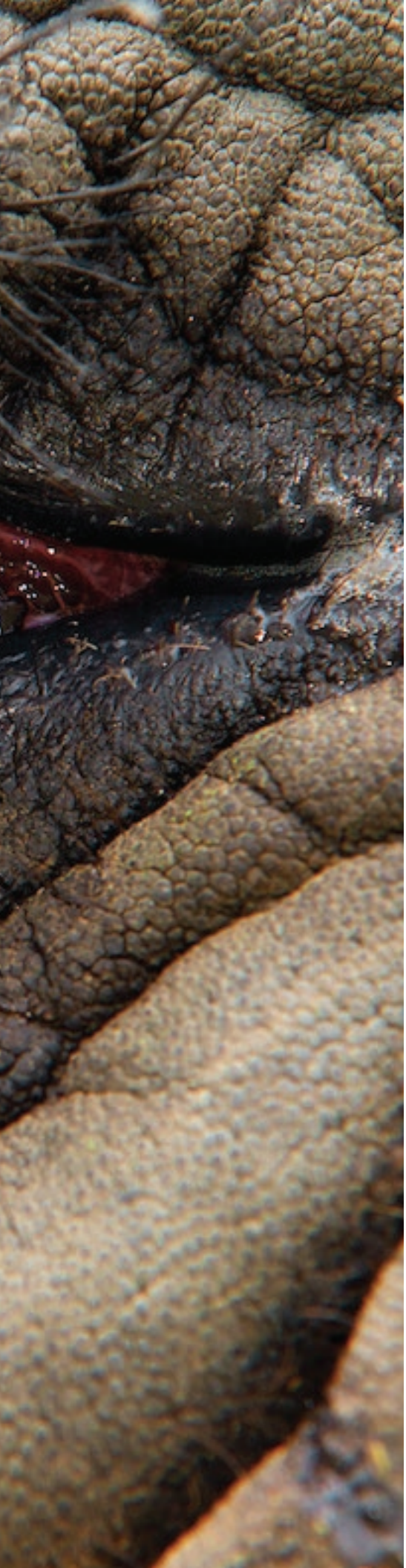
2. Establish a full-time investigative wildlife crime unit.

3. Allocate more resources to combating wildlife crime.

1 Martin, Esmond and Vigne, Lucy (2015). Hong Kong's Ivory: More Items for Sale Than Any Other City in the World. Save the Elephants. Retrieved from www.savethelephants.org.

2 Chan, Cherie (May 27, 2015). Most Hong Kongers support banning ivory sales, poll finds. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from www.sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com.

Hong Kong skyline



Shannon Benson

THE HONG KONG IVORY TRADE

INTRODUCTION

Few conservation battles have garnered more global attention than the current crisis facing Africa's elephants. A resurgence in consumer demand for ivory, primarily in Asia, has resulted in widespread poaching across the African continent, with up to 33,000 elephants killed annually.[3]

Much of this ivory is smuggled into Hong Kong, a longstanding hub for the international ivory trade. While the Hong Kong government issues licenses to traders allowing them to sell ivory obtained before 1989 (the year international commercial trade in ivory was banned), retailers use this system to sell illegal, recently poached ivory. Officials turn a blind eye to the fraud, making no meaningful checks to ensure the ivory is from original stock held prior to the international ban.

The Hong Kong government insists that its regulatory system is adequate in curbing illegal sales and trafficking. The evidence laid out in this report tells a different story.

Over the past year, WildAid has investigated licensed ivory dealers throughout Hong Kong. Undercover field investigators posing as ivory buyers also provided undercover footage to WildAid as well as to WWF-Hong Kong.[4] What we found is a "legal" trade that provides cover for smuggling, profit for criminal syndicates and incentive for poachers to kill as many elephants as they can.

3 Wittemyer, George; Northrup, Joseph M.; Blanc, Julian; Douglas-Hamilton, Iain; Omondi, Patrick; and Burnham, Kenneth P. (2014). Illegal Killing for Ivory Drives Global Decline in African Elephants. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Vol. 111, No. 36.

