

Factsheet produced by the IUCN Global Species Programme in consultation with the SSC Steering Committee, the Chair of the Joint SSC and CEESP Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group

### **Sustainable use and trophy hunting: differences and IUCN positions**

This factsheet serves to clarify differences between sustainable use and trophy hunting and provide an explanation of IUCN's positions, or not, on both.

#### **Sustainable use**

The closest IUCN has come to defining sustainable use is in the introduction to the World Conservation Strategy (1980) in which 'living resource conservation' is discussed and conservation is defined as '*the management of human use of the biosphere so that it may yield the greatest sustainable benefit to present generations while maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations.*' Beyond this, IUCN's policy statement on the [Sustainable Use of Wild Living Resources](#), recognises that sustainable use is one of the three components of the objective of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Article II of the CBD states: '*sustainable use means the use of components of biological diversity in a way and at a rate that does not lead to the long-term decline of biological diversity, thereby maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of present and future generations.*' The IUCN policy statement on the Sustainable Use of Wild Living Resources, adopted at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Session of the World Conservation Congress (Amman, Jordan, 2000) commends the policy to IUCN's Members, Commissions and Secretariat for implementation through its programmes and in accordance with its objectives. It concludes that:

- a) Use of wild living resources, if sustainable, is an important conservation tool because the social and economic benefits derived from such use provide incentives for people to conserve them;
- b) When using wild living resources, people should seek to minimize losses of biological diversity;
- c) Enhancing the sustainability of uses of wild living resources involves an ongoing process of improved management of those resources; and
- d) Such management should be adaptive, incorporating monitoring and the ability to modify management to take account of risk and uncertainty.

Article 2 of the IUCN Statutes also indicates that "*the objectives of IUCN shall be to influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable.*" Through its policy on statement on the Sustainable Use of Wild Living Resources, IUCN further commits to ensuring any uses of wild living resources are equitable and ecologically sustainable.

#### **Trophy hunting**

IUCN does not have a position on trophy hunting. Trophy hunting can be a form of sustainable use, and if conducted according to the [Guiding Principles on Trophy Hunting as a Tool for Creating Conservation Incentives](#) developed by the Species Survival Commission (SSC), can provide positive benefits for conservation. Within this guidance trophy hunting is used to refer to hunting that is:

- Managed as part of a programme administered by a government, community-based organization, NGO, or other legitimate body;
- Characterized by hunters paying a high fee to hunt an animal with specific "trophy" characteristics (recognizing that hunters each have individual motivations);
- Characterized by low off-take volume; and
- Usually (but not necessarily) undertaken by hunters from outside the local area (often from countries other than where the hunt occurs).

The guiding principles also specifically apply to hunting programmes orientated to terrestrial wild animals in their native geographic ranges. IUCN does not support moving species outside their native ranges for the primary purpose of trophy hunting ([IUCN Position Statement on Translocation of Living Organisms](#)). IUCN policy has also condemned "the killing of animals in enclosures or where they do not exist as free-ranging" (IUCN Recommendation 3.093, adopted by the IUCN Congress at its 3<sup>rd</sup> Session in Bangkok, Thailand, 17-25 November 2004), a stance also supported by the SSC specifically (see the Guiding Principles above).

The IUCN SSC considers that trophy hunting, is likely to contribute to conservation and to the equitable sharing of the benefits of use of natural resources when programmes incorporate the following five components: **(1) Biological Sustainability, (2) Net Conservation Benefit; (3) Socio-Economic-Cultural Benefit; (4) Adaptive Management: Planning, Monitoring, and Reporting; and (5) Accountable and Effective Governance.**

# Compatibility of Trophy Hunting as a Form of Sustainable Use with IUCN's Objectives

## A Report by the IUCN WCEL Ethics Specialist Group

### 1. Introduction

This report has been provided by the following members of the WCEL Specialist Ethics Group (ESG), all professors of environmental law: Klaus Bosselmann (NZ/Germany), Peter Burdon (Australia), Prue Taylor (NZ), Ngozi Stewart (Nigeria), Louis Kotzé (South Africa) and Thiti Waikavee (Thailand).

The report aims for assisting IUCN to clarify the ethical acceptability of trophy hunting according to current IUCN statutes and policies and consistent with generally accepted methodologies of social and environmental ethics. There has been considerable debate around the morality of trophy hunting in the general public including the international conservation movement, and within IUCN.

For IUCN, the issue of trophy hunting recently arose in the context of whether organizations that are supportive of trophy hunting may be eligible for IUCN membership under the IUCN statutes. Of central importance to determining membership is whether, at least, one central purpose of an organization meets IUCN's objectives. The Council has to determine, in particular, whether:

“the objectives *and* track record of the applicant embody to a *substantial* extent (i) the conservation of the *integrity and diversity* of nature; *and* either or both: (ii) the aim to ensure that any use of natural resources is *equitable and ecologically sustainable*; (iii) dedication to influencing, encouraging and assisting societies to meet the objectives of IUCN.”<sup>1</sup>

In determining whether an applicant meets this test, the Council cannot rely on claims or representations made by the applicant, but has to consider whether the applicant's “objectives” and actual “track record” make it likely that the applicant is dedicated to advancing the objectives of IUCN. Hence, a mere intention or willingness of the applicant to advance IUCN's objectives would not be sufficient. The “dedication” to influencing, encouraging and assisting societies involves a credibility assessment. This may include a closer look at the membership of the applying organization, for example, the motives and actual conduct of its members and the overall impact that the organization has had, and would have as an IUCN member, on IUCN's dedication to meet its objectives.

