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Mr Stephen Alan Wiggins
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Our ref: DWO391540

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Dear Mr Wiggins,

Thank you for your follow-up letter of 3 December to Rory Stewart regarding his announcement about lion hunting trophies during an Adjournment Debate on 24 November. I have been asked to reply and apologise for the delay in doing so.

You raise a large number of issues and I hope that the following helps to explain the UK's approach to trophy hunting.

We share your concern about African lions and the sustainability of trophy hunting, which is why we have worked within the EU to introduce stricter controls on the importation of lion trophies. These ensure that not only must the exporting country be satisfied that the animal was hunted sustainably, but the importing country must also undertake this check. As a result of this extra measure the UK, as part of the EU, has already suspended lion trophy imports from a number of African countries on the grounds that they would be unsustainable.

You ask why the UK tolerates trophy hunting when lions are already under threat from habitat decline. We have some sympathy with your view but we also recognise that for many countries the principle of sustainable utilisation of their own natural resources is extremely important and in many cases a critical source of income. This is a principle we recognise and if implemented properly and with strict quotas, we consider trophy hunting can be a useful wildlife conservation tool. By allowing some trophy hunting that can generate revenue to fund conservation work, land managers and local people are more likely to tolerate the presence of such large, dangerous animals which can be a threat both to them and to their livestock.

That said, the situation in some countries is far from ideal, which led the Minister to announce that we will work with our European and international partners, including the United States, and experts in the field to use our collective influence to drive improvements in the hunting industry. Unless we see a significant improvement in the way hunting takes place, judged against strict criteria such as the age of the lions being hunted, we will ban lion trophy imports within the next two years. As the Minister said during the debate, the only way this will be successful is if we work with African countries to develop shared solutions that the range states also support. We consider a two-year deadline reasonable to allow African lion range states to make the necessary improvements.



You mention Cecil the lion as an example of hunting restrictions failing. The killing of Cecil was illegal and action has reportedly been taken to prosecute the offenders. The illegal hunting of protected wildlife can never be condoned; the Foreign Office Minister for Africa wrote to Zimbabwe at the time asking what more can be done to stop illegal hunting and poaching.

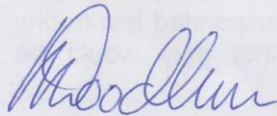
I understand that you would prefer the UK to introduce a blanket ban on lion trophy imports but as the conservation status of African lions varies across the species' range, it is only right that we assess the sustainability of imports on a country-specific basis. More generally, we must rigorously evaluate the available evidence to determine what the right approach is on this difficult issue, and in particular work with the African countries that are home to these magnificent creatures to ensure long-term solutions.

Our previous reply did not make a commitment about a possible EU proposal to up-list the African lion at the 17th Conference of Parties (CoP17) to CITES. This is because we continue to engage with EU colleagues about possible EU CoP17 proposals and have not yet reached final conclusions. Parties have until 27 April to submit proposals to amend the Appendices to CoP17. In broad terms, however, an amendment to a species' listing is more likely to be successful if proposed and supported by range states (and this may yet happen), rather than attempting to impose a solution from outside. You might be interested to see the recent comments of the Executive Secretary of CITES, John Scanlon, when asked about the potential for a proposal during a recent interview with the BBC:

www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-35294840

I hope this reply assures you that the UK Government is committed to ensuring the long-term survival of the African lion.

Yours sincerely,



Kevin Woodhouse
Defra - Customer Contact Unit

