

# JOINT POSITION ON TROPHY HUNTING

July 2022

We, the undersigned organisations, oppose trophy hunting and the associated trade in trophies and assert that “killing to conserve” is neither an ethical nor a sustainable approach to wildlife conservation.

## FACTS

### 1.1 Biodiversity crisis

In the face of the unprecedented man-made global **biodiversity crisis**, in which species survival is threatened by multiple factors including habitat loss and degradation, overexploitation, climate change, and pollution, trophy hunting puts an additional pressure on already threatened species. While the solutions to most threats are complex, in the case of **trophy hunting**, **banning imports** can be a straightforward mechanism to help reduce risks of **unnecessary overexploitation**.

### 1.2 Trophy hunting

Trophy hunting is the controversial killing of an animal for competition or pleasure, with the purpose of acquiring body parts - such as heads, tusks, antlers, horns, or skins - as a status symbol or for display. Trophy hunting is distinct from killing an animal to obtain meat for human consumption.

### 1.3 Global extent of trophy hunting

Between 2014 and 2018 almost **125,000 trophies of CITES protected species** were imported around the world, with the **EU** being the **second largest importer** after the United States.<sup>1</sup> Most trophies come from **mammals** including imperilled and internationally protected species such as African elephants, leopards, lions, cheetahs, rhinos, giraffes, polar bears, and brown bears.

## THE UNSUSTAINABLE PRACTICE OF TROPHY HUNTING

### 2.1 Trophy hunting threatens the survival of species

Killing the most impressive, strongest and fittest (mainly male) individuals essential for reproduction can result in:

- **Risk of local extirpation** and population declines;<sup>2 3</sup>
  - **Population structure** alterations skewed to subadults and female individuals, which **reduces reproductive success**;<sup>4</sup>
  - Lack of males and altered dispersal patterns, which may result in **inbreeding** particularly in small, isolated populations;<sup>5</sup>
  - **Genetic erosion**: decrease of genetic diversity and loss of advantageous genes promoting adaptability and resilience<sup>6</sup>, e.g., genetic diversity in African lions was reduced by up to 17 % in the last 120 years;<sup>7</sup>
  - **Increased rate of infanticide**: trophy hunting disrupts social structure which can increase the rate of infanticide, where a territorial male kills the young sired by the previous territory-owning male by increasing territorial takeovers (e.g., lions, leopards, and brown bears);<sup>8 9 10</sup>
  - **Phenotypic changes** (alterations of physical characteristics), e.g., **size reduction** of tusks and horns;<sup>11 12 13 14</sup>
  - Destabilisation of populations through **loss of key individuals** and their **social and ecological knowledge** which is critical for survival and reproduction<sup>15 16</sup>, e.g., removal of old elephant bulls can lead to a **lack of leadership** and social guidance<sup>17</sup>, and **increased aggression** in subadult males<sup>18</sup> that can in turn lead to additional elephant mortalities from human-wildlife conflict retaliations.
- Trophy hunting can lead to **decreases in population size, health and resilience**; thus, can considerably **reduce long-term population viability and species survival**.

## 2.2 Trophy hunting undermines wildlife conservation

- Trophy hunting is **inconsistent with** global **conservation** efforts since **imperilled species** that are internationally protected are permitted to be **killed for** status symbols and **recreation**.
  - **Privileged access to protected wildlife for foreign hunters** can lead to a **decrease in tolerance** towards **wildlife** with the **local communities** being prohibited from hunting these species for subsistence and **feeling excluded from the benefits** provided by wildlife while bearing all the associated costs.<sup>19</sup>
  - The **legal trade** in trophies offers a **cover** for illegal practices and the **illegal trade** in wildlife specimens.<sup>20</sup>  
<sup>21</sup> It **stimulates** the **demand** for body parts from protected species and thus can **fuel illegal hunting**.<sup>22</sup>
  - The trophy hunting sector lacks **transparency** and is **plagued with corruption** leading to **excessive quotas, inadequate monitoring, and lack of scientific oversight**.<sup>23 24</sup> As such, trophy hunting undermines the rule of law.
  - Although reliable population data and consistent species monitoring should be a prerequisite for the establishment of non-detrimental trophy hunting quotas for CITES-listed species, the **lack of accurate data** is often ignored in favour of economic interests resulting in **unscientific and unsustainable quotas**.
  - Long-term **wildlife conservation** can **only** be **successful in a healthy ecosystem**, which is, in turn, dependent on the critical contribution of animals to its functioning. Depriving ecosystems of their key actors may critically destabilise the entire systems and also adversely affects associated human benefits from **ecosystem services**.
- Trophy hunting is incompatible with successful species conservation as it interferes with strategies for effective protection and can incentivise illegal practices.

## 2.3 Trophy hunting fails to deliver meaningful economic benefits to communities

- Compared to overall tourism revenues and employment, trophy hunting is **economically insignificant**.<sup>25</sup>
  - **Economic** benefits for local communities are minimal or **lacking** because **trophy hunting** is often conducted **on private farms** or state **reserves** which in many cases are poorly managed and subject to corruption. Local communities typically see little of the **income** generated from trophy hunting, with the **money** often **split between foreign hunting companies and** the pockets of **local elites**.<sup>26 27</sup>
  - Trophy hunting **reduces** opportunities for **sustainable** and **more profitable** non-consumptive **tourism** alternatives like photo tourism. For example, an elephant trophy fee typically amounts to 20,000 to 40,000 USD, whereas it is estimated that an elephant which is allowed to live a full lifespan can generate about 1,600,000 USD in tourism revenues.<sup>28</sup>
- Trophy hunting is a reckless **exploitation** of the **biodiversity** commons for the short-term **profit of** a small, **privileged minority**.