The central question for the Council is - or should be - whether or not an applicant adds to the potential of the IUCN's overarching objective, i.e. “to influence,

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<sup>1</sup> Art. 7 (c) IUCN Statutes and Regulations (as last amended on 10 Sept. 2016); *emphasis* added.

encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable.” (Art. 2). This objective cannot be interpreted in a way that emphasizes one aspect (e.g. “sustainable use”) at the expense of other aspects. Nor would it be appropriate to liken the objective with “sustainable development” or any abstract idea of promoting conservation. Rather, Article 2 contains a certain hierarchy: the conservation of integrity and diversity of nature is the overall concern. The use of natural resources has to occur in a manner that it is equitable and ecologically sustainable so that the integrity and diversity of nature will be conserved (and restored where necessary). This clearly implies that sustainable use and sustainable development are both subservient considerations to the overarching aim of ensuring ecological integrity.

It would be wrong therefore to measure trophy hunting purely against “sustainable use” as it is commonly referred to in domestic environmental laws and international hard and soft law. Nor could it be measured against statements on sustainable use of wildlife as, for example, provided by WWF which contends: “WWF is not opposed to hunting programs that present no threat to survival of threatened species and, where such species are involved, are part of a demonstrated conservation and management strategy that is scientifically based, properly managed, and strictly enforced, with revenues and benefits going back into conservation and local communities.”<sup>2</sup> Trophy hunting is not mentioned here, and even it were, it would have to be measured against a “demonstrated” conservation strategy and against “revenues and benefits going back into conservation and local communities”.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the overarching concern, for IUCN at least, is to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature (globally and locally) and to educate (“influence” etc.) societies (nationally) how this can be achieved. Is trophy hunting an acceptable means to achieve this end?

In answering this question, we need to consider not just sustainable use requirements and practices, but also the general debate around trophy hunting. There are pro-arguments in favour and arguments against. The former are largely based on economic benefits for local conservation efforts, while the latter is critical of such ‘trickle-down’ effects and emphasizes the ethical dimensions of trophy hunting.

For the Ethics Specialist Group, ethical grounding of conservation laws, policies and practices is critical and arguably consistent with IUCN’s overall objective to ensure integrity and diversity of nature. In the next section we outline some ethical considerations before addressing the actual question at hand.

## **2. General debate around trophy hunting**

The debate about the justifiability of trophy hunting ranges from stressing economic benefits at one end of the spectrum to fundamental ethical objections at the other.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.worldwildlife.org/pages/sustainable-use-of-wildlife>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Supporters base their argument largely on the perceived virtue of economic benefits and advantages for conservation. The claim is that local communities financially benefit from hunting and funds raised can be directed toward conservation efforts. These claims are based on financial, empirical evidence, but the benefits appear to be nowhere near as widespread as claimed. For example, in Zimbabwe as little as 3% of the income for trophy hunting actually reaches local communities.<sup>4</sup>

Hunters as a group tend to privilege an abundance of the species they are interested in killing over the existence of biologically diverse ecosystems.<sup>5</sup> Despite claims by trophy hunting organizations that hunting promotes wildlife conservation in Africa, there is evidence that trophy hunting causes populations of African lions to decline.<sup>6</sup>

Apart from uncertainties around verifiable benefits generated by trophy hunting, there are basic concerns with cost-benefit analysis (CBA) used for the evaluation of wildlife conservation, particularly with respect to trophy hunting.

First, we can never identify all the direct and indirect benefits and costs of any action. This is especially true for wildlife conservation with its many unknowns. How to quantify the benefits of trophy hunting? Aside from possible benefits for local communities, the benefits of human-induced culling of wildlife are questionable given that trophy hunters often remove individuals with the highest breeding value from wildlife populations.<sup>7</sup> Proof that hunting can have measurable conservation-related benefits for a species may be a possibility in principle, but is hard to come by given the complexities involved. Species development is not just affected by direct human action, for example, motivation of private landowners to increase the numbers of a certain species such as the white rhino.<sup>8</sup> There are important environmental factors to be considered including ecological interdependences, habitat stability and impacts of biodiversity loss and climate change. There are too many uncertainties to justify trophy hunting by pointing to benefits for wildlife conservations.

Secondly, in light of the debate about 'valuing nature' and 'monetizing nature' it can be questioned whether a monetary value can be placed on life.<sup>9</sup> It is unethical to

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<sup>4</sup> S. Wiggins, *The Economics of Poaching, Trophy and Canned Hunting*, 2015;

<https://iwbond.org/2015/09/02/the-economics-of-poaching-trophy-and-canned-hunting/>.

<sup>5</sup> R. Holsman, "Goodwill Hunting? Exploring the Role of Hunters as Ecosystem Stewards," *Society Bulletin* 28, no. 4 (2000), 808–16.

<sup>6</sup> C. Packer et al., "Sport Hunting, Predator Control, and Conservation of Large Carnivores," *PLOS ONE* 4, no. 16 (2009), <http://journals.plos.org>. S. Wiggins, *How can 'we' save the African Lion?*, 2016; <https://iwbond.org/2016/01/05/how-can-we-save-the-african-lion-panthera-leo/>

<sup>7</sup> This phenomenon is called "unnatural selection." F. Allendorf and J. Hard, "Human Induced Evolution Caused by Unnatural Selection through Harvest of Wild Animals," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 106 (2009): 9987–94.

<sup>8</sup> N. Leader-Williams, S. Milledge, K. Adcock, M. Brook, A. Conway, M. Knight, S. Mainka, E.B. Martin & T. Teferi (2005). Trophy Hunting of Black Rhino: Proposals to Ensure Its Future Sustainability, *Journal of International Wildlife Law & Policy*, 8 (1) 1-11.

<sup>9</sup> G. Monbiot, 'The Pricing of Everything', 2014 SPERI Annual Lecture University of Sheffield, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/georgemonbiot/2014/jul/24/price-nature-neoliberal-capital-road-ruin>; 'Can Nature be Monetized?', Capital Institute Forum <http://capitalinstitute.org/braintrust/can-nature-monetized/>

place a monetary value on human life. On what grounds then should this be different with respect to animals? Even if an 'intrinsic value' of animals (biocentrism) is denied, an assumed mere 'instrumental value' of animals (anthropocentrism) still requires justifiable reasons for killing animals. These may include essential human needs (food, clothing, cultural identity etc.), but certainly not killing for fun ('experience', sport, trophies). At the very least, the onus for justifying trophy hunting must lie with those who claim that the 'benefits' for wildlife conservation are greater than the 'costs' of loss of life. Again, it must be stressed that the assumption of justifiable trophy hunting could only be made on the grounds of ethical anthropocentrism - a position that arguably is not consistent with IUCN's overarching conservation ethics (see further below).

