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From the Minister for Environment & Agri-Environment
Elliot Morley MP

Dear Caroline

Thank you for your letter of 24 January to Ben Bradshaw, enclosing about the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and the ivory trade.

The UK Government is absolutely clear that illegal and unsustainable trade in ivory should not be permitted. This issue is brought into sharp relief every two to three years when the parties to the CITES Convention meet to discuss what controls on wildlife trade are needed. The objective of CITES is not to prohibit wildlife trade, but rather to ensure that where trade is carried out it is done in a sustainable way that ensures the long-term survival of all species.

The possibility of one-off sales of ivory stocks was one of the many items discussed at the 12th conference of CITES Parties in November 2002, in Chile (CoP12). The UK's position at the Conference was clear. We had agreed with other EU Member States that the EU would not support any resumption in the commercial ivory trade unless we were satisfied that this would not result in an increase in the illegal killing of elephants, or undermine the conservation of elephant populations elsewhere in the world.

The Parties rejected trading quota proposals from Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia and South Africa in respect of their elephant populations on the grounds that there were insufficient controls to prevent an increase in the illegal killing of elephants. However, they did agree that Botswana, Namibia and South Africa should be allowed to make one-off sales of 20, 10 and 30 tonnes of ivory respectively, provided that a number of strict pre-conditions are met.

The conditions provide for strict controls over the potential markets for this ivory, including the development of a unique marking system for any worked ivory that may be produced. They also provide for careful monitoring of the illegal killing of elephants using baseline data which is now being gathered on population and poaching levels. The ivory in question comes from existing legal stocks collected from elephants that have either died of natural causes, or as a result of Government-regulated population control measures. The aim of these controls is to prevent any illegal ivory from entering into these regulated markets and to discourage an upsurge in poaching. The proceeds of the trade would be used exclusively for elephant conservation and community conservation projects within, or adjacent to, the elephants' range.

The Santiago agreement was subsequently endorsed by the CITES Parties at their 13th Conference (CoP13), which was held in Bangkok, Thailand, at the beginning of October 2004. In endorsing this, the Parties also rejected a proposal from Namibia for an annual quota of 2000 kilos of raw ivory, as they felt this would be premature given that the conditions for the one-off sale agreed at CoP12 have not yet been met. They did agree, however, that Namibia should be allowed a limited non-commercial trade in traditional native jewellery (known as *ekipas*) made from worked ivory, provided that these were properly marked and accompanied by a valid export permit. Although it does not breach the Santiago principles, the EU abstained on this latter proposal because the member states were unable to reach consensus. The UK view was that Namibia should have sought consensus with opposing range states on this issue as part of a comprehensive agreement on the controls on the trade in ivory and the proposal should have been submitted to CoP14.

These one-off sales of ivory can, of course, be suspended at any time if the CITES Secretariat and the Convention's Standing Committee (which meets between the main CITES Conferences) find that an exporting or importing country has not complied with the controls. The sales can also be stopped if there is evidence that this proposed trade is having a negative impact on other elephant populations. Two monitoring systems that have been established to track the illegal killing of elephants (Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants, or MIKE) and illegal sales of ivory (Elephant Trade Information System, or ETIS) will be critical in ensuring that elephant range states relying on tourism are not harmed by ivory sales from countries that also rely on trade.

The UK draws a distinction between one-off sales of ivory legally held by governments for the benefit of their wildlife conservation programmes, and a general return to commercial trading in ivory where we are not convinced the conditions currently exist to ensure proper protection for elephants. I can assure you that neither the UK, nor the other EU member states, will support the proposed one-off sales if we are not entirely satisfied that the strict conditions I have referred to have been met.

*Yours
Elliot*

ELLIOT MORLEY