

Elephant in the Room

Why a trophy hunting ban would hurt conservation and development

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Summary

- The proposed United Kingdom trophy hunting import ban is illiberal, harmful to conservation efforts, and detrimental to local communities in source countries.
- Well-managed trophy hunting is recognised by major conservation bodies (including IUCN and CITES) and many developing nation governments as a conservation tool.
- Trophy hunting, when properly regulated, can generate revenue for conservation, create economic incentives for habitat protection, support target species and their habitats, and contribute to local livelihoods.
- A ban would undermine the UK's international commitments in trade and conservation, contradicting its trade liberalisation stance as a World Trade Organization (WTO) member and its support for the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).
- The proposal overrides existing CITES regulations, which provide an internationally agreed framework for sustainable and legal wildlife trade, including specific provisions for hunting trophies.
- The proposed bill banning the trade creates an unusual post-Brexit dependency on EU wildlife trade regulations by referring to EU annexes for species listings, rather than relying solely on CITES appendices.
- A more nuanced approach aligned with existing multilateral agreements would be more appropriate than a unilateral prohibition.

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Introduction

In 2022, a private member bill was introduced to Parliament with the previous Conservative government's support to prohibit the import of hunting trophies. The bill was debated in the House of Commons and the House of Lords, though did not become law prior to the dissolution of Parliament for the general election. Nevertheless, the Labour Party's 2024 election manifesto contained a commitment to ban the import of hunting trophies, as did the Conservatives' manifesto. Thus, even though the matter was not included in the King's Speech of the new Labour government, it is likely to be tabled at some time during this Parliament.

There has been considerable discussion and debate on the possible impact of the bill on species conservation and local livelihoods. There has, however, been less discussion of the implications of the bill for the UK's role in multilateral agreements, notably agreements relevant to international trade and biodiversity conservation.

The proposed Hunting Trophies (Import Prohibition) Bill 2023-24¹ was an illiberal measure that undermines the UK's position with respect to international agreements on both trade and conservation. Though one would have thought that the government that 'delivered Brexit' would be embracing international trade over the protectionist policies of the European Union, the widespread support for this bill on both sides of the aisle indicates that this may not be the case. Rather, the bill – in the likely event it is reintroduced - will demonstrate a growing consensus in Parliament to move away from trade liberalisation.

¹ UK Parliament, Hunting Trophies (Import Prohibition) Bill, Parliamentary Bills, House of Commons, Session 2023-24 (<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3547>)

Key elements of the bill

Bill 024 2023-24 as introduced on 22 January 2024 includes the following elements:

It is prohibited to bring a hunting trophy into Great Britain where (a) the hunting trophy is of an animal to which this Act applies...

In this Act 'hunting trophy' means the body of an animal, or a readily recognisable part or derivative of an animal, that (a) is obtained by a person ('the hunter') through hunting the animal...

This Act applies to an animal of a species listed in Annex A or B of the Principal Wildlife Trade Regulation...

The Secretary of State must appoint an Advisory Board on Hunting Trophies... to advise the Secretary of State... on any matter relating to the import to Great Britain of hunting trophies...²

Illiberalism

The rationale for import prohibitions or restrictions is normally protectionism, i.e., protecting domestic industry from foreign competitors. As this bill does not directly address hunting in the UK, such as deer stalking in Scotland or the export of hunting trophies from the UK, it is a protectionist measure. However, the prohibition of hunting trophy imports is not really aimed at protecting the UK's trophy hunting industry.

The rationale for the prohibition on hunting trophy imports could better be described as 'illiberalism.' The Illiberalism Studies Program at George Washington University defines the concept as follows [*italics in the original*]:

By illiberalism, we define a strain of political culture, a set of institutional reforms (such as assaults on an independent judiciary) and broader societal processes (such as declining trust in liberal democratic institutions) that, over the past two decades, has emerged in response to liberalism as experienced by various countries.

