



Tiger Trade Facts & Fallacies

ASSUMPTION: Legalizing domestic tiger trade is the sovereign right of any nation.

FACTS:

- CITES Resolution Conf. 12.5 asks Parties to prohibit trade in tiger parts and derivatives, both internationally and domestically, even from captive-bred specimens. This resolution was adopted by consensus.
- Range countries with wild tiger populations stand to lose the most from any unilateral decision to legalize any form of tiger trade.
- Any country that legalizes tiger trade at this time will bear significant responsibility for loss of wild tigers due to poaching.

ASSUMPTION: Bans on tiger trade have not worked, so it is time to try a new approach.

FACTS:

- The current international and domestic bans on trade in tiger products have helped Russia's tiger population to recover and other wild tiger populations to persist.
- Without these bans, wild tigers would be even worse off than they are today.
- Experience has shown that bans on trade in other highly endangered species have been very effective – when they are adequately supported and enforced.

ASSUMPTION: Traditional tiger conservation methods have not worked, as evidenced by the continuing decline of wild tiger populations.

FACTS:

- Few tiger range countries have invested the full political will and financial support necessary for traditional tiger conservation methods to work.
- Protection of habitat and prey species coupled with anti-poaching efforts stabilized wild tiger populations in the Russian Far East and in certain reserves in India and elsewhere.
- Wild tigers are far more likely to survive and thrive if they are well protected in situ.
- Traditional conservation methods are far less costly per tiger protected than any ex situ scenario, and also protect entire species complexes and ecosystems.

ASSUMPTION: Tiger farming will supply all demand for tiger products at an affordable price.

FACTS:

- Raising a farmed tiger to maturity is 250 times as expensive as poaching a wild tiger in India. Therefore, tigers poached from the wild will provide a cheaper alternative to supplement legal sources.
- A regulatory regime would drive up the costs of farmed products, making the lower costs of poached tigers even more attractive.
- There is no evidence that tiger farming will do anything to curb the economic incentive to poach tigers.
- There is insufficient information on potential demand for tiger products if bans were lifted.

ASSUMPTION: Legal trade in farmed tiger products would decrease demand for parts of wild tigers.

FACTS:

- There is no evidence to support such a claim.
- Legalizing trade would ignite demand from former consumers and recruit new consumers, thereby increasing demand.
- The bones of wild tigers are believed by some consumers to have more powerful health effects, making them more desirable and more valuable than farmed products.
- Given the impossibility of distinguishing wild tiger products from farmed tiger products, stopping illegal trade in parts from wild tigers would be made far more difficult.



ASSUMPTION: Legalizing trade in farmed tiger products will decrease poaching of wild tigers.

FACTS:

- There is no evidence to support such a claim.
- Poaching, smuggling and illicit trade are often run by organized criminal networks with large profit margins, and legalizing trade in products from farmed tigers is likely to create rather than end black market opportunities.
- Tiger poaching will always be less expensive than tiger farming and, therefore, more lucrative.
- Illegal tiger products cannot be distinguished from legal tiger products.
- If trade in farmed tigers is legalized, poaching of wild tigers will increase, and scientific studies in India have demonstrated that most wild tiger populations will not be able to withstand even small increases in poaching over time.
- To decrease poaching of wild tigers, trade bans must be kept in place and better implemented with professional law enforcement efforts all along the trade chain, from forest to end-use market.

ASSUMPTION: Farmed tigers will one day be placed into the wild, ensuring survival of wild tigers.

FACTS:

- Wild tigers can be saved more easily and at far less expense by protecting the habitat and prey of existing wild tiger populations.
- Most tigers on farms do not have the genetic pedigree for release into the wild.
- Tigers in farms are bred to be docile with other tigers, making it likely that resident wild tigers, which are territorial, would kill any farmed tigers introduced into the wild.
- To date, reintroductions of lions and other carnivores have failed and resulted in loss of human lives, livestock and the wildlife involved.
- Due to their lack of fear of humans, captive-bred tigers would be easily poached.
- A lack of fear of humans will make any farm-raised tigers released into the wild a menace to people.
- Given good management, there are enough tigers left in the wild to ensure recovery of wild tigers. Indeed, they will "breed like cats" with adequate protection of habitat and prey, coupled with enforcement of existing laws.

ASSUMPTION: Tiger products are needed for human health and to preserve certain cultural practices.

FACTS:

- Leading members of the global traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) industry say they do not need or want tiger products and that reopening trade in such products will damage the reputation of TCM. It is important to respect these wishes and views, particularly the efforts of TCM practitioners to use alternatives to tiger bone.
- Leaders of ethnic communities that have used tiger skins to adorn traditional dress are now encouraging their people to stop wearing the fur of tigers and other endangered species.

ASSUMPTION: Legalizing trade products from tiger farms will enhance local livelihoods.

FACTS:

- The livelihoods that will be enhanced by legalizing trade in farmed tiger products are likely to be already-wealthy tiger farm owners and medicine manufacturers, or the criminal networks that will insert the parts of wild tigers into the market.
- It is indeed important to work to enhance the livelihoods of the rural poor, but legalization of trade in tiger products will not achieve this. In India, the potential for many local poor people living near tiger reserves to base their livelihoods on revenue from tourist revenue and handicrafts is significant. Therefore, reopening of tiger bone trade in China could harm the rural poor of India.
- Smuggling of tiger parts and derivatives is a symptom of a lack of effective enforcement to stop transnational crime, which has negative social and economic implications. By commitments to cross-border enforcement efforts, governments will move a long way towards combating not just illegal wildlife trade, but other forms of serious crime as well.

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