

# ARC Centre of Excellence for Environmental Decisions (CEED)

## Media Release

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### **Trophy hunting may be “a key to saving wildlife”**

The world may need to allow controlled trophy hunting of elephants, lions and other animals if it wants to keep its endangered wildlife, an environmental scientist says.

Dr Duan Biggs of the ARC Centre of Excellence for Environmental Decisions (CEED) and The University of Queensland (UQ) argues that trophy hunting of elephants and lions – managed well – is critical for the well-being of local communities in low income countries, and the successful conservation of the animals and their habitats in turn.

Dr Biggs says managed hunting means that only carefully selected animals such as old or dying animals are hunted to ensure sustainability, and only allowing the export and import of trophies from operators that follow best practices.

Without this, he warns, poaching and illegal trade in wildlife products will thrive, as impoverished local communities have no incentive to protect the animals, and may even be driven to poach them or join the illicit trade.

“While millions of dollars are spent each year to combat the illegal wildlife trade, most is used for military enforcement and creating awareness,” says Dr Biggs. “We have neglected to look at how local communities can help in the battle. These are the people who are at the front line.”

He explains that many local people run community conservancies in which they actively protect their wildlife. This includes looking out for poachers and leaving woodlands intact for the animals, rather than clearing these areas to plant low-yielding crops.

Studies show that many of these community conservancies, including 90 per cent of those in Zimbabwe and 50 per cent in Namibia, are in fact sustained by trophy hunting. In 2013, along with tourism, trophy hunting supported 6,400 jobs and generated AUD\$7.7 million as well producing 500 tonnes of meat – two million high protein meals – for Namibia.

These incentives discourage local people from poaching, as the yield pays the wages of those who work on conservation, helps build the community’s infrastructure, or contributes to households and livelihoods, Dr Biggs says.

“So even when they want to get rid of ‘problem animals’, such as elephants that trample and destroy their homes and crops, or lions that eat their livestock, they won’t,” he says. “Knowing that their

community can gain hundreds of thousands of dollars from trophy hunting leads them to have much greater tolerance for the wildlife.”

Research shows that community conservancies have helped to boost Namibia’s elephant population from 7,500 to 20,000 between 1995 and 2013 while the range of lions has expanded to outside of state protected areas in the same period.

“This increase indicates that they are effectively removing some of the threats to their animals,” Dr Biggs says. “The conservancies are successful because the people self-enforce within the community – there’s much less incentive to poach if you know that your neighbour is going to report you or the community turn against you.”

He warns that the banning of trophy hunting will leave many of them – and their communities – in dire straits as people will lose their jobs, income and food, Dr Biggs says. In fact it may even make wildlife poaching worse.

“Photographic tourism alone cannot sustain their livelihoods or conservancies because the revenue is insufficient and unpredictable. Poachers are not discouraged by law enforcement because the incentive to poach is too high. Many also feel that conservation laws are unfair to them.

“So a decision to ban all hunting trophies, like the Australian government recently did with lion trophies from Africa, is like banning all blueberries from Asia because some from one country were contaminated.

“Apart from punishing the entire region unfairly, it also takes away people’s rights to make their own decisions on their resources. They already resent people from rich countries telling them what they can and cannot do with their wildlife.”

“In a perfect world, we wouldn’t have to kill a single animal,” he adds. “But since it isn’t, we need to make difficult trade-offs: we will never be able to stop poaching completely, but if we want to minimise it, we’ll have to help the local communities generate as much income as they would earn otherwise.

“And if we can’t do that, the reality is we either allow the hunting of a few old animals that no longer contribute to the continuation of the species, or we let the entire species get closer to extinction.”

The above points, as well as the local communities’ role in combatting the worldwide poaching crisis and illegal wildlife trade, were discussed by scientists and conservation managers at a recent symposium on the role of communities, governance, incentives and sustainable use in combating wildlife crime held in South Africa.

The symposium’s findings, including understanding and responding to community rights, needs and priorities when designing initiatives to combat this growing threat, will be taken to an illegal wildlife trade conference in Kasane, Botswana today.

Australia’s ARC Centre of Excellence for Environmental Decisions (CEED), at the University of Queensland, was the scientific partner for the symposium led by the International Union for

Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group (SULi) with the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), the Austrian Ministry of Environment and TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network, the GIZ and USAID.

CEED is the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Environmental Decisions. CEED's research tackles key gaps in environmental decision making, monitoring and adaptive management.

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**For more information on the symposium and its outcomes:**

[https://www.iucn.org/about/union/commissions/sustainable\\_use\\_and\\_livelihoods\\_specialist\\_group/](https://www.iucn.org/about/union/commissions/sustainable_use_and_livelihoods_specialist_group/)

For more information on the symposium partners, please visit [www.ceed.edu.au](http://www.ceed.edu.au), [www.iucn.org](http://www.iucn.org), [www.iied.org](http://www.iied.org), [www.traffic.org](http://www.traffic.org), [www.giz.de](http://www.giz.de), [usaid.gov](http://usaid.gov), and [www.acds.co.za](http://www.acds.co.za).