Adherents of illiberalism argue that, in the face of a liberalism that has 'gone too far,' it is time to reassert the rights of the collective, or of an alleged silent majority, by restoring national sovereignty in various spheres: politically, by rejecting supranational and multilateral institutions in favour of the nation-state and preferring a strong leader with large powers over a parliamentary system; economically, through at least partial protectionism; culturally, by refusing multiculturalism and minority rights in favor of an essentialist definition of the nation, its members, and its genuine cultural attributes³

The bill is not so much protectionist as it is illiberal. Proposed restrictions or prohibitions of trade are illiberal if they are put in place in reaction to trade liberalisation enabled or promoted by

² Ibid, p2

³ Marlene Laruelle, (2021) *What is illiberalism?* illiberalism.org. Accessed: 30 May 2024 (<https://www.illiberalism.org/definition-of-illiberalism/>)

multilateral agreements that go against perceived national values. In this case, the government is asserting that the British dislike people hunting animals, notably foreign animals, for sport.

The bill, however, puts in place illiberal measures that are at odds with the position of the UK as a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and a Party to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). It further undermines the UK's commitment as a Party to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and, notably, to the recently launched Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). Also, it locks the UK oddly into an ongoing illiberal tie to the European Union regarding the classification of endangered species.

Undermining the UK's position in the WTO

The UK is a founding member of the WTO, and since its departure from the EU, it is now able to represent itself as a sovereign country in WTO negotiations and disputes. In a recently published House of Commons Library Research Briefing (Peres 2024), the UK recognises the importance of the WTO in liberalising trade:

The UK views a functioning WTO and a strengthened multilateral trading system as playing an important role in curbing protectionism and building resilient trade relations.

The Research Briefing further explains that:

The principle of comparative advantage supports the WTO trade liberalisation rationale and its efforts in curbing protectionist practices. According to this principle, countries should channel their resources – financial, human, natural – to the product they are relatively more efficient at producing and then trade it for products other countries produce best. This is intended to increase trade flows and promote efficiency, competition, and innovation, allowing consumers to have access to the best product at the best price.

On the other hand, illiberal trade measures, like this bill, ignore the principle of comparative advantage and promote trade restrictions to decrease trade flows and restrict consumer choice. The bill is completely at odds with the UK's membership in the WTO, as evidenced by official statements such as the following made by the UK Trade Secretary earlier this year at the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference (Department for Business and Trade, Hands and Badenoch 2024):

Free trade creates jobs, opportunities for businesses, and puts money in people's pockets. We want to see more barriers torn down, not new ones being put up.

The bill puts up new barriers, restricts trade and reduces business and employment opportunities.

There is, however, one aspect of the WTO agreements that could be seen to support the bill's illiberal import ban – Article XX of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and specifically paragraphs b and g as follows (WTO 2024a):

Article XX: General Exceptions

The Subject to the requirement that such measures are not applied in a manner which would constitute a means of arbitrary or unjustifiable discrimination between countries where the same conditions prevail, or a disguised restriction on international trade, nothing

in this Agreement shall be construed to prevent the adoption or enforcement by any contracting party of measures: ...

(b) necessary to protect human, animal or plant life or health; ...

(g) relating to the conservation of exhaustible natural resources if such measures are made effective in conjunction with restrictions on domestic production or consumption...

The government could make the case that the bill relates 'to the conservation of exhaustible natural resources,' if indeed the import prohibition could be shown to be an effective conservation measure as put forward by proponents of the bill. However, there is considerable debate about the merits of the bill regarding the conservation of hunted species. For example, a recent academic study noted the following (Challender et al. 2023):

Assuming past trade is indicative of future imports, the argument that the bill would reduce pressure on many threatened species subject to legal hunting for trophies is unfounded. Other threats, notably unregulated hunting, poaching, and/or retaliatory killing, are much greater for most species imported to the UK as hunting trophies...