4 Lo, Cheryl and Edwards, Gavin (2015). The Hard Truth: A Report on How Hong Kong's Ivory Trade Is Fuelling Africa's Poaching Crisis. Retrieved from www.wwf.org/hk/en.

HONG KONG AND THE FIRST IVORY WAR, 1976-1989

The United Nations Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) was created in 1975 to ensure commercial trade did not drive species to extinction. In 1977, the African elephant was listed on CITES Appendix II, which required nations seeking to export ivory to prove that such exports would not be detrimental to survival of the species in the wild.

However, the CITES regulatory system was subject to widespread abuse. CITES permits were re-used multiple times to register illegal stockpiles. Countries with few or no elephants "exported" tons of ivory. CITES permitted international trade in "worked ivory," but failed to define the term. As a result, huge quantities of poached tusks, smuggled out of East Africa to the United Arab Emirates, could be imported into Hong Kong with minimal "working"—sometimes just roughly chopped into sections.[5]

In short, the system produced only an illusion of control, while providing various mechanisms to legitimize poached ivory. Consequently, the African elephant population fell from more than 1.2 million in 1979 to roughly 600,000 by 1989.

The main beneficiaries of these loopholes were the ivory traders of Hong Kong, then a British colony. Given its pivotal trading position as the gateway to China and the rest of Asia, as well as the laissez-faire attitude of the British administrators, Hong Kong became a critical transit point for legal and illegal ivory, supplying retail and carving industries in Hong Kong and China, and foreign markets such as Japan.

Throughout the 1980s, CITES sought to fine-tune its regulatory systems without success. A quota system, devised in Zimbabwe in 1985, was a significant failure.[6] Finally, in the face of the poaching epidemic and failure to control the legal market, CITES uplisted the African elephant to Appendix I in 1989, thereby prohibiting international commercial trade in ivory.

At the time of the ban, Hong Kong authorities reported to United Kingdom Ministers that 670 tonnes of ivory remained in its stockpile—an estimated 570 tonnes of which came from illegal sources, according to a 1992 Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) report.[7]

Rather than implement the 1989 CITES ban after a customary 90-day grace period, the UK entered a "reservation" to the listing on behalf of the Hong Kong government. British officials were well aware that huge quantities of poached ivory were stockpiled there, yet despite international pressure, the reservation remained in place for six months. For the purposes of trade in African elephant ivory, Hong Kong proceeded during that time as though it were not Party to CITES. The EIA further noted evidence of weak controls over the stockpile:

During the six-month reservation period, 200 tonnes of ivory "went missing" from Hong Kong. After the initial announcement of 670 tonnes, the figure was revised down to 474 tonnes. The explanation given by [officials] was that the first estimate was made by the traders who owned the stocks and the second was made by the authorities. This explanation did nothing to allay fears that the ivory had been smuggled to Japan—especially when large amounts of ivory from Hong Kong were being seized in Japan on a regular basis.

The 1989 uplisting of the African elephant to Appendix I had a profound effect. Ivory prices plummeted rapidly and poaching rates fell across Africa, allowing elephant populations to start to recover. Sadly, this victory proved to be short-lived.

THE SECOND IVORY WAR, 2008-PRESENT

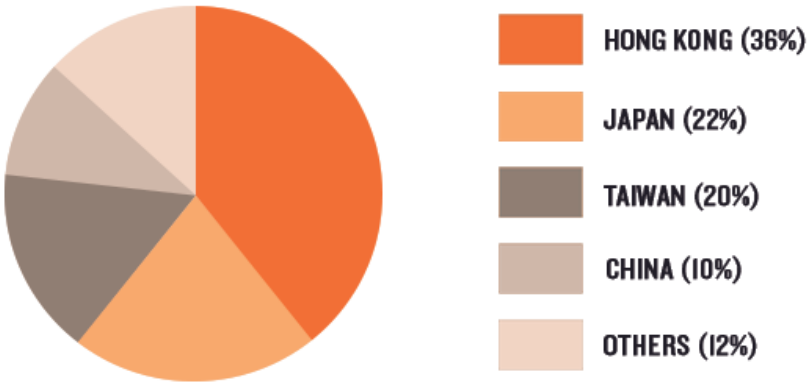
Despite recovering elephant populations, several southern African countries that had not experienced the heavy poaching levels seen elsewhere were adamantly

