

COMBATting WILDLIFE CYBERCRIME



PROPOSAL: COP17 DOC. 29

PROPONENT: KENYA

IFAW RECOMMENDATION: SUPPORT

Analysis

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The proposed decision on combatting wildlife cybercrime calls for the sharing of best practice models on online platforms and enforcement protocols; sharing changes to domestic legislation and increasing engagement with online tech companies. The decision builds on previous CITES Decisions 15.57 and 15.58 by outlining measures that can be taken by the CITES Secretariat and Parties to tackle the illegal trade in CITES Appendix I and II species over the Internet.

Enforcement investigations into wildlife cybercrime and NGO research into the online trade in wildlife demonstrate that CITES Appendix I and II species (both live animals and their parts and derivatives) are available for sale over the Internet across the globe. While it is important to note that some of this trade may be legal, there have been a number

of arrests, seizures and prosecutions that highlight that the Internet is being used as a platform for illegal trade. Organised criminal networks of online traders are being identified, and provisional links are being made between consumer demand and the killing or capture of endangered wildlife destined for Internet trade. However, further investigations by enforcement officials combined with a centralised data base of prosecutions is necessary in order to be able to more clearly ascertain cause and effect and quantify how much of a driver online trade may be to poaching on the ground.

Evidence of wildlife trade over online platforms

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INTERPOL's Project WEB (2013) was the first international enforcement operation investigating the scale and nature of online ivory trade in Europe. The operation found 660 advertisements of ivory items conservatively valued at approximately EUR

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Progress

1,450,000 for sale during a two-week period on 61 Internet auction sites in nine European countries. Other enforcement operations and prosecutions have shown that a significant number of traders use the Internet to facilitate illegal trade in endangered species, including Operation Cobra III, an international law enforcement operation conducted in May 2015 with the aim of combating wildlife crime and bringing the criminals involved to justice.

Many recent reports highlight the scale and nature of online wildlife trade. Among them, IFAW's *Wanted Dead or Alive: Exposing Online Wildlife Trade* (2014) found 33,006 endangered animals and wildlife products worth at least US\$10.7 million, for sale over a period of six weeks. The report investigated 280 online marketplaces in 16 countries. Ivory, reptiles and birds were the items most widely offered for trade, and there was a roughly equal split between ads for live animals and ads for parts and products. The results led to 1,192 intelligence files - almost 13 per cent of the ads - being submitted to law enforcers for further investigation. Another notable effort was TRAFFIC's 2016 investigation of Facebook Groups in peninsular Malaysia, which, over a period of five months, found more than 300 apparently wild, live animals for sale as pets, ranging from sun bears and gibbons to otters and binturong.

Some countries have introduced (or are in the process of introducing) domestic legislation specifically designed to make it easier for enforcers to tackle wildlife cybercrime. China and the Czech Republic have already changed their legislation, while the United Kingdom and France are among those with plans in process. Enforcers in some countries are also ramping up their enforcement efforts by increasing their capacity and knowledge through additional funding and training. National investigations and international enforcement operations have taken place but more enforcement actions are necessary if the level of trade is to decrease.

A number of online marketplaces and social media platforms have been ramping up efforts to ensure their platforms are not being used to facilitate illegal wildlife trade. This has included introducing more robust policies prohibiting the illegal trade in wildlife over their sites, removing advertisements and, in some cases, blocking users who breach their policies, as well as collaborating with enforcement agencies to crack down on identified traders. One such example is Tencent, a leading provider of Internet services in China, and owner of sites including WeChat and QQ, which launched "Tencent for the Planet," an initiative that led to Tencent shutting down a group of social media accounts believed to be involved in illegal online wildlife business activities.