The bill could also undermine conservation efforts that are supported by legal hunting for trophies. More evidence is needed on the potential impacts of the bill, but it could reduce revenue for conservation areas that depend on such hunting to support management, including law enforcement and anti-poaching efforts, and thereby mitigate other threats to species and habitats. It could have a negative, even devastating, impact on Indigenous people and local communities who rely on legal hunting for trophies for monetary and/or non-monetary benefits (e.g., cash income, meat and employment).

Further, Article XX requires that any trade restriction is not 'a disguised restriction on international trade.' The bill is clearly a restriction on international trade, and the UK is already a Party to an international trade agreement that addresses such matters – CITES. Further, the UK is a Party to the CBD and a signatory to the GBF, which, as discussed in more detail later, calls for the sustainable and legal trade of wild species.

The WTO and CITES

In addition to being a founding member of the WTO, the UK has been a Party of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) since 1976. CITES imposes measures on the trade in endangered species to ensure that the trade is sustainable (non-detrimental) and legal.

Article XX(g) connects the WTO to CITES, with CITES trade measures generally recognised as legitimate exceptions to the GATT rules. The case of the US prohibition of shrimp and shrimp products based on Article XX(g) is often cited as supporting evidence for the role of CITES in regulating the trade in wild species (WTO 2024b). As noted, in a joint report on the WTO and CITES, 'there has not been any WTO dispute directly challenging a CITES trade measure' (WTO 2015: 5).

As an illiberal trade measure, the bill undermines the UK's stated policy position 'to see more barriers torn down, not new ones being put up.' However, it also must be seen in the context of the UK's role as a Party to CITES.

Undermining the UK's position in CITES

CITES is an international agreement to ensure the sustainable and legal trade of endangered wild species. It was drafted in response to a resolution of the 1963 General Assembly of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), agreed by 80 countries in 1973, and launched in 1975.⁴ Trophies were highlighted in the original IUCN resolution:⁵

Whereas many rare and vanishing species of wildlife are threatened with early extinction through illegal export from their native land and whereas such illegal export would be much less frequent if import into other countries were prohibited... the 8th General Assembly of IUCN meeting at Nairobi in 1963 recommends that the practical and political problems involved in illegal export be studied and that an international convention on regulations of export, transit and import of rare or threatened wildlife species or their skins and trophies be drafted and submitted for the approval of governments by the appropriate international organisations possibly on the occasion of a world-wide conference convened for that purpose.

The UK was an active member of IUCN at the time and was also very active in the first CITES Conference of the Parties (CoP) in 1976, where it tabled dozens of proposals regarding the regulation of trade in wild species.⁶ For example, the UK noted that 'All rhinoceros species are endangered, and tight control of trade in them is necessary.'⁷ Today, the UK government provides detailed guidance to anyone who wants to import or export specimens of CITES-listed species, including hunting trophies (Animal and Plant Health Agency, Department for Environment and Food & Rural Affairs 2013).

Under CITES, Parties must first agree that a particular wild species is threatened by international trade. It must then agree on the appropriate trade measures to be put in place to mitigate this threat. This is done by listing the species on one of three appendices:

Appendix I lists species that are the most endangered among CITES-listed animals and plants...

⁴ CITES What is CITES (<https://cites.org/eng/disc/what.php>)

⁵ IUCN Eighth General Assembly Proceedings, 1963. (<https://www.iucn.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/ns-sp-001.pdf>)

⁶ CITES, First meeting of the Conference of the Parties (<https://cites.org/eng/cop/01/prop/index.php>)

⁷ <https://speciesplus.net/api/v1/documents/7744>

Appendix II lists species that are not necessarily now threatened with extinction but that may become so unless trade is closely controlled...