5 Thornton, Allan and Currey, Dave (1991). *To Save an Elephant*, p. 13. Doubleday. ISBN 0-385-40111-6.

6 Schreurs, Miranda A. and Economy, Elizabeth C. (1997). *The Internationalization of Environmental Protection*, p. 163. Cambridge University Press.

7 Environmental Investigation Agency (1992). Under Fire: Elephants in the Front Line. Retrieved from www.eia-international.org.

WORLD RAW IVORY CONSUMPTION, 1987



Source: TED Case Studies: Elephant Ivory Trade Ban. American University, Washington DC.

opposed to the Appendix I listing. Relentless pressure from these countries resulted in CITES authorizing a "one-off" legal sale of ivory in 1999 to Japan from Botswana, Zimbabwe and Namibia. Almost 50 tonnes of ivory were sold.

There were sporadic reports of poaching increases, as well as significant ivory seizures in Africa and Asia.[8] But it was not until 2008, when CITES permitted a second "one-off" sale to Japan and China, that poaching resumed on a devastating scale.[9]

By 2011, an estimated 33,000 elephants were being poached per year, with forest elephant populations falling by 62% compared with 2002 levels.[10] Tanzania alone has lost 60% of its elephant population in just five years.[11]

China decided to release 5 tonnes of the CITES-approved ivory onto the market annually, although Chinese officials told CITES that they would in fact need 200 tonnes a year to satisfy consumer demand, bolstered by strong economic growth and a rapidly growing Chinese middle class.

HONG KONG AND THE ILLUSION OF CONTROL

With lax regulations, extensive retail networks, low tax rates and close proximity to China, Hong Kong is the world's largest ivory market and remains a key transit point for ivory, which is legally sold by licensed vendors.

A recent report indicated that nearly 30,856 ivory items were openly for sale—primarily trinkets and other small items that can be easily smuggled.[12] Items on display in windows and backrooms sell for a significant discount compared with similar products in China, making Hong Kong attractive to mainland buyers.

Hong Kong has allowed trading to continue until its stockpile is exhausted, with no set deadline. Yet 26 years after the international ban, the ivory hasn't run out.

The legal ivory trade is notionally regulated by the Hong Kong government's Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD). This agency is largely bureaucratic, focused primarily on rubber-stamping wildlife trade rather than investigating abuses.

The primary instrument of control is the "License to Possess," a one-page form specifying the licensee's name, retail address and weight of ivory in possession. According to the AFCD, a License to Possess "shall be kept and displayed in a conspicuous position in the keeping premises specified in the license."[13]

But even this nominal licensing system is openly abused: Of the 94 shops surveyed by WildAid from October 2014 to August 2015, *only one* retailer was observed displaying its License to Possess in accordance with the law. The vast majority of shops visited were disorganized and appeared unlikely to be able to produce an accurate inventory.

As demonstrated in the photos below, of the vendors who were displaying a license, often it was partially hidden, damaged, out-of-date or tampered with by redacting the trader's name and maximum weight of licensed inventory.

According to unpublished data provided by the AFCD, the largest amount of stock held by any of the Hong Kong ivory traders is six tonnes. However, undercover footage has revealed one trader as saying that it is simple to procure 10 tonnes: "In general, if you are ordering (ivory) of less than 10 tonnes, I can sell it to you anytime."

Vendors are required to report annually to the AFCD the total weight of ivory in their possession. In 2013, traders reported a cumulative 117.9 tonnes, a figure that had remained virtually unchanged for three years (see graph on page 11).

