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His Excellency Edgar Chagwa Lungu
State House
P.O. Box 30135 Lusaka
Zambia

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Your Excellency,

Proposed Hippopotamus cull in the Luangwa River Valley

It is with alarm, that I have read^[1] of the proposed reinstated cull of some 2,000 hippopotamus (hippo) along the Luangwa River Valley over the next five years.

The claimed need for such a cull by Zambia's Department of National Parks & Wildlife (DNPW) is "*to prevent the future spread of anthrax among wild animals along a 250km stretch of riverine forest between Chikwa in North Luangwa and Lusangazi in South Luangwa*^[2]." Furthermore, the DNPW claims the threat of such an anthrax 'problem' is exacerbated due to "*high populations of hippo, compounded by unusually low rainfall.*"

The IUCN^[3] class the hippo (*Hippopotamus amphibius*) as vulnerable, with an estimated global population of around 110,000 - 130,000. But threats such as illegal hunting (for meat) and the illicit supply of hippo canine teeth as a source for ivory are among the many threats this species faces:

"A 1994 assessment by TRAFFIC, the monitoring agency of international trade for the IUCN, reported that illegal trade in hippo ivory increased sharply following the international elephant ivory ban in 1989" – IUCN^[3]

In a study published in August 2017 - "*Missing teeth: Discordances in the trade of hippo ivory between Africa and Hong Kong*^[4]" - the researchers found that upon interrogation of Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) trade database, that almost all the trade in hippo teeth ivory was via Hong Kong. However, the volume of imports declared by Hong Kong was substantially different than the quantity reported by the exporting countries (Uganda



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and Tanzania), with the source of some 14,000kg of hippo teeth unaccounted for and thereby deemed to stem from illicit activity (Note: 14,000 kg is equivalent to 2,700 hippos, or 2% of the world's hippo population). Presumably, this excess of imports was sourced from illegal hippo hunting.

Latest data confirms^[2] that in the decade to 2016, more than 6,000 hippo teeth, 2,048 hippo tusks and a further 1,183 hippo 'trophies' were exported to EU Member States alongside thousands of other 'parts and products'. International trade records show that from 2004-2014 around 60,000 kg of hippo ivory were imported into Hong Kong.

Therefore, with the hippo facing such threats, any proposed cull by Zambia's DNPW needs to be backed by clear, independent, irrefutable science that makes such a detestable killing (the cull) a desperate measure of last resort. However, this latest reincarnation of the hippo cull proposed by Zambia's DNPW lacks any such supporting evidence^[2]:

- DNPW has, to date, failed to provide robust, scientific evidence demonstrating that there is an overpopulation of hippos in the Luangwa River or make public the Government of Zambia report that has previously been cited in their justification;
- DNPW have failed to provide robust, scientific evidence that clearly demonstrates that previous hippo culls in the Luangwa Valley have been successful in reducing the hippo population over the long-term;
- DNPW has failed to provide rainfall and river level data showing that river levels and water flow in the Luangwa River are abnormally low and cannot sustain the current hippo population;
- DNPW has failed to provide credible, scientific evidence to show that such an indiscriminate hippo cull of healthy animals would prevent a future outbreak of anthrax – nor prevent the spread of an existing one;
- Scientific evidence suggests that culling hippos stimulates breeding and ends up increasing the population, potentially establishing a vicious cycle of death and destruction.



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The hippo's vulnerability as a species, with the threats the species faces in the illicit clamber of humans seeking to profit from the nonsensical demand for ivory, cannot be helped by culling that same, threatened species.

Arguably, hippos are already being pushed towards extinction^[5] by illicit activity. Zambia's reputation as a country keen to promote its wildlife for income from photographic tourism cannot take the risk of recklessly culling hippos (or any other so threatened species) based upon unsubstantiated policies. Furthermore, the proposed hippo cull is being promoted as a commercial endeavour, with the sale via South African hunting outfitters^[1]:

"According to a post on africahunting.com, Umlilo Safaris is offering five hippos per hunter."

Regardless of the lack of independent scientific evidence to support the hippo cull/killing, there will no doubt be many trophy hunters willing to take the opportunity to kill regardless of any proven need for such killing, or conservation imperative – professional hunters can lack any ethical, or moral compass ^{[1],[6]}.

In conclusion, Zambia's DNWP's strategy to promote a hippo cull as a commercial, trophy hunting opportunity (despite any proven need for such a cull) is not without substantial reputational risk and potential lasting damage to Zambia's image.

Yours respectfully and sincerely,

Stephen Alan Wiggins

Founder of International Wildlife Bond (IWB)

Registered Charity No. 1164833
T.+44 (0)1379 384814
E: stephenawiggins@iwbond.org
Web: <https://iwbond.org/>



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