



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL ENVIRONMENT  
Directorate F - Global Sustainable Development  
ENV.F3 – Multilateral Environmental Cooperation  
Head of Unit

23 SEP. 2019

Brussels,  
ENV/F3 (CITES)

Dear petitioner,

Thank you for your e-mail addressed to Commissioner Vella, in which you raise concerns regarding juvenile elephants being taken from the wild to far-away destinations. The Commissioner has asked me to reply on his behalf.

Triggered by reports about juvenile elephants being taken from the wild to far-away destinations under questionable circumstances, international trade in live elephants has recently been the subject of much discussion in the EU and elsewhere. The conservation of African elephants in the wild is a priority for the EU, and we are working closely with many range states towards this objective. No wild-caught elephants have been imported into the EU during the past ten years, and the Commission is not aware of any such imports intended for the foreseeable future.

International wildlife trade, including trade in live elephants, is regulated under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and corresponding EU legislation. All Asian elephants and all but four populations of African elephants are included in Appendix I to the Convention, meaning that commercial trade in live animals or other elephants specimens is generally prohibited.

At its meeting in Geneva in August this year, the Conference of the Parties to CITES (CoP) discussed a proposal to prohibit any movements outside of their natural range of live African elephants from the two populations where this is currently still allowed. The EU worked with other countries, notably African elephant range states, towards an improved version of the proposed text, which retained its overall intent whilst including some necessary safeguards. This amended proposal was adopted by the CoP with 75% of the participating countries voting in favour. According to the adopted text (which will soon become available as an official CITES document), any movement of live elephants will require the approval of the relevant authorities in the countries of origin and destination.

Moreover, taking of live African elephants from the wild for international trade will only be allowed in exceptional circumstances, where competent scientific bodies have concluded that such a transfer will provide demonstrable conservation benefits for elephants living in the wild, or in the case of temporary transfers in emergency situations, such as if an outbreak of disease or an armed conflict puts the animals at risk in their natural habitat.

Yours faithfully,

Hugo-Maria Schally