In 2014, the number dipped slightly to 111.3 tonnes. This implies that only 6.6 tonnes had been sold in the previous year, widely recognized as a boom period for ivory sales with record-high tourist arrivals from mainland China. By comparison, ivory sales in 1994-1995 totaled 38 tonnes.

If ivory sales rates from most of the previous years are taken as accurate, Hong Kong's stockpile of legal, licensed, pre-1989 ivory should have sold out by 2004.

Instead, it has remained at a dubiously "healthy" level: As explained to investigators on undercover footage, ivory vendors are routinely replenishing their stocks with newly poached ivory, as no system exists to connect any individual tusk or product to verified paperwork.

In February 2015, one licensed dealer

8 Orenstein, Ronald (2013). *Ivory, Horn and Blood: Beind the Elephant and Rhinoceros Poaching Crisis,* p. 64. Firefly Books. ISBN 978-1-77085-227-3.

9 CITES press release (July 16, 2008). Ivory sales get the go ahead. Retrieved from www.cites.org.

10 Maisels, F.; Strindberg, S.; Blake, S.; Wittemyer, G.; Hart, J.; Williamson, EA.; et al. (2013). Devastating Decline of Forest Elephants in Central Africa. *PLoS ONE* 8(3): e59469. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0059469.

11 Mathiesen, Karl (June 2, 2015). Tanzania elephant population declined by 60% in five years, census reveals. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from www.guardian.com.

12 See footnote 1.

13 Hong Kong Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (Feb. 28, 2014). Circular No. ES 01/14.

Altered ivory possession permits on display

explained to an undercover wildlife trade investigator posing as a customer how this works:

Investigator: "Is all of your ivory stock legal?"

Ivory vendor: "All my things are legal. When [the international commercial ivory trade] was outlawed in 1989, we registered our stocks with the Hong Kong government … all materials were registered, but the record was not in detail. They only record the weight of my raw materials and finished products. So I can simply exchange with anything. After I sell an [ivory] item, I can use illegal ivory to make another item to top off my stock again. The government officials have no idea on how to govern."[14]

The AFCD also allows ivory stocks to be de-registered, from commercial to "inactive" or "personal" use, and back again. However, once the ivory is de-registered, it's no longer subject to a license and essentially is taken off the books. The government does not have figures for the amount of "inactive" stock held by traders, thereby creating another mechanism for laundering illegal ivory.

A recent AFCD plan entitled "Measures to Strengthen Control and Combat Illegal Trade in Ivory" proposed that licensees display a "notice" and poster, presumably more visible than the current license.

But such a scheme would simply replace one ineffective system with another, since there still would be no connection to actual pieces of ivory.

Moreover, the AFCD lacks manpower and key resources—such as radiocarbon analysis equipment to determine the age of ivory and an adequate number of sniffer dogs—to effectively enforce ivory inventory controls. As WWF-Hong Kong noted in its recent report, the AFCD has only eight inspectors who police ivory retailers, among many other duties.[15]

Hong Kong's maximum penalties for ivory trafficking remain at extremely low levels. Gambling on the chance of a six-month jail sentence or low fine in Hong Kong compared with life imprisonment in mainland China, traffickers have opted for Hong Kong as a "soft touch," in case smuggled ivory is intercepted by customs in the ports of Shanghai or Shenzhen.

SMUGGLING INTO CHINA

Hong Kong is a major tourist destination, and was visited in 2014 by over 61 million people, of which 47 million came from mainland China.[16] This represents a 106% increase in mainland tourists between 2008 and 2014. According to a recent report, Hong Kong ivory vendors say that over 90% of ivory buyers are Chinese visiting from the mainland.[17]

14 The original conversation was conducted in Mandarin and translated approximately into English.

15 See footnote 4.

16 Zhao, S. (Feb. 9, 2015). After bumper year of incoming tourism, Hong Kong expects slower growth in 2015. *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from www.scmp.com.