Appendix III is a list of species included at the request of a Party that already regulates trade in the species and that needs the cooperation of other countries...⁸

The text of the CITES agreement⁹ sets out specific measures for permitting trade in listed species. Appendices I and II are particularly relevant to the trophy hunting bill, and their key trade measures are as follows:

- **Export of Appendix I and II species**

An export permit shall only be granted when the following conditions have been met:

(a) a Scientific Authority of the State of export has advised that such export will not be detrimental to the survival of that species;

(b) a Management Authority of the State of export is satisfied that the specimen was not obtained in contravention of the laws of that State for the protection of fauna and flora;

- **Import permit for Appendix I species**

An import permit shall only be granted when the following conditions have been met:

(a) a Scientific Authority of the State of import has advised that the import will be for purposes which are not detrimental to the survival of the species involved; ...

(c) a Management Authority of the State of import is satisfied that the specimen is not to be used for primarily commercial purposes.

In other words, trade in species listed on either Appendix I or Appendix II requires an export permit based on a non-detriment (sustainability) finding and a legal acquisition finding. Trade in Appendix I species also requires an import permit based on a non-detriment finding for the purpose of the import and confirmation that the import is not primarily for commercial purposes.

Hence, under CITES, an internationally agreed-upon system to which the UK is an active Party is in place for regulating the trade in endangered species specimens, including hunting trophies. This system recognises the sovereignty of countries in making decisions about export and import permits, notably with respect to the sustainability and legality of trade. The import prohibition of this bill, on the other hand, ignores this system to which the UK has been a Party for decades and declares most illiberally that hunting trophies from any endangered species cannot be imported.

⁸ CITES, The CITES Appendices (<https://cites.org/eng/app/index.php>)

⁹ CITES, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (<https://cites.org/eng/disc/text.php>)

So, the import prohibition bill also undermines the UK's position with respect to CITES. If the UK is to respect the role of other Parties, it should accept export permits for hunting trophies from species listed on Appendix II, except where additional trade measures may have been agreed. For example, the listing of white rhinos from Namibia in Appendix II is 'for the exclusive purpose of allowing international trade in live animals for in-situ conservation only'¹⁰ and, thus, does not allow for export permits for trophies except as an Appendix I listed species.

For species listed in Appendix I, an import permit is also needed. This means that an importing country like the UK could refuse the import of a hunting trophy, e.g., from a rhino hunted in Namibia or an elephant hunted in Tanzania. This would need to be based on advice from its Scientific Authority that the purpose of the import would be detrimental to the survival of the species or that the import was primarily for commercial purposes. So, for Appendix I species, a system is already in place to prohibit trophy imports if warranted.

Further, a CITES resolution on trade in hunting trophies of species listed in Appendix I states that the importing country should 'accept the finding of the Scientific Authority of the exporting country that the exportation of the hunting trophy is not detrimental... unless there are scientific or management data to indicate otherwise.'¹¹ Thus, specifically regarding hunting trophies, the UK could also review data that may indicate that an import permit should not be issued.

In summary, CITES has a well-established, internationally agreed-upon system for regulating trade in endangered species, including specific measures to address the possible impacts of trade in hunting trophies. The hunting trophy import prohibition bill overrides this multilateral trading system and, in so doing, undermines the UK's position in CITES and, indeed, in multilateral agreements regarding the sustainable and legal trade in wild species.

An illiberal maintenance of EU protectionism

'The illiberal nature of the hunting trophy bill is further accentuated by tying the UK to the European Union through its adherence in terms of the Control of Trade in Endangered Species Regulations 2018¹² to the Principal Wildlife Trade Regulation, i.e., the European Council Regulation 338/97¹³ which is still in force in the UK.

¹⁰ CITES, Appendices (<https://cites.org/eng/app/appendices.php>)

¹¹ CITES, Resolutions. Conf. 2.11 (Rev.) Trade in hunting trophies of species listed in Appendix I (<https://cites.org/sites/default/files/documents/COP/19/resolution/E-Res-02-11-R09.pdf>)

¹² The Control of Trade in Endangered Species Regulations 2018 (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2018/703/regulation/1/made>)

¹³ Council Regulation (EC) No 338/97 (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/eur/1997/338/contents>)

