

The world votes to end China's tiger trade : Trade in Tiger Parts banned, Tiger "Farms" to be monitored

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The ruling puts a serious question mark on the fate of at least 5000 tigers currently in Chinese breeding farms, which had been bred in hope that the domestic trade in tiger parts would be reopened.

"We have received advice that if we opened hospitals providing tiger bones from the farms, people would stop going to the black market," Wang Weisheng, director at the wildlife department of China's state forestry administration had told Reuters in an interview on the sidelines of the CITES meeting before the crucial vote.

"This will cut down the profit of poachers and smugglers. As a responsible government, we will launch a scientific evaluation of this advice. If the policy (of allowing trade) can prove that it can help the tiger population internationally, we will adopt it. If the policy can't help the wild tiger, we will not employ it," he said.

The evaluation was to start in July but he could not say how long it might take, Reuters said. China banned the sale of tiger products in their domestic market in 1993 which are used for traditional medicines.

The debate on the issue started with India tabling the draft decision framed in association with Nepal, China, the Russian Federation and other important tiger range states.

After introducing the document showing concern at the future of the species and the imminent threat posed to it due to farming, India gave a status report of the initiatives it was taking to control wildlife crime in the country. India ended by saying it could not imagine a world where a ban on tiger parts trade is lifted and urged all parties to stop farming.

This found support from other range countries like Bhutan, Nepal, Russia and Thailand. Even African countries affected by wildlife trade such as Swaziland, Kenya and Malawi also spoke up in support of the draft. In fact one of the crucial lines of the draft was introduced by the US, which came out very strongly against tiger farming.

The crucial portions of the draft said:

'Asian big cat range States shall strengthen their efforts to implement Resolution Conf. 12.5, and for

tiger range States, report on progress at SC57, and subsequent meetings of the Standing Committee, and to the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties; with a review for CoP15 identifying gaps and additional measures needed;

Asian big cat range States shall improve international cooperation in conservation and trade control through continual dialogue, and when convened, tiger range States are invited to participate in the tiger trade enforcement workshop and the conservation strategy workshop.

Parties are strongly encouraged to develop or improve implementation of regional enforcement networks

Parties with intensive operations breeding tigers on a commercial scale shall implement measures to restrict the captive population to a level supportive only to conserving wild tigers. Tigers should not be bred for trade in parts and derivatives.

All parties evaluating their domestic tiger trade control policies shall take into consideration the view of parties as expressed in Res. Conf. 12.5.'

The operative portions of the Res conf 12.5 interestingly said the following:

'RECOMMENDS that the consumer States of specimens from the tiger and other Asian big cat species: where necessary and appropriate, remove references to parts and derivatives of Appendix-I Asian big cats from the official pharmacopoeia and include acceptable substitute products that do not endanger other wild species, and introduce programmes to educate the industry and user groups in order to eliminate the use of substances derived from Appendix-I Asian big cats and promote the adoption of appropriate alternatives….'

Strangely enough after tabling the above resolution China then wanted to insert the word 'international' before the word 'Trade' in the sentence: 'Tigers shall not be bred for trade in parts and derivatives'. They, however, lost the vote as it did not get the required 66.6% majority. They received only 28.79% of the vote.

Tiger -wine

'Inserting the word would have meant that China could have happily carried on with the domestic trade by reopening it. I think this has been one of the most important victories for the tiger especially when the trade was beginning to even pass off Asiatic lion bones as those of the tiger,' Ashok Kumar, vice chairman of Wildlife Trust of India, who is attending the meeting, said.

The 'Tiger farm' owners in China were breeding tigers in captivity in the hope that the domestic ban on the sale of tiger parts and derivatives would one day be lifted.

These farms mass-produce tigers so that their bones can be fermented to create 'bone-strengthening tonic,' and tiger meat has until recently been featured on the cafeteria menu.

Meanwhile, tiger farm owners have been lobbying the government to reopen trade in tigers complaining that the upkeep of so many tigers is a financial burden.

The CITES Secretariat's own mission report termed tiger farming as an 'industry', which is the result of bad business decision.

'We are extremely pleased that range states spoke up on behalf of their tiger populations in the wild. Allowing the farming of tigers for trade would have been just another nail in the coffin for this flagship species'said Grace Gabriel, Asia Regional Director for International Fund for Animal Welfare expressing her delight.

The captive breeding of a tiger requires 250 times more of a financial investment than the pittance necessary to put a bullet in a tiger and transport it to market.

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Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) is a not-for-Profit Charity organization in India. The organization works across the country in the field of wildlife conservation, Rescue, Rehabilitation, Enforcement assistance etc.. to ensure a better future for the Wildlife in India.

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