## 2.4 Trophy hunting raises considerable ethical concerns

- **Killing animals for fun** simply to attain decorative objects or status symbols is ethically **unjustifiable**.
- Trophy hunting **disregards** the **intrinsic value** of wild animals by **reducing them to commodities** used for recreational purposes and by acknowledging their **worth** for conservation **only in terms of monetary benefits**, e.g., trophy fees.
- Trophy hunting is an immoral '**pay to slay**' scheme: it puts a '**price tag on death**' as the amount wealthy hunters are willing to **pay to kill** targeted animals when such killings are widely **opposed by society**.
- Hunting organisations set **perverse incentives** to kill more animals by **rewarding** with medals and records **the killing of specific combinations of**, in many cases **threatened species**, such as the *Big 5* (African elephant, rhino, lion, leopard and buffalo) or the *Cats of the World*.<sup>29</sup>

- Trophy hunting is an **ethically unjustifiable** practice that **commodifies** and **objectifies wild animals**, puts a **price tag on death**, and can **contribute to human inequalities** and structural injustices.

## 2.5 Trophy hunting disregards animal welfare

- In most circumstances where animals are deliberately killed, convention and legal provisions demand that the **methods** used should **minimise negative welfare impacts**, and that **operatives** must be **trained** and subjected to **oversight**. However, no such requirements apply to the deliberate killing of wild trophy hunted animals.
  - **Hunting methods** that **increase** the **suffering** of the animal, such as the use of bows and arrows, muzzle loaders, handguns or dogs chasing animals for hours to exhaustion, are **frequently employed** and even **widely encouraged** by trophy hunting organisations.
  - Because trophy hunters seek a **high quality ‘trophy’**, they often avoid damage to body parts that will subsequently be displayed, such as the head, and reduce the number of shots to the animal, thereby increasing the chances of a protracted and **painful death** for the target animal.
  - It is often not a requirement for the trophy hunter to hold a gun or hunting licence, thus, **limited skills** and **lack of experience** of trophy hunters might lead to **unnecessary suffering** of the target animal.
- Trophy hunting is an **inhumane** form of hunting that results in and encourages methods which increase **animal suffering**.

## 2.6 Trophy hunting is opposed by the public

- In a recent survey across **European countries**, **81%** of respondents **opposed trophy hunting** of wild animals in general and **favoured** a strict ban on hunting trophy imports.<sup>30</sup>
  - In **Switzerland**, **96%** of citizens **support banning** trophy hunting imports.<sup>31</sup>
  - According to a 2022 survey in the **United States**, more than **75%** of Americans **oppose trophy hunting**, and **82%** **oppose** the **hunting** and import of trophies from **lions** and **African elephants**, both of which are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.<sup>32</sup>
  - In **South Africa**, **64%** of the population **opposed trophy hunting** in a 2020 survey, despite South Africa being a major exporter of hunting trophies.<sup>33</sup>
- The **majority** of people surveyed in **importing** and **exporting countries** view **trophy hunting negatively** and speak **in favour of banning** trophy hunting or hunting trophy imports, further demonstrating the divide between the public and the **niche trophy hunting clientele driving current policy**.

## CONCLUSION

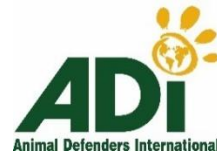
**Trophy hunting** puts additional pressure on threatened species and can have **detrimental consequences** for the genetic integrity and survival of species and the ecosystems of which they are a part, **without** delivering meaningful **economic benefits** for local communities. The trophy hunting industry entrenches **unjust social structures** and is **plagued with** weak governance, corruption, lack of transparency, excessive quotas, illegal hunting, poor monitoring and other **problems**. In addition, trophy hunting practices are often **poorly regulated**, **inhumane** and **inconsiderate of animal welfare**. Furthermore, killing animals for fun is **neither ethically justifiable** nor tolerable in modern society. This is reflected in the **broad public opposition to trophy hunting**. **Alternative** ways of generating income from wildlife, such as ecotourism and other forms of non-consumptive uses, have proven **successful** in benefiting local communities **economically** and increasing their **appreciation for biodiversity** and wildlife, while contributing to the **long-term protection of populations** and species. Such alternatives are jeopardised by the trophy hunting industry, when they should be **prioritised** through further development and **funding**.

It is time for governments to live up to their **responsibility** and take every measure possible **to prevent further loss** of wildlife from the man-made global **biodiversity crisis**. **Banning imports of hunting trophies** is an overdue **step towards giving endangered wildlife a future**.



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- <sup>32</sup> [https://www.humanesociety.org/sites/default/files/docs/HSUS\\_National-Public-Opinion-SCI-Demo-Data.pdf](https://www.humanesociety.org/sites/default/files/docs/HSUS_National-Public-Opinion-SCI-Demo-Data.pdf)
- <sup>33</sup> IPSOS nationally representative, stratified random probability sampling poll November/December 2020, presented in January 2021 in South Africa.





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