The bill states that it will apply to ‘an animal of a species listed in Annex A or B of the Principal Wildlife Trade Regulation.’¹⁴ Essentially, Annex A includes the species listed in CITES Appendix I, and Annex B includes those listed in Appendix II. However, these annexes can also include species that the European Union, or now independently Great Britain (i.e., the United Kingdom minus Northern Ireland) decide should be there. The reasons could be a determination that the species are ‘so rare that any level of trade would imperil the survival of the species,’ or that ‘levels of international trade might not be compatible with its survival or with the survival of populations in certain countries.’¹⁵

Rather than respecting the listing decisions made by the Parties to CITES, the UK has maintained the EU’s illiberal approach to making up its own lists of endangered species. These are based on the CITES lists, but with the possibility for the EU or Great Britain to add or remove species to the annexes as they see fit.

So, if the trophy hunting import prohibition bill is successful, then even if CITES decides to remove a species from Appendix I or II, the EU or Great Britain could decide to keep it on their Annex A or B and keep the import ban. They could also add new species, such as the Cape Buffalo, a big five game animal that has never been listed by CITES. This further undermines the UK’s position with respect to CITES and other multilateral agreements relevant to the harvesting, use and trade of wild species.

Undermining the UK’s support for the Global Biodiversity Framework

At the CBD’s 15th CoP in December 2022, the Parties, including the UK, adopted the GBF. The UK has played a leadership role in supporting its implementation by being one of the first countries to support the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs and Harrison 2023) with an initial pledge of £10 million (GEF 2023).

The GBF (UN Environment Programme 2022) includes explicit goals and targets that are directly relevant to the management and use of wild species, including the trade in hunting trophies. Of relevance are Goal B and Targets 5 and 9:

GOAL B [Prosper with Nature]

Biodiversity is sustainably used and managed and nature’s contributions to people, including ecosystem functions and services, are valued, maintained, and enhanced, with those currently in decline being restored, supporting the achievement of sustainable

¹⁴ UK Parliament, Hunting Trophies (Import Prohibition) Bill, p.2.

¹⁵ Council Regulation (EC) No 338/97 of 9 December 1996 on the protection of species of wild fauna and flora by regulating trade therein, Article 3, Para 1(a)(i) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/eur/1997/338/article/3>)

development for the benefit of present and future generations by 2050. *Ensure that the use, harvesting and trade of wild species is sustainable, safe, and legal*, preventing overexploitation, minimizing impacts on non-target species and ecosystems, and reducing the risk of pathogen spill-over, applying the ecosystem approach, while respecting and protecting customary sustainable use by indigenous peoples and local communities.

TARGET 5

Ensure that the use, harvesting and trade of wild species is sustainable, safe, and legal, preventing overexploitation, minimizing impacts on non-target species and ecosystems, and reducing the risk of pathogen spill-over, applying the ecosystem approach, while respecting and protecting customary sustainable use by indigenous peoples and local communities.

TARGET 9

Ensure that the management and use of wild species are sustainable, thereby providing social, economic, and environmental benefits for people, especially those in vulnerable situations and those most dependent on biodiversity, including through sustainable biodiversity-based activities, products and services that enhance biodiversity, and protecting and encouraging customary sustainable use by indigenous peoples and local communities.

Hunting as a conservation measure

As indicated by the following statements by Henry Smith, the MP who introduced the bill as a Private Member's Bill in November 2022, there are several arguments made in support of the bill, of which wildlife conservation is only **one**:

- By enacting the Hunting Trophies (Import Prohibition) Bill, **we can support African leaders in their efforts to conserve wildlife** for future generations.¹⁶
- The argument that a ban on hunting trophy imports is neocolonial or that it dictates to other countries how they should manage their conservation policies is absurd. We are a sovereign nation, and **we are entitled to refuse** to support the suffering of animals, to refuse **to put more pressure on already endangered species**, and to refuse to trade in

