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From Rory Stewart OBE MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Environment and Rural Affairs

Dear George,

Thank you for your email of 16 June on behalf of a number of your constituents about the import of hunting trophies.

I appreciate that the practice of hunting endangered species is emotive for many people. Wildlife trade is regulated by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), of which the UK is a Party. The approach of CITES, which we support, is to ensure that when wildlife trade takes place, it is done so legally and sustainably, not necessarily to reduce or end it. Of over 35,000 species that CITES protects, commercial trade in the most endangered is prohibited apart from in exceptional circumstances. For the others limited trade is allowed subject to regulation and monitoring to ensure that it is sustainable.

CITES sets out international controls for the import and export of hunting trophies. A hunting trophy of an endangered species can only be exported if the exporting country is satisfied that the hunt was legal and sustainable.

Import controls are currently implemented at an EU-wide level and, in light of growing concerns about the sustainability of the hunting of some species, stricter controls on the import of hunting trophies of six species, including lions and African elephants, have been introduced. As a result, the import of hunting trophies of certain species from certain countries is currently prohibited. In addition, individual Member States can take a stricter approach, as in the case of the Netherlands' ban on trophy imports. The UK adopts a stricter approach than EU countries in a number of areas, for example, prohibiting the re-export of raw ivory.

The Government considers that properly managed, legal and sustainable trophy hunting can play a part in species conservation efforts, including by providing an important source of funding for conservation in some countries. In view of this, we have no plans to introduce legislation banning the import of all hunting trophies of endangered species. We will however continue to monitor the impact of trophy hunting and will work to put in place greater protection, including prohibiting imports, if this is shown to be needed.

For example, in recognition of the real concerns about the impact of trophy hunting on lion conservation, I announced in Parliament on 24 November 2015 that the Government will ban lion trophy imports by the end of 2017 unless there are improvements in the way hunting takes place in certain countries, judged against strict criteria.

In addition to this, working with EU Member States, the UK led in the development of a proposal for enhanced global rules on hunting trophies to be agreed at the 17th Conference of CITES Parties this autumn. This proposal aims to establish common guidelines so that hunting trophy exports are sustainable, and in particular agree clear criteria on when lion trophy hunting might be considered acceptable.

The British people have voted to leave the European Union. However, until Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty is invoked we will continue to engage with EU business as normal and be engaged in EU decision making in the usual way. Once Article 50 is invoked we will remain bound by EU law until the withdrawal agreement comes into force.

I can assure your constituents that we intend to play our part in securing the long-term survival of the African lion and other species subject to trophy hunting.



RORY STEWART