

WWF Position and Recommendations on tiger farming

Definition of *tiger farm*¹: captive facilities that breed tigers with an intent (or reasonable probability) of supplying or directly engaging in the commercial trade in tiger products, be they body parts or derivatives. The application of this definition is not limited by the stated purpose of such facilities; rather it is to be informed by the quality and independence of regulatory oversight of that facility's operations.

The number of tigers in tiger farms has escalated rapidly in recent years, with 7,000-8,000 tigers reportedly held in a large number of facilities throughout East and Southeast Asia - most notably in China, Thailand, Lao PDR and Viet Nam.^{2 3} This captive population is much higher than the globally estimated 3,890 tigers remaining in the wild.

WWF believes the current scale of captive breeding operations within tiger farms is a significant obstacle to the protection and recovery of wild tiger populations, as it allows for two highly negative pressures on the species to persist:

- **Tiger farms undermine enforcement efforts:** the movement (or leakage) of tiger products from such facilities to consumer markets, be it through legal or illegal means, complicates and thus undermines enforcement efforts aimed at distinguishing and stopping the trade in wild tiger products.
- **Tiger farms help perpetuate (and grow) demand:** The availability of any tiger products or derivatives from tiger farms serves to legitimize and normalize demand for such items in a region currently experiencing profound and sustained growth of consumer classes. Given the high cost of raising tigers in captivity, tiger farms have a vested interest in promoting demand for their products, whether by putting pressure on the Government to be allowed to sell them or by exploiting buyers who are unaware of the law. *Even a modest expansion in the persistent demand for tiger products could trigger immense poaching pressures on wild populations.*

Such concerns are well-founded, given the considerable evidence base showing that the vast majority of tigers killed by poachers are transported *from* countries such as India, Russia, Nepal, Indonesia and Malaysia *towards* countries currently permitting the operation of tiger farms within their borders.⁴

¹ Given that there is no universally recognized definition for the term 'tiger farm', the definition provided here has been adopted by WWF for purposes of this position paper.

² "EIA Briefing: Asian Big Cats; Recommendations for CITES CoP 17" (2016); China = >5,000-6,000; Thailand = >1,450; Laos = 435 (roughly); Vietnam = 241.

³ It is estimated that there are also roughly 5,000 captive tigers in the USA at this time. Here the situation is distinct in that the large majority of these tigers are not held in 'tiger farms', as is the case in Asia. However, the lack of federal regulation around this large number of tigers (over 90% of which are held outside of accredited zoos), leaves them vulnerable to an illegal trade which continues to drive poaching of their wild counterparts. For more on WWF's position on US captive tigers please refer to <http://www.worldwildlife.org/stories/more-tigers-in-american-backyards-than-in-the-wild>

⁴ Review of Implementation of Resolution Conf. 12.5 (Rev. CoP16) on Conservation of and Trade in Tigers and other Appendix I Big Cat Species", E-SC65-Doc.38-Annex 1, IUCN/TRAFFIC (2014).

Recommendations:

WWF recommends that States which currently permit tiger farms reduce the negative impact of such operations on the wild tiger population by taking the following steps:

- i) Put in place a clear plan and timeline* to phase out existing captive breeding facilities used for commercial purposes⁵, while also taking actions to prevent the creation of new facilities (or expansion of existing facilities) in the interim.
- ii) Ban commercial trade in all tiger parts, from any source*, by introducing laws which prohibit legal trade in all tiger products. Where such laws already exist, loopholes that enable trade should be addressed and closed. Such actions would be in line with CITES Decision 14.69 which states tigers should not be bred for trade in their parts and derivatives. It would also serve to remove the main economic incentive for captive breeding.

Until such time as the phase-out of tiger farms has been completed, countries should:

- iii) Institute measures to increase transparency* on the operations of existing tiger farms, including mechanisms to make all pertinent details regarding these facilities publically available on a regular basis. Such details should include stud books providing details of birth rates and overall numbers, disposal, movement or storage of all tiger specimens (live or dead, including all parts and derivatives). The status and results of these efforts might also be reported back as an element of a country's international commitment to CITES. Currently, the lack of such transparency allows for the possibility of unlawful activity described in *point iv*, below.
- iv) Guarantee rigorous enforcement oversight* of all captive breeding facilities to ensure tiger products from such facilities are unable to enter trade chains or markets, which may increase demand. It is essential that such enforcement measures ensure, at a minimum, that illegal wild tiger products are not laundered through lawfully operating captive breeding facilities or points of sale. Efforts must be supported by regular monitoring of market availability (including e-commerce and social media groups) and well-publicised enforcement action by State authorities.
- v) Ensure* no captive breeding facilities established primarily for commercial purposes masquerade as scientific or conservation entities in order to exploit loopholes in existing law or to receive any other undue benefits.
- vi) Ensure jurisdiction* over captive tiger facilities is vested with central or federal-level authorities so it is possible for the above points to be implemented in a consistent and efficient manner across jurisdictions; and to also ensure the same national government does not abrogate its obligations under international agreements such as CITES.
- vii) Engage with intergovernmental processes* such as the *Global Tiger Initiative (GTI)* and expert intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations to implement the above-listed priorities.

⁵ In line with CITES Decision 14.69 and [Notification 2008/059](#).