¹⁶ Henry Smith (2023) We must take a stand against horrors of trophy hunting with import ban, 21 October (<https://www.henrysmith.info/news/we-must-take-stand-against-horrors-trophy-hunting-import-ban>)

the body parts of animals who have been killed for fun. This Bill is about our values and borders¹⁷

- As I said, this is import legislation; its territorial extent is Great Britain. It is about what we choose to import to this country, and a clear majority of the British people do not want the body parts of endangered species imported here, because **they care about these majestic species and want them to continue to exist**, for the sake of their children, grandchildren and many generations to come. The idea that killing an endangered species saves an endangered species is absurd and should be called out for what it is.¹⁸
- The evidence is clear across the globe that our global wildlife is in danger. In fact, over the last half a century we have seen around a 60 per cent decline in global wildlife. Every year more animal species are threatened with extinction, and we must ensure that the UK plays no part in this deterioration. **By enforcing a strict ban on trophy hunting imports, the UK can lead the way in supporting the conservation of endangered species, and protect wildlife overseas.**¹⁹

In addition to the claim that the bill will conserve endangered species, other arguments for the bill include preventing animal suffering, helping African leaders and asserting UK sovereignty to refuse imports of disliked products. As the bill, however, specifically ‘applies to an animal of a species listed in Annex A or B of the Principal Wildlife Trade Regulation’, then the reason species are listed in these Annexes is the primary reason for the legislation, i.e. conservation:

COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 338/97 of 9 December 1996

on the protection of species of wild fauna and flora by regulating trade therein

Article 1

Object

The object of this Regulation is to protect species of wild fauna and flora and to guarantee their conservation by regulating trade therein in accordance with the following Articles.

This Regulation shall apply in compliance with the objectives, principles and provisions of the Convention defined in Article 2.

Article 2

Definitions

¹⁷ Henry Smith (2024) The Government must support the second reading of the ban on hunting trophy imports, 21 March (<https://www.henrysmith.info/news/government-must-support-second-reading-ban-hunting-trophy-imports>)

¹⁸ Henry Smith (2024) Henry Smith MP welcomes progress of new trophy hunting imports ban bill, 25 March (<https://www.henrysmith.info/news/henry-smith-mp-welcomes-progress-new-trophy-hunting-imports-ban-bill>)

¹⁹ Henry Smith, Ban Trophy Hunting Imports. Accessed 16 May 2024 (<https://www.henrysmith.info/bantrophyhuntingimports>)

For the purposes of this Regulation...

(b) 'convention' shall mean the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (Cites)...²⁰

So how does the EU define conservation and how does this definition relate to hunting? The glossary of the EU's Clearing House Mechanism for Biodiversity²¹ defines conservation as follows:

The management of human use of the biosphere so that many yield the greatest sustainable benefit to current generations while maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations: Thus conservation in positive, embracing preservations, maintenance, sustainable utilisation, restoration and enhancement of the natural environment.

This definition is taken directly from the World Conservation Strategy - Living Resource Conservation for Sustainable Development (WCS) published by IUCN in 1980 in cooperation with the UN (Environment Programme, Food and Agriculture Organization, and Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) and WWF. It was further endorsed by IUCN members, including the UK government, at IUCN's 15th General Assembly in 1981, calling on governments 'to utilize the WCS in developing their programmes and to promote the implementation of the WCS principles...'²²

The WCS not only defined conservation as the management of biodiversity use for sustainable human benefit, but it also set out three conservation objectives, very much like the GBF Targets 5 and 9, which called for the sustainable and beneficial use of wild species. These are as follows.²³

Living resource conservation has three specific objectives:

To maintain essential ecological processes and life-support systems (such as soil regeneration and protection, the recycling of nutrients, and the cleansing of waters), on which human survival and development depend;

²⁰ EU, COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 338/97 of 9 December 1996 on the protection of species of wild fauna and flora by regulating trade therein (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:01997R0338-20230520>)

²¹ European Environment Agency, Glossary, CHM Biodiversity (<https://www.eea.europa.eu/help/glossary/chm-biodiversity>)