17 See footnote 1.

IVORY SEIZED BY HONG KONG CUSTOMS, 2014

PERIOD	NO. OF CASES	QUANTITY (kg)	COUNTRY OF LOADING
JAN-MAR	18	192	Angola, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa
APR-JUN	36	1,368	Angola, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa
JUL-SEP	27	337	Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa
OCT-DEC	25	318	Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa
TOTAL	106	2,215 kg	

Source: Hong Kong Customs & Excise Department

It's clear that commercial outlets selling "legal" ivory are targeting tourists. Many ivory shops can be found in the city's main tourist areas, such as Tsim Sha Tsui, Central, Sheung Wan, The Peak and Stanley. These areas are popular with mainland Chinese tourists, who arrive in large groups by coach.

Although it's illegal to take ivory out of Hong Kong without government-issued permits, ivory sellers routinely coach tourists on circumventing the law. As one vendor told undercover investigators:

Ivory Vendor: "Most of it [the ivory] goes to mainland China through two routes.... We don't care, as long as the transactions are conducted in Hong Kong, and I can prepare the license for you. In the past, our customers from mainland China did not have the import permits, so we had to help send their purchases to Beijing. But now I am scared of going through this process, as it takes months. Now that the operations have changed, they [mainland customers] set up their companies in Hong Kong, and I sell them [the ivory] with the license. These stocks are legal in Hong Kong. If you want to send it to Beijing, Fuzhou or Guangzhou, that's your business.... Sometimes, they [mainland customers] buy the ivory, then 'escape' to Zhuhai through Macau—it is so simple. That is how it is done."[18]

In 2014, employees at two established retailers also were filmed advising people on how to smuggle ivory across borders:[19]

A salesman at a department store called Yue Hwa Chinese Products Emporium admitted to undercover investigators that taking ivory out of Hong Kong is illegal, but advised them that smuggling is easy: "Even if you go through the metal [detector], there's no sign. You [just] hide it somewhere."[20]

18 The original conversation was conducted in Mandarin and translated approximately into English.

19 Boehler, Patrick (Feb. 12, 2014). Hong Kong craft shop staff secretly filmed advising customers how to smuggle ivory across border. *South China Morning Post*.

20 Yue Hwa Chinese Products Emporium ceased selling ivory products in 2014.

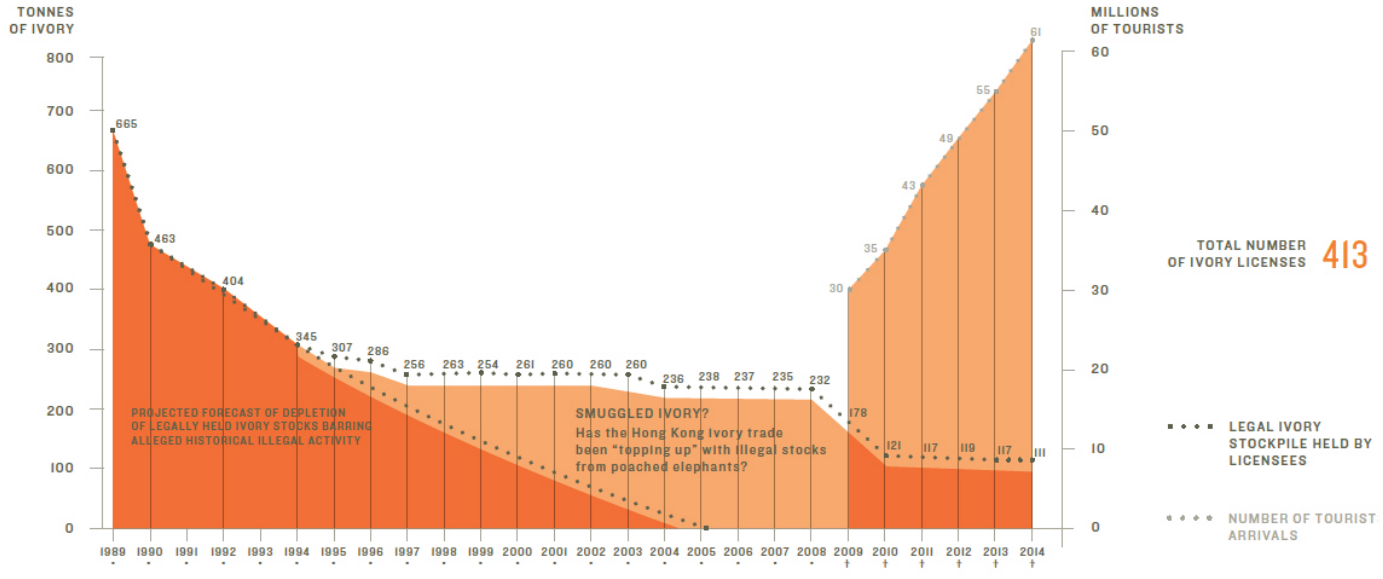
A senior sales consultant at Chinese Arts & Crafts told the investigators about a customer who bought two dozen ivory chopsticks and smuggled them to Singapore, hidden among four dozen plastic chopsticks.[21] The salesperson also spoke of customers smuggling ivory to North America hidden in socks, and about how others avoid checks on the mainland side of the border by leveraging their contacts at customs there, advising that "it depends on the class of your friends."