Thirdly, there are practical difficulties of compatibility. As economic benefits are easier to quantify than ecological benefits, there is a tendency to neglect ecological benefits and harms that are far more difficult to quantify, whether in economic/financial terms or in terms of conservation efficiency. Policy positions based on economic considerations often neglect critical ethical issues such as ecological justice, human rights and human responsibilities. The implication is that a preconceived level of economic benefit justifies (a degree of) ecological harm; especially if that benefit could be used to advance the human development project. If the economic benefit, as perceived by humans, is sufficient, then any ecological harm can be justified, whereas the "value" of maintaining ecological integrity is never stated or used as a counter-balance to economic value. This trade off approach raises the question of what the limits are - and that has to be determined or guided by ethical concepts.<sup>10</sup>

Opponents of trophy hunting tend to argue from a moral and ethical perspective.<sup>11</sup> Typically, they refer to social ethics (i.e. rich-poor disparities, trickle-down ideology, intra-generational justice, equality) and environmental ethics (inter-generational justice, inter-species justice, ecological sustainability). Both social and environmental ethics are relevant here as Articles 2 and 7 refer to them. It is important, however, to stress that environmental ethics offers the key to understanding the relationship between human needs and inspirations, on the one hand, and the sustainability of ecological systems on the other. The latter is a precondition to the former.<sup>12</sup>

As far as the general debate around trophy hunting is concerned, there is a certain emphasis on assessing benefits against possible risks (e.g. economic benefits for

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<sup>10</sup> It is worth noting that IUCN's practices tend to favour CBA approaches over ethical approaches for the evaluation of biodiversity conservation measures. A report by the International Centre for Integrated Assessment and Sustainable Development at Maastricht University examined IUCN's perspectives, policies and practices with respect to biodiversity conservation for the period between 2007 and 2013 ("IUCN and Perspectives on Biodiversity and Conservation in a Changing World", *Biodiversity and Conservation*, December 2013, Vol. 22, Issue 13-14, pp 3105-3120) and found that anthropocentric, economic and market-based approaches far dominated genuine ethical approaches to evaluating biodiversity conservation measures.

<sup>11</sup> There appears to be only one voice arguing in favour of trophy hunting from an environmental ethical perspective: A. Gunn, 'Environmental Ethics and Trophy Hunting', *Ethics and the Environment*, Vol. 6.1 (2001), 68-95; <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/11197>.

<sup>12</sup> This is also true in light of the needs of indigenous and local communities in poor ("developing") regions of the world. Their livelihood was always dependent on a harmonious relationship with nature. This has not changed by the fact that the (over-)developed world has imposed existential threats to their livelihood with respect to both, social and environmental conditions.

communities vs endangering of species and/or ecosystems). Such emphasis looks at the consequences of human conduct – in our case trophy hunting - and is known as ‘consequentialism’. From a consequentialist perspective, the good outcome, or consequence, of a morally motivated conduct is crucial. If the outcome has more benefits than harm, then the conduct is justified. In the extreme, consequentialism amounts to “ends justifying the means”.

Contrasting with the consequentialist perspective is the deontological perspective. Here rules and moral duty are central. Deontology derives the rightness or wrongness of human conduct from the character of the behavior itself (at least since Immanuel Kant). Typical for deontological ethics is the idea of human rights or sustainability. Neither human rights nor sustainability can be entirely explained as protection measures against undesirable outcomes (typical for consequentialism), although they may be part of the reason why human rights or sustainability ought to be guiding rules for humanity. Essentially, if something is recognized as a (fundamental) rule, then any behavior not following the rule is unethical (and often, but not necessarily so, illegal).<sup>13</sup>

For IUCN’s position on trophy hunting to be credible, it is important to reflect on both, economic (utilitarian) and ethical (consequentialist and deontological) considerations bearing in mind that IUCN typically derives its position from its own normative rules (e.g. statutes, resolutions, policies, guidelines etc.). Neither purely economic or utilitarian reasoning, nor purely ethical reasoning may satisfy all the stakeholders involved, although it has to be stressed that ANY human behavior is ultimately motivated by ethics, whether consciously or unconsciously. Arguably, IUCN is inherently motivated and shaped by ethical, not economic or utilitarian concerns for conservation,<sup>14</sup> although it has to be said that the development of IUCN’s current policies and programmes has considerably lacked in this regard.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. IUCN’s current position

As mentioned earlier, Article 2 of the Statutes charges IUCN with the commitment to “influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable.” Accordingly, the IUCN has an overarching commitment to ecological integrity assisted by a form of use of natural resources that is both socially equitable and ecologically sustainable. Neither socially unjust nor ecologically unsustainable practices could be tolerated, so the onus has to be on an applicant to demonstrate that their objectives and practices serve this commitment in order to justify IUCN membership. Again, the dedication to influence, encourage and assist societies and the ability and credibility to do so are crucial

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<sup>13</sup> A recent example of opposition against trophy hunting from a deontological perspective is A. Ahmad “The Trophy Hunting Debate: A Case of Ethics” *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol 51, Issue No 26 – 27, 2016.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, R. Engel (with K. Bosselmann), *The Contribution of IUCN to the Ethics of World Conservation: Chronology from 1948-2008*.

<sup>15</sup> An example is the lack of implementing specific ethical resolutions such as the endorsement of the *Earth Charter* at the 2004 IUCN WCC or the adoption of *Ethics Mechanisms* at the 2012 IUCN WCC. See also P.E. Taylor, P. Burdon and D.A. Brown, ‘Moral leadership and Climate Change Policy: the role of the World Conservation Union’, *Ethics, Policy and Environment* (forthcoming 2017).

here.

