

African Lion at the CITES CoP 17

Appendix II: African populations of *Panthera leo*

A zero annual export quota is established for specimens of bones, bone pieces, bone products, claws, skeletons, skulls and teeth removed from the wild and traded for commercial purposes.

Annual export quotas for trade in bones, bone pieces, bone products, claws, skeletons, skulls and teeth for commercial purposes, derived from captive breeding operations in South Africa will be established and communicated annually to the CITES Secretariat.

The box above contains the decision that was taken by the CITES Conference of Parties 17 in Johannesburg, South Africa, on 5 October 2016, along with a long list of supplementary conservation actions. The original proposal by Niger and ten additional lion range States to up-list *Panthera leo* did not find strong support because neither the biological nor the trade criteria required to list the African lion under Appendix I were met. The compromise to keep Africa's lions in Appendix II with an annotation was the result of long negotiations in a specific working group that met for four evenings during the conference. The decision does not affect trophy hunting (trophies are personal effects, not commercial items) but it bans all commercial trade in wild lion parts. This was a response to concerns about the increasing lion bone trade from Africa to East Asia. Under this annotation, it is still possible to export bones and other body parts from captive bred lions from South Africa, but at least it becomes transparent. Many stakeholders wanted to see a zero quota for all lion bone, but CITES can only impose international trade limitations to a country after demonstrating serious problems with sustainability. Many find South Africa's hunting in confined enclosures ("canned hunting") ethically unacceptable, but CITES only looks at biological sustainability, which is not an issue here. The problems are with laundering of wild lion bones and creating loopholes for tigers. However, the TRAFFIC/WildCRU report (Williams et al. 2016) does not offer evidence; recent reports from Mozambique (C. Everatt, pers.comm.) remind us that the threat is real but we need to expand such anecdotal evidence into a systematic analysis. We now have three years to gather evidence that the trade is detrimental to the species and then address it again at the next CoP. At the same time, canned hunting remains the focus of many animal welfare organisations, and through a decision at the IUCN World Conservation Congress it has also become an issue for IUCN (<https://portals.iucn.org/congress/motion/009>).

The CITES CoP17 decision on the African lion also lists a number of assignments directed to the Secretariat, the Animal Committee, and the Standing Committee, and makes recommendations to the African lion range States and the Parties, which are worth mentioning because they include topics to which the IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group may be able to contribute. These include (1) to develop and implement joint lion conservation plans and strategies (considering the existing plans), (2) develop an inventory of African lion populations and the relevant databases, (3) undertake studies on legal and illegal trade in lion parts and smuggling routes, (4) undertake a comparative study of lion population trends in relation to conservation and management practices, (5) support capacity-building and performing non-detrimental findings, and (6) review the taxonomy of *Panthera leo*. The CITES Standing Committee shall establish a Task Force for the African lion that incorporates all African lion range States, but also important consumer countries. Finally, all African lion range States are encouraged to collaborate according to this Decision, and "all Parties, governmental, intergovernmental, non-governmental organisations, donors and other entities" are invited to join the efforts to "conserve and restore this iconic species across the continent".

These are certainly sublime words, and no doubt the lion would be saved if these intentions would come true. But without any irony – these recommendations, and foremost the assignments directed to the Secretariat ("subject to external funding"...), offer a roadmap to implement a number of important conservation measures in collaboration with the lion range States. This is completely in line with the decisions of the Entebbe Lion Range States Meeting in May 2016 (see editorial Cat News 63, Spring 2016), and it reflects the conclusion of the evaluation of the Lion Conservation Strategies (Bauer et al. 2016). We think that the Johannesburg compromise and the resulting Decision is actually more than a stopgap. Up-listing or split-listing would have divided the range States and would have eroded willingness to collaborate. Now we have some clear assignments which outline a constructive way forward and three years – until the next CITES CoP – to prepare for next steps.

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Bauer H., Nowell K., Breitenmoser U., Jones M. & Sillero-Zubiri C. 2015. Review of Lion Conservation Strategies. CMS working document, Bonn. http://www.cms.int/sites/default/files/document/CMS_Review_of_Lion_Conservation_Strategies_Final_0.pdf

Williams V. L., Newton D. J., Loveridge A. J. & Macdonald D. W. 2015. Bones of Contention: An Assessment of the South African Trade in African Lion *Panthera leo* Bones and Other Body Parts. TRAFFIC, Cambridge, UK & WildCRU, Oxford, UK