In April 2015, the *South China Morning Post* reported that a Hong Kong woman traveling with her baby was arrested at a Shenzhen border checkpoint as she attempted to smuggle 24 ivory items weighing 6 kg into mainland China.[22] The woman told customs officers that she had been advised to carry her child to reduce the risk of being searched upon entering

21 Chinese Arts & Crafts ceased selling ivory in 2014.

22 Lo, Clifford (April 16, 2015). Smuggler carrying baby caught with 6kg of ivory at Hong Kong-Shenzhen border. *South China Morning Post*. Retreived from www.scmp.com.

HONG KONG: LEGAL IVORY STOCKPILE HELD LICENSEES & NUMBER OF TOURIST ARRIVALS



• The figures for 1989–2008 include some registered ivory for non-commercial purposes and some pre-convention ivory.

† The figures for 2009–2014 cover ivory under Licenses to Possess for commercial purposes and exclude stock acquired prior to the listing of African elephant in CITES Appendix I but held for non-commercial purposes.

Source: Hong Kong Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Shenzhen. The supplier of the ivory had even told her about a "baby rental" service that could be provided for this purpose, according to the report.

To further facilitate smuggling, shopkeepers readily write fake invoices for elephant ivory items, identifying the product as mammoth ivory so that it can be transported across borders. Should a discerning customs officer identify the item as elephant ivory, the purchaser can simply plead ignorance.

For example, in October 2014 investigators recorded a shopkeeper in Tsim Sha Tsui East offering to produce fake receipts for his customer:

Trader: "Some customers asked me to issue an invoice stating that it is mammoth, then they can bring it out of Hong Kong. But in fact, it is not mammoth."

Investigator: "So you can do the same for me if I buy?"

Trader: "Yes. I can give you two invoices, one stating it is mammoth."[23]

DEFENDING THE TRADE

Through both ivory wars and crises over trade in rhino horn, tiger parts, shark fin and other wildlife products, the AFCD has maintained that all wildlife trade is well regulated in Hong Kong, despite clear evidence to the contrary.

AFCD Assistant Director Simon Chan recently claimed, "Hong Kong has put in place a strict control mechanism over local sale. Anyone keeping ivory for commercial purposes must obtain a License to Possess for each keeping premises."[24]

The Hong Kong government has repeatedly stated that it's unwilling to take any "bold" action, such as banning "legal" ivory, as Hong Kong is a signatory of CITES and intends to follow the stipulations of the Convention unless otherwise instructed:

Hong Kong's control over domestic trading of ivory is comparable to other countries. We will continue our efforts on enforcing the CITES requirements and public education. There is currently no plan to ban all ivory trade.