In furtherance of its overarching commitment, the IUCN has passed over 100 resolutions that directly link conservation science (and practice) with justice and equity. Examples include: the World Conservation Strategy (1980), *World Charter for Nature* (also adopted by the UNGA in 1982); *Caring for the Earth: A Strategy for Sustainable Living* (1991); the *Draft International Covenant on Environmental Development* (1995/2015); Resolution 3.022 endorsing the *Earth Charter* as “an ethical guide for IUCN policy” (2004); Resolutions 4.098 *Intergenerational Partnerships: Fostering Ethical Leadership for a Just, Sustainable and Peaceful World* and 4.099 *Recognition of the Diversity of Concepts and Values of Nature* (2008); 3.020 *Drafting a Code of Ethics for Biodiversity Conservation*; and 004 *Establishment of the Ethics Mechanism* (2012).

The resolutions concerning the *Earth Charter* and the *Ethics Mechanism* are major recent landmarks. The first because the Earth Charter is the world’s most widely endorsed ethical guide for sustainability. It articulates the values of care, respect and responsibility for each other with ecological integrity at its core, and has been endorsed by civil society, governments and UNESCO. In addition to guiding policy, the IUCN has undertaken to “work to implement its principles” through its programmes. The second resolution (calling for effective implementation of *Ethics Mechanisms*) is crucial because it recognises the central importance of global ethics to the IUCN’s mission, and delivery of its programmes and activities.

With respect to sustainable use of wildlife, Resolution 011 *Closure of Domestic Markets for Elephant Ivory* (2016) effectively bans trophy hunting of elephants as it “threatens the survival of many populations of savannah and forest elephants and undermines the ecological integrity of savannah and forest ecosystems”.<sup>16</sup>

Against these overarching commitments and resolutions, other IUCN documents including guidelines and statements from specialists groups need to be assessed. With respect to trophy hunting, the Species Survival Commission has developed ‘Guiding Principles for Using Trophy Hunting as a Conservation Tool’, and IUCN has published a Briefing Paper (updated version prepared for CITES CoP17 <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/cop/17/InfDocs/E-CoP17-Inf-60.pdf> ). These documents recognize that, when well managed, trophy hunting can deliver important benefits for species protection and recovery, habitat conservation, and reducing illegal hunting and illegal wildlife trade, as well as delivering important livelihood benefits to rural communities (e.g. in Namibia, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Tajikistan, Canada, Pakistan and several European countries).

The documents do not explain, however, how “well managed” trophy hunting may be consistent with IUCN’s commitments to promoting ecological integrity and diversity, as expressed in IUCN’s objectives and many resolutions seeking to implement the objectives in policy and programme development. Given the hierarchy of norms that IUCN is guided by, it would fall upon the authors of subordinated documents such as the SCC’s ‘Guiding Principles’ or the IUCN’s

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<sup>16</sup> Notably, the International Council for Game & Wildlife Conservation expressed a disclaimer “for the record” stating that “legal elephant trophies are not subject of this Motion.” (WCC-2016-Res-011-EN; last paragraph).

'Briefing Principles' to demonstrate their consistency with generally adopted objectives and resolutions or, if they aim for deviating from them, seek a status that binds IUCN at large, typically in the form of a resolution adopted at a WCC.

In the absence of such clarifications, the interpretation of trophy hunting as an acceptable form of "sustainable use" has to follow the guidance that Articles 7 and 2 provide. As shown above, Article 2 defines "sustainable use" with respect to IUCN's overarching concern to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature (not economic benefits for communities or conservation practices).

For the purposes of the question at hand here, the onus is clearly on an applicant for IUCN membership to demonstrate that its own objectives and track record would serve IUCN's overarching objective. In the light of the appropriate interpretation of Article 2 and the many resolutions (mentioned above) that further elaborate on the importance, meaning and implementation of Article 2, the 'Guiding Principles' and 'Briefing Paper' are insufficient to serve as a guide for a decision on the eligibility of organizations supporting trophy hunting. Instead, the objectives of such organizations are *prima facie* inconsistent with IUCN's objectives.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This report addressed the issue of "sustainable use" as a possible criterion to determine the eligibility for IUCN membership of organizations supportive of trophy hunting. It also addressed the more general issue of IUCN's position on trophy hunting. Both issues are intertwined and need to be considered simultaneously.

Trophy hunting is not consistent with "sustainable use". And even if it were, "sustainable use" is not the sole criterion for the decision on eligibility of organizations seeking IUCN membership. The critical question is whether trophy hunting as it is practiced by individuals and promoted by certain hunting organizations may be consistent with IUCN's general objectives as expressed in Articles 2 and 7. This is clearly not the case. Any other view would threaten IUCN's credibility for providing moral and ethical leadership in conservation policies. It would certainly undermine the many efforts of IUCN members to promote a just and sustainable world.