²²

5/1. World Conservation Strategy (https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/resrecfiles/GA_15_RES_001_World_Conservation_Strategy.pdf)

²³ World Conservation Strategy (1980), Chapter 1, Para 7 (<https://portals.iucn.org/library/efiles/documents/WCS-004.pdf>)

To preserve genetic diversity (the range of genetic material found in the world's organisms), on which depend the breeding programmes necessary for the protection and improvement of cultivated plants and domesticated animals, as well as much scientific advance, technical innovation, and the security of the many industries that use living resources;

To ensure the sustainable utilization of species and ecosystems (notably fish and other wildlife, forests and grazing lands), which support millions of rural communities as well as major industries.

Further, the WCS recognised the importance of wild species utilisation for food, livelihoods, business and recreation:²⁴

Many wild plants and animals of the land are an important renewable resource and source of food, particularly for rural communities in developing countries...

Wild animals and plants also provide a significant, and sometimes the only, source of income for rural communities...

World trade in wildlife and wildlife products has become big business

Finally, wildlife is a major resource base for recreation and tourism... In Canada 11% of the population hold hunting licences; in the USA 8% hold hunting licences...

Specifically, regarding trophy hunting, in 2012, the IUCN Species Survival Commission published the IUCN SSC Guiding Principles on Trophy Hunting as a Tool for Creating Conservation Incentives (IUCN 2012: 4, 5). These principles clearly state that well-managed trophy hunting can deliver conservation outcomes:

Trophy hunting is a form of wildlife use that, when well managed, may assist in furthering conservation objectives by creating the revenue and economic incentives for the management and conservation of the target species and its habitat, as well as supporting local livelihoods...

Trophy hunting, if well managed, is often a higher value, lower impact land use than alternatives such as agriculture or tourism.

The IUCN Principles are echoed in a CITES decision in 2016 at CoP 17 on trade in hunting trophies,²⁵ which states the following:

RECOGNIZING that well-managed and sustainable trophy hunting is consistent with and contributes to species conservation, as it provides both livelihood opportunities for rural

²⁴ World Conservation Strategy (1980), Chapter 4, Paras 6-7, (<https://portals.iucn.org/library/efiles/documents/WCS-004.pdf>)

²⁵ CITES Resolutions, Conf. 17.9 Trade in hunting trophies of species listed in Appendix I or II (https://cites.org/sites/default/files/document/E-Res-17-09_0.pdf)

communities and incentives for habitat conservation, and generates benefits which can be invested for conservation purposes...

AGREES that the export of hunting trophies of species listed in Appendix I or II should be conditional upon issuance of an export permit in accordance with Articles III or IV of the Convention...

RECOMMENDS that Parties exporting hunting trophies of CITES-listed species ensure that trophy hunting is sustainably managed, does not undermine the conservation of target species and, as appropriate, provides benefits to local communities...

In short, well-managed, sustainable and legal trophy hunting is recognised by IUCN Members and CITES Parties, including the UK government, as a conservation measure. A unilateral general prohibition of trophy imports is an anti-conservation measure.

On the other hand, a restriction of imports for trophies from species listed on CITES Appendix I (or, for the most part, EU Annex A) where the purpose of the import is seen to be detrimental to the survival of the species is an appropriate conservation measure.

For species listed on CITES Appendix II, allowing the import of trophies with export permits is the appropriate conservation measure.

Concluding remarks

The Hunting Trophies (Import Prohibition) Bill 2023-24 is an illiberal measure that undermines the UK's commitment to WTO trade liberalisation and to the CITES measures to promote sustainable and legal trade of wild species. Further, it is an anti-conservation measure that undermines the ability of exporting countries and their local communities to benefit from the sustainable use of their wild species.

Rather than prohibiting the importation of hunting trophies outright, the UK government could take a more nuanced and selective approach in support of both trade liberalisation and wildlife conservation. Rather than 'going it alone', the UK government might want to stick to the tried-and-tested multilateral rules-based framework.

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