—Wong Kam-sing, Hong Kong Secretary for the Environment[25]

At CITES meetings, AFCD officials have argued that, like China and Japan, Hong Kong should be allowed to legally import ivory. AFCD has been one of the most vocal supporters of ongoing trade, appearing to see its role as promoting and defending the trade rather than policing it.

OPPOSING THE TRADE

China

On the occasion of his first state visit to the US in September 2015, President Xi Jinping pledged that China would work together with American counterparts to end the ivory trade.

The White House released full text of this agreement on Sept. 25, 2015:

The United States and China, recognizing the importance and urgency of combating wildlife trafficking, commit to take positive measures to address this global challenge. The United States and China commit to enact nearly complete bans on ivory import and export, including significant and timely restrictions on the import of ivory as hunting trophies, and to take significant and timely steps to halt the domestic commercial trade of ivory. The two sides decided to further cooperate in joint training, technical exchanges, information sharing, and public education on combating wildlife trafficking, and enhance international law enforcement cooperation in this field. The United States and China decided to cooperate with other nations in a comprehensive effort to combat wildlife trafficking.[26]

This announcement marks the first public commitment by President Xi to end ivory sales in China and follows an earlier pledge made by Chinese officials to phase out the domestic trade: In May 2015, China's Minister of State Forestry Administration Zhao Shucong made headlines when he said that China will "strictly control ivory processing and trade until the commercial processing and sale of ivory and its products are eventually halted."

This pledge forms part of China's "Decree on Accelerating the Development of Ecological Civilization," which was jointly issued by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the State Council on April 25, 2015.

Mainland China's decision to phase out the domestic ivory trade has given new impetus to the global effort to stop the mass slaughter of elephants. If Hong Kong does not follow suit, there will be a ban in one part of China but not in another, subverting China's efforts to stop ongoing laundering and illegal imports.

United States

The U.S.-China agreement in September 2015 to end the ivory trade follows action on federal and state levels to eradicate the American market. Under current U.S. law, ivory can be sold legally across state lines if it was imported prior to January 18, 1990, the date when African elephants were officially listed under CITES Appendix I. President Barack Obama, on the occasion of his first official visit to East Africa in July 2015, pledged to ban interstate trade with very limited exceptions.

State legislation also is critical to stopping local ivory sales. Three states—New York, New Jersey and California—have enacted bans against commercial ivory sales. In November 2015, voters in Washington and Oregon will decide via referendum whether to ban commerce in wildlife products including ivory.

The Hong Kong People

In recent years, the Hong Kong people have expressed increasing concern over the continued sale of ivory in the territory. A petition asking the Hong Kong government to ban ivory sales has garnered nearly 9,000 signatures (and continues to grow).[27] In December 2014, a University of Hong Kong random telephone survey of

23 The original conversation was conducted in Mandarin and translated approximately into English.

24 Chan, Simon (Oct. 15, 2015). Hong Kong government has strict control mechanism in place over sale of ivory. *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from www.scmp.com.

25 Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government press release (Feb. 11, 2015). LCQ22: Regulation of ivory possession and trade. Retrieved from www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201502/11/P201502110477.htm.

26 The White House, Office of the Press Secretary (Sept. 25, 2015). Fact Sheet: President Xi Jinping's State Visit to the United States. Retrieved from www.whitehouse.gov.

27 Petition: Hong Kong Government — Ban Ivory Sales Now! Retreived from www.azaaz.org.

Hong Kong ivory vendor (Alex Hofford)

Hong Kong ivory seizure (Alex Hofford)

1,021 Cantonese-speaking residents 18 years or older found that over 75% of respondents support or strongly support a ban on ivory sales in Hong Kong.[28]

Over the past year, campaign initiatives and protests organized by local NGOs Hong Kong for Elephants and WildLifeRisk led to a voluntary decision to cease ivory sales by Hong Kong's four major ivory retailers: Chinese Arts & Crafts (Hong Kong) Ltd, Wing On Department Store, Yue Hwa Chinese Products Emporium and Chinese Goods Centre Limited. The positive response from these retailers demonstrates that some elements within the industry are bowing to public pressure and willing to adapt their business models.