## **ADDENDUM (12 November 2017):**

1. The authors of this report acknowledge receipt - on 8 November – of a “Response to the WCEL Ethics Specialist Group submission to IUCN Council”, referred to as “Consultation led by the SSC Sustainable Use and Livelihoods SG with other SGs engaged in sustainable use activities” and dated 5 November. No authors or “other SGs” were identified, so we refer to this document as “SSC SULi response”.
2. We note that the Chair of the GCC meeting on 1 November had invited the Klaus Bosselmann (for ESG), Mike t’Sas Rolfes and Rosie Cooney (for SSC SULi) to make any revisions of the papers that had been submitted (i.e. this ESG report and the SULi report “The ethics of trophy hunting”). The SSC SULi response does not appear to be a revision of the original SULi report, nor is it clear whether it is intended to replace the original report or to complement it. To comply with the GCC Chair’s suggestion, we have refrained from writing a new report (or “response”) and instead expand our report through this Addendum.
3. We do not wish to engage with the SSC SULi response in any great detail. We take issue, however, with its tone and highly opinionated (rather than reasoned) approach and stress that an ethical discourse is about finding normative and ethical truths based on mutual respect and recognizing its open-endedness. There is no space for declaring the own position as superior by slamming an opposing viewpoint (“ignores the evidence”, “views of a certain group”, “highly simplistic” etc.) and questioning its validity (“We recommend that Council does not take this submission into consideration in their decision-making”).
4. Any position on trophy hunting (and any human action for that matter) is ethically motivated, whether consciously so or not. The issue is always to be aware of one’s action - not only in terms of possible consequences, but also with respect to fundamental values. For example, trophy hunting could be justifiable on the grounds of beneficial effects to conservation efforts, yet unethical on the grounds of respect for life. To this end, is there any justification in allowing trophy hunting of lions, elephants and rhinos, but not gorillas or whales? Likewise, respect for life can require finding solutions for the survival and well-being of indigenous communities with means other than benefits from trophy hunting (not all means are justified to achieve desired ends).
5. The position of ethical consequentialism makes a judgment on a good outcome (or consequence). This judgment inevitably involves a verdict (whether intended or not) on short-term and long-term, local and non-local, social and environmental, quantifiable and non-quantifiable consequences. The SSC SULi response’s claim that “direct economic benefits” and “indirect conservation impacts” of “incentives and revenue” justify (well managed)

trophy hunting and therefore represents a “consequentialist approach” is methodologically flawed as it reduces ethical consequentialism to pragmatism and economic utilitarianism (see e.g. J. Bentham, R. Nozick, J. Rawls, A. Sen, P. Singer).

6. The process of IUCN’s decision-making as well as the decision itself has ramifications not just for membership applications, but for IUCN’s central objective to “influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature”. We repeat therefore our plea for a broad Union-wide dialogue on the implications of this objective in the light of IUCN’s ethical commitments (e.g. the Earth Charter’s “respect and care for the community of life”). While we reaffirm our view that IUCN’s ethical and legal framework provides the necessary guidance, we also acknowledge lacking awareness, communication and capacity. We call upon Council to provide leadership in this regard.
7. For clarity, we absolutely reject the SSC SULi view that a lack of ethical consensus (if any) justifies continuing with applications from organizations that support trophy hunting on the assumption that IUCN is “a broad church”. This is a logical fallacy because pursuing such applications IS acting in accordance with an implicit view that “high-value tourist hunting” (= SSC SULi’s definition of trophy hunting) is ethically justifiable. If IUCN were to take such a view, this would not only disregard own ethical commitments, but undermine IUCN’s credibility as a champion for a sustainable and just world.

# Comments on “Compatibility of Trophy Hunting as a Form of Sustainable Use with IUCN’s Objectives - A Report by the IUCN WCEL Ethics Specialist Group”

Simon N. Stuart<sup>1</sup>

## Background

I have been requested to comment on the report by the WCEL Ethics Specialist Group (ESG) on trophy hunting prepared by K. Bosselmann, P. Burdon, P. Taylor, N. Stewart, L. Kotzé and T. Waikavee. I have also seen the speaking notes from a presentation given by R. Cooney, Chair of the CEESP / SSC Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group, to the IUCN Governance Committee on 24 July 2017, and also a one-page document prepared by the IUCN Global Species Programme entitled “Sustainable use and trophy hunting: differences and IUCN positions”. I have not discussed my comments here with any of the authors of these papers, nor did I inform them in advance that I was writing these comments.

## Observations with regard to IUCN’s mission

There are some things in this paper with which I agree. For example, this statement is in my view spot-on: *“In determining whether an applicant meets this test, the Council cannot rely on claims or representations made by the applicant, but has to consider whether the applicant’s “objectives” and actual “track record” make it likely that the applicant is dedicated to advancing the objectives of IUCN. Hence, a mere intention or willingness of the applicant to advance IUCN’s objectives would not be sufficient.”* I completely agree with this point. Indeed, I would contend that this is what went wrong with the Born Free Foundation case, where, with the wisdom of hindsight, assurances proved to be insufficient. The point made here by the WCEL ESG should of course apply to all organizations that might apply for IUCN membership, and not just hunting organizations.

I also agree with this statement: *“The use of natural resources has to occur in a manner that it is equitable and ecologically sustainable so that the integrity and diversity of nature will be conserved (and restored where necessary). This clearly implies that sustainable use and sustainable development are both subservient considerations to the overarching aim of ensuring ecological integrity.* IUCN is primarily a conservation organization. One of the ways that conservation can be achieved is through sustainable use. So for IUCN, sustainable use is a tool, as is sustainable development, and also other secondary (for IUCN) issues such as tourism, animal welfare, etc.

## Commentary on trophy hunting

However, I part company with the WCEL ESG authors in their discussion on the *“General Debate around Trophy Hunting.”* This section of their paper opens with what in my opinion is a major misunderstanding, and most of what they write subsequently goes in the wrong direction because of this. This is their opening statement: *“The debate about the justifiability of trophy hunting ranges from stressing economic benefits at one end of the spectrum to fundamental ethical objections at the other.”* Whatever one’s personal views of hunting (trophy or otherwise), this is simply not true. While some proponents of trophy hunting might argue on economic grounds, for the most part they argue on ethical grounds. They support such hunting, in part, because it can bring about enormous recovery in species numbers, including of threatened species, and can lift people out of poverty.

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<sup>1</sup> Writing in a personal capacity

These are primarily ethical concerns, not economic concerns. Conservation and recovery of species is fundamentally a driving ethic; so is poverty alleviation. The paper by R. Cooney referred to above goes into greater depth on the reasons why people hunt in her section "*Can 'killing for fun' really play a role in IUCN's broad conservation vision?*" Here she presents a number of ideas that are worthy of reflection. Any claim that trophy hunting supporters are somehow unethical and driven only by economic considerations, whereas opponents of such hunting are somehow driven solely by ethical concerns is very simplistic, and in my view unhelpful, in this debate. This issue is much more nuanced than that.

