

Joan Walley MP  
Chair, Environmental Audit Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

11 January 2012

Dear Ms Walley,

We write on behalf of the undersigned members of Wildlife and Countryside Link, to welcome the Committee's interest in conducting an inquiry into wildlife crime, and to convey some points in relation to the possible scope of the inquiry.

It is our view that a focus on the illegal wildlife trade in the UK would be of particular relevance at this time. Last year saw a record number of endangered rhinos killed for their horns and a record number of large ivory seizures, representing the growing threat to elephants posed by illegal trade. According to a recent Global Financial Integrity Report from 2011, the illegal wildlife trade is worth up to \$10 billion a year and has strong links to organised crime and terrorism. It poses dangers to human health as well as an evident threat to endangered species and biodiversity around the world.

As you know, the Committee's 2004 report into Wildlife Crime recognised that "the link between wildlife crime and other serious crimes, the clear and growing involvement of organised crime, and the increased reliance on the internet for illegal trade in protected species makes the argument for spending time and resources on this area of crime compelling." It is our view that this case has become even more pressing since the report's publication.

A focused inquiry in 2012 would be timely for four reasons. Firstly, this year the UK will update its COTES (Control of Trade in Endangered Species) Regulations in line with the European Commission's review of wildlife legislation. This may also prompt an in-depth review of COTES as mandated in 2009. Secondly, the Law Commission's current review of UK wildlife law has a broad remit including the management of wildlife in the UK, welfare and cruelty provisions relating to wild animals, and wildlife criminal offences. However the Commission's consultation paper, expected this summer, is likely to focus on localised interaction with wildlife, as opposed to wildlife trade. Thirdly, legislation to establish the National Crime Agency will be introduced this year, which will impact on the enforcement of the illegal wildlife trade. Finally, the annual CITES Standing Committee takes place in late July 2012, and an EAC inquiry into the illegal wildlife trade would serve to highlight important issues to the UK Government and the international community at this time. We therefore encourage the Committee to consider an inquiry into the illegal wildlife trade in the early summer of 2012.



Wildlife and Countryside Link  
89 Albert Embankment  
London  
SE1 7TP

T: 020 7820 8600  
F: 020 7820 8620  
E: [enquiry@wcl.org.uk](mailto:enquiry@wcl.org.uk)  
W: [www.wcl.org.uk](http://www.wcl.org.uk)

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We once again welcome the Committee's interest in this area and look forward to submitting formal evidence on whatever terms of reference you decide

Yours sincerely,

Heather Sohl  
Chair, Wildlife Trade Working Group, Wildlife and Countryside Link

Thomas Quinn,  
Vice-Chair, Wildlife Trade Working Group, Wildlife and Countryside Link

This letter is supported by the following Wildlife and Countryside Link members:



Wildlife and Countryside Link  
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London  
SE1 7TP

T: 020 7820 8600  
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