Hong Kong Legislative Support

Following a trip to Kenya in September 2014, and a trip to Kenya and Tanzania in July 2015, Hong Kong legislator Elizabeth Quat has spearheaded a movement lobbying the Hong Kong and China governments to ban ivory sales, and her campaign is gaining momentum. At a February 2015 press conference, Quat announced her plan to seek a Hong Kong government ban on ivory sales, calling such a move "an important message that shows the Chinese government is very keen on protecting animals and the Sino-African relationship."[29]

Also in February 2015, five lawmakers from Quat's party, The Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (DAB), announced at the party's annual Chinese New Year press conference that they would submit a suggestion to ban the domestic sale and transportation of ivory in China for discussion by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) in Beijing.[30] Quat lobbied 32 out of 36 Hong Kong NPC lawmakers to support her bid to end China's ivory trade.

Led by DAB Chairman Tam Yiu-chung, the lawmakers recommended that China should support efforts to educate and persuade the public against buying or selling ivory. The DAB forms the backbone of the 36-strong bloc of delegates from Hong Kong.

Global momentum towards a post-ivory era is gathering pace, and it seems the world is finally turning against this destructive trade. But if elephants are to stand any chance at survival, Hong Kong must take immediate steps to shutter its own market, for good.

28 See footnote 2.

29 WildAid (Feb. 10, 2015). Hong Kong lawmaker pushes for ivory ban. Retrieved from www.WildAid.org.

30 Ibid.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Hong Kong should announce a ban on all domestic trade in ivory as well as imports of pre-Convention ivory.

Mainland China's recent decision to phase out domestic trade in ivory has given new impetus in the global effort to stop the mass slaughter of elephants for their ivory. Given that over 90% of ivory purchasers in Hong Kong are from the mainland, it makes both moral and practical sense for Hong Kong to ban the trade as well. Such a move would make enforcement on the mainland considerably easier as well as significantly contribute to closing down the trade in what is currently the world's largest ivory market.

Suggested steps towards a Hong Kong ivory sales ban:

• Ban the import and sale of pre-Convention ivory (ivory obtained prior to the uplisting of African elephants to Appendix I) and implement effective enforcement.

• Ban the sale of whole and cut raw ivory tusks.

• Ban the sale of worked ivory in any form.

• Develop a mandatory registration system for antique ivory intended for sale, enforced by use of radiocarbon analysis equipment.

• Increase the maximum penalties for ivory trafficking.

• Step up public education and awareness campaigns in partnership with NGOs and the private sector.

2. Hong Kong should establish a dedicated wildlife crime unit.

The Endangered Species Protection Liaison Group (ESPLG), a working group comprising representatives from the AFCD, Hong Kong Police and the Hong Kong Customs and Excise Department, convene just once a year for a half-day session. This group should be expanded into a full-time operational unit with officers trained in the use of firearms and equipped with expertise in CITES issues. A primary recommendation of a 2010 EIA report was for the Hong Kong government to set up a wildlife crime unit. In May 2015, Hong Kong's leading wildlife groups renewed the call for such a unit to be created, over five years after the EIA report.[31]

Hong Kong should increase intelligence-led enforcement, including carrying out controlled deliveries, monitoring retail outlets, employing staff to work undercover and sniffer dog teams at all 12 boundary control exit points, including Lo Wu boundary control point and Hong Kong International Airport.

3. Hong Kong should allocate more resources to fight wildlife crime.

Hong Kong is a global hub for wildlife products such as ivory, rhino horn, shark fin and other wildlife products. Without an increased financial commitment focused on building investigative and enforcement capacity, Hong Kong will continue to be a favored destination point for ivory and other products that are decimating wildlife populations around the world.

31 Environmental Investigation Agency (2010). Enforcement Not Extinction. Retrieved from www.eia-international.org.

Ivory protest, March 2015 (Alex Hofford)

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