The WCEL ESG paper also suffers from a very selective review of the literature, focusing on just a few papers that tend to support opposition to trophy hunting. In any case, a review of the actual effects of trophy hunting on conservation and livelihoods is presumably beyond the mandate of the WCEL ESG, and the authors could have reached out to the SSC for the necessary expertise; my impression is that they did not do this. There is a massive literature on the benefits and risks of trophy hunting, and the paper by R. Cooney presents a more thorough and balanced perspective on this. There is plenty of evidence of the conservation benefits of well-managed hunting, including trophy hunting. Indeed the whole conservation approach in North America, for example, is hunting-based. It should also be noted that trophy hunting is by no means just an African-based activity, something that might not be clear from much of the recent publicity on the topic.

Dangers can of course arise in trophy hunting, just as in all forms of conservation, and this is also well documented in the literature. The WCEL authors allude to some of these. This is why careful monitoring and adaptive management are always necessary, as stated in the [IUCN Policy Statement on Sustainable Use](#). IUCN's focus should be to help make sure that where trophy hunting occurs, it contributes to the achievement of broader conservation benefits. As the authors say, our focus is on those broader benefits, and trophy hunting needs to be considered in that context. There are sometimes also uncertainties in particular situations about, for example, the efficacy of protected areas, or environmental education, or conservation legislation, yet we would be foolish to call for their abolition. The uncertainties around the conservation benefits of trophy hunting in certain circumstances are much less than these authors admit.

I find the arguments that the authors make about biocentrism and anthropocentrism to be very unconvincing. If one holds to nature having intrinsic value, as I do, does this require me to be opposed to trophy hunting? No. Anybody who lives in nature knows that it is a tough place. In both its natural and disturbed states, it is full of the suffering and death of animals. It is that world that many hunters live in (urbanized people can have more romantic views of nature). Many hunters are passionate conservationists. I am not a hunter and do not wish to become one, nor do I wish to be an advocate for hunters, but I have often been humbled by the genuine love that hunters can have for animals. It is no coincidence that the modern conservation movement was founded to a large extent by hunters, including the founding chair of WCEL. Many hunters today would describe themselves not as anthropocentrists nor ethical anthropocentrists, but as biocentrists. Part of the confusion lying behind this WCEL ESG paper is perhaps related to the notion that the human-caused death of an animal is somehow out of line with conservation objectives. But anyone involved in practical conservation will know that a huge amount of conservation involves the death of animals – removal of invasive species, species reintroductions (which almost always involve high mortality rates of animals), control of wildlife disease, dealing with human-wildlife conflict, predator control to allow other species to recover, addressing the over-abundance of certain species, etc, etc. The biocentrism referred to by the authors seems to take them in a direction of supporting animal welfare (protecting the lives of individual animals by stopping hunting), not conservation (saving species and ecosystems). As a result of the approach they have taken, I fear that the WCEL authors have unwittingly made conservation subservient to animal welfare, when according to their analysis

of IUCN's mission (with which I agree), animal welfare must be subservient to conservation. The logic of their thinking appears to be that, in order to prevent hunters from killing an individual animal (an animal welfare ethic), they would abolish trophy hunting, even if the end of hunting leads to widespread removal of wildlife across the landscape as it surely would in some cases (in other words, the animal welfare ethic would override the conservation ethic, surely out of line with IUCN's mission).

The WCEL authors have a paragraph starting with "*Thirdly, there are practical difficulties of compatibility...*", which discusses the difficulties of trading off between ecological and economic values. This is of course true as a broad principle, but I do not think it is relevant to this discussion of trophy hunting, because IUCN is not interested in trading off such values. The arguments in favour of trophy hunting that are of interest to IUCN are the ethical ones (as mentioned above), not the economic ones. The authors are making this point because they have not considered any ethical arguments in favour of trophy hunting, and as a result have set up a false trade-off between ecological and economic concerns.

In contrast, the authors look at the opponents to trophy hunting in a very generous way. They do not seem to consider the possibility that many of these opponents put the ethic of saving lives of individual animals (animal welfare) as higher than the ethic of the recovery of species (conservation). In line with the mission, the conservation ethic must be dominant for IUCN, not the animal welfare ethic.

The authors also state that "*in the extreme, consequentialism amounts to "ends justifying the means"*". But this comes down to one's ethics. If our overriding ethic is a conservation one (as it is for IUCN), then that overrides other concerns, such as animal welfare. But if our overriding value is animal welfare, then the goal of conservation is not sufficient to override in principle opposition to trophy hunting. So the point of contention around well-managed trophy hunting is not *economics vs conservation* (as the authors suggest), but rather *conservation and poverty alleviation vs animal welfare*. Putting this in deontological terms, if I am forced to take a tough decision (because of course I care about the welfare of animals), I find that am under a fundamental rule to save species and combat poverty, rather than saving the lives of individual animals.

The SSC's "[Guiding Principles for Using Trophy Hunting as a Conservation Tool](#)" and the IUCN briefing paper for CITES "[Informing Decisions on Trophy Hunting](#)" were both carefully written to be consistent with IUCN's mission and the [IUCN Policy Statement on Sustainable Use](#). The authors imply that these documents might not be in accord with IUCN's higher-level policies, but do not explain how or why. I fail to see how they are not fully consistent.

In the final paragraph before the Conclusion, the authors state that "*the onus is clearly on an applicant for IUCN membership to demonstrate that its own objectives and track record would serve IUCN's overarching objective.*" I completely agree. This principle should apply to all organizations applying for membership, including hunting groups AND those opposing hunting to demonstrate that their actions will ALWAYS put conservation first. The conclusion of this paragraph, that "*the objectives of such [i.e., hunting] organizations are prima facie inconsistent with IUCN's objectives*" is not in my view supported by the arguments in the WCEL ESG due to the weaknesses pointed out above. Likewise, they do not provide a basis for their statement in the Conclusion that "*Trophy hunting is not consistent with "sustainable use".*"

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I do not find the WCEL ESG document to be convincing, or thoroughly researched. Specifically:

- 1) It shows a lack of awareness of the conservation benefits that can arise from trophy hunting by referring to the literature very selectively;
- 2) It gives no consideration of the ethical reasons why many conservationists support trophy hunting (I am left wondering whether or not the authors know that these ethical reasons exist);
- 3) It gives an interpretation of biocentrism in a way that leads them (presumably inadvertently) to put animal welfare before conservation; and
- 4) They conclude that with some sweeping statements that trophy hunting is not consistent with sustainable use, and that trophy hunting is clearly inconsistent with IUCN's general objectives, which are not demonstrated by their paper because of the weaknesses outlined above.

I find the closing of the paper to be the most disturbing aspect: *"The critical question is whether trophy hunting as it is practiced by individuals and promoted by certain hunting organizations may be consistent with IUCN's general objectives as expressed in Articles 2 and 7. This is clearly not the case. Any other view would threaten IUCN's credibility for providing moral and ethical leadership in conservation policies. It would certainly undermine the many efforts of IUCN members to promote a just and sustainable world."* While I am sure that this is not the authors' intention, unfortunately this suggests intolerance to alternative views, and an attitude of moral superiority, and I question the ethics of such a stance. For sure IUCN MUST be driven by a conservation ethic. But within our family we have a very broad array of views on how to achieve conservation. We come together in IUCN to learn from those with whom we often disagree. We try to respect those who have different views. And we try to achieve things together under the framework of IUCN that we could not do outside, and that often means trying to have the humility to listen and learn. In a world that is increasingly full of confrontation and factions, IUCN's job is to build bridges, not to sew further divisions. Within our over-arching conservation ethic, we need to be a broad family, and to embrace each other, to learn, and develop new ideas together. It is my experience that there are those in both the hunting community and the animal welfare community that are willing to put conservation first; that is why we have organizations from both ends of the spectrum in the IUCN membership, and that is how it should be.

I am unable to support the conclusion of the WCEL ESG paper in its current form, and would not recommend to Council that they take this paper into consideration

# The ethics of trophy hunting

By Michael 't Sas-Rolfes and Rosie Cooney<sup>1</sup>

November 2017

## Introduction

In recent years, the ethics of so-called ‘trophy’ hunting have been increasingly scrutinized internationally, both within and outside of conservation circles. In response, SULi members have led in-depth exploration of contemporary moral philosophy and social psychology relating to environmental and animal ethics, with input from a wide and diverse range of groups from within and outside IUCN, to understand the ethical ramifications of trophy hunting in the context of generally accepted conservation goals. In this short submission, we summarise our approach and highlight some key findings to date to assist the deliberations of Council regarding admission of certain applicants to IUCN.

## What is this document based on?

We (primarily M 't-R) carried out an initial literature survey, followed by 1) a broader study on wildlife commodification ethics and 2) an analysis of the relationships between various ethical approaches to animal welfare and biodiversity conservation<sup>2</sup>. We convened (with many partners) a Knowledge Café at the 2016 IUCN World Conservation Congress in Hawaii entitled ‘Conservation, Animal Welfare and Animal Rights: Tensions & Synergies’. The approximately 50 attendees<sup>3</sup> considered four case studies involving apparent conflicts between ethics based on individual animals and ethics based on conservation of nature, one of which concerned trophy hunting. A paper drawing on discussions is under preparation and will soon be submitted to the peer-reviewed literature. The following short summary is informed by this work and additional research by the lead author on [hunting in Africa](#). We welcome engagement of the WCEL Ethics SG and other parts of IUCN in this work as it goes forward, to develop a broader and more nuanced understanding of the ethical complexities around these issues.

## What is trophy hunting?

To think clearly about the ethics of trophy hunting requires defining what we are discussing. ‘Trophy hunting’ is not a well-defined term, includes a wide variety of practices, and overlaps extensively with other types of hunting, particularly hunting for meat.

Hunting has a deep historical connection to human evolution and culture, and many forms of hunting remain widely practiced in the modern world, across developing and developed countries. Hunting [motivations](#) and [functions](#) are highly variable and multiple: they may include meeting subsistence needs, sourcing high quality meat from non-industrial sources; being outdoors and connecting to nature; managing overabundant herbivores to protect forest

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<sup>1</sup> Member and Chair, respectively, of the IUCN CEESP/SSC Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group (SULi). Neither of us personally has ever hunted wild animals.

<sup>2</sup> Both lines of inquiry are ongoing and have included direct consultation with diverse leading experts in the fields of environmental and animal ethics, as well as drawing on the deep expertise of the various SSC Specialist Groups who work on the conservation of taxa subject to trophy hunting (particularly African Elephant, African Rhino, Deer, Caprinae and Cat Specialist Groups).

<sup>3</sup> The attendees represented a broad spectrum of views, representing government agencies, intergovernmental agencies (e.g. CITES Secretariat), IUCN SSC specialist groups, academia, zoos and aquaria, pro-hunting and sustainable use groups (e.g. Safari Club International Foundation, Conservation Force, International Association for Falconry and the Conservation of Birds of Prey), and animal welfare organisations (e.g. IFAW, Born Free Foundation, HSUS).

regeneration, threatened species or agriculture; eliminating designated problem animals; using tracking and shooting skills; and maintaining cultural practices and traditions.

‘Trophy’ hunting typically refers to a form of *recreational* hunting, meaning that it is not part of the basic livelihood strategy of the hunter; it also typically implies *selective* hunting, meaning the hunter targets animals with specific attributes (e.g. male, large body size/horns/antlers/tusks); and it usually involves the hunter *retaining* some part(s) of the animal’s body. Trophy hunting takes place across most European countries, in the USA, Canada, Mexico, Argentina, Australia, New Zealand, and many Central Asian and African countries. In some cases, people travel to other countries to carry out these hunts, sometimes paying large amounts of money to do so.

The various motivations for such hunts are seldom readily separable. A deer hunter in Finland or France, for example, may hunt primarily for meat and because such hunting is deeply ingrained in rural cultures, but may or may not seek out a larger-antlered male, and may or may not take the antlers home as a memento. [Hunters frequently have a strong ethic of land and wildlife stewardship](#), and the meat of hunted animals is typically eaten. Even in cases where foreign tourists pay high fees to hunt large mammals, as they may do in Africa or Central Asia, the meat is highly valued by local people with subsistence needs (the main exception being most predators), and in some countries it is a legal requirement that the meat is not wasted; [empirical research](#) also indicates that foreign recreational hunters may be motivated by a variety of values including local community benefits.

### **How do we approach the ethical dilemma of trophy hunting?**

The ethics of trophy hunting are complex, because different people approach them with different values and using different moral theories. We explain [value pluralism](#) and [moral pluralism](#) and their implications in more detail in Annex 1.

*Value pluralism:* One ethical complexity or conflict arises because even where all people value the conservation of nature, this may be within very different overall frameworks or hierarchies of values. Whereas some approaches may place human well-being centre stage (anthropocentrism), others may place the highest value on the interconnected array of species that make up ecosystems (collective ecocentrism), while others focus on individual life forms (individual biocentricism). Anthropocentric values can clearly conflict with ecocentric values, e.g. a certain species population may be managed differently to provide food for humans or reduce agricultural conflict than to simply conserve biodiversity. However, biocentric values focused on individual animals may also conflict with ecocentric values, e.g. a conservation manager might kill individual introduced animals if they severely impact upon populations of native species and their associated ecosystem dynamics. In practice, conservation managers must often make decisions in which they ‘trade off’ the interests of an individual animal with that of broader ecosystem/biodiversity conservation. Trade-offs in environmental management are difficult (indeed, may be ‘[taboo](#)’), but as inescapable in this realm as they are in other complex policy areas such as public health.

There is no single simple answer to these conflicts of values. The current environmental ethics literature reveals widespread disagreement over these plural environmental value systems and how conflicting values should be ranked or reconciled. In practice, most contemporary international environmental policies still appear to be largely anthropocentric in their orientation, justifying their concern for nature conservation in terms of human well-being (e.g. the UN Sustainable Development Goals).

*Moral pluralism*: A further ethical complexity around trophy hunting arises because people use different theories of moral reasoning. Under a *consequentialist* analysis trophy hunting will be judged as acceptable or not based on its outcomes for nature and for people. If it leads, for example, to less poaching, more land for wildlife, or more supportive local communities, it may be considered ethically justified. Under the *deontological* approach, however, its ethical acceptability will be judged based on whether the actions involved are considered intrinsically wrong. For instance, it may be considered intrinsically wrong to kill another sentient being as this infringes animals' rights. An alternative *virtue ethics* approach focuses more on the character of the actor in determining ethical acceptability. Following this approach, actions of trophy hunters motivated purely by pleasure, with little regard for social or environmental concerns, might be considered unethical.

Because all three theories have both advantages and disadvantages, many moral philosophers support *moral pluralism*, the idea that no one philosophical approach will always provide the right answers. Others reject all three theories and argue for radically different approaches to environmental and animal ethics. In recent years, social psychologists have conducted [empirical research that essentially supports moral pluralism](#), noting that it is especially evident when surveying peoples and cultures outside of secular affluent Western societies.

Resolving ethical dilemmas over trophy hunting is therefore fraught, due to an absence of any shared framework for ethical decision-making. It seems clear that a deontological approach grounded in individual biocentrism could find hunting of sentient animals ethically unacceptable. It appears equally clear, however, that under consequentialist approaches reflecting collective ecocentrism or anthropocentrism, some forms of trophy hunting could be ethically justified. A virtue ethics approach may also accommodate trophy hunters that strive to align their activities with broader conservation and social/human development goals.

We conclude that, given obvious disagreement among environmental and animal ethicists over value plurality and value ranking, as well as the validity and applicability of plural moral theories, there can be no universally accepted ethical basis for opposing trophy hunting in general. Likewise, we would argue there can be no acceptable ethical basis for supporting it regardless of its specific consequences for nature and for human well-being.

### **What are the implications for IUCN?**

The late moral philosopher and animal ethicist, James Rachels, observed that it is problematic to enforce ethical principles that are not shared by everyone within a political entity. As a political entity, the IUCN's core objective is to 'conserve the integrity and diversity of nature'. This is a broad objective, seemingly open to diverse variations of values and moral reasoning.

The [Earth Charter](#) represents an expression of values that may be considered appropriately inclusive of the values of all IUCN members. Whereas certain instances of trophy hunting under specific circumstances could clearly violate the spirit of the Charter, it nevertheless seems clear that existing appropriately managed forms of hunting - such as those that support species recovery and the rights and well-being of indigenous and local communities - would not, whether a 'trophy' is produced or not. Any attempt for IUCN to specify and enforce a single values framework or moral theory upon its diversity of members in relation to the unclearly defined practice of trophy hunting would appear to be inappropriate; it would risk compromising the integrity and cultural diversity – and therefore global legitimacy – of the organisation's membership.

## **Annex 1: Value pluralism and moral pluralism: what do they mean and what are their implications?**

### **Value pluralism: do we all value nature for the same reasons?**

*Values* are individual human judgements of what is important in life. *Morals* (or moral values) relate more specifically to human judgements of what is right and wrong. *Ethics* are moral values that are shared by a defined community or society. Where such relevant community or society boundaries are aligned with political entities, ethics may be codified by *laws*.

Different human cultures have developed very different values in relation to animals and the environment. For example, traditional hunter-gatherer societies, pastoralists, agrarian farmers and modern urban dwellers hold very different values, and these may change over time as societies evolve and adapt to new circumstances. For this reason, many moral philosophers argue for recognising some degree of *moral relativism*: the idea that ethical standards cannot legitimately be applied universally to all humans.

Within conservation ethics, tensions arise due to conflicting value systems. The broad conservation community (by definition) holds shared values around the importance of conserving nature, but encompasses individuals and organisations from many different cultural and historical contexts. People who value the conservation of nature may value it for different reasons: people may hold these values within, for instance, an anthropocentric, individualist biocentric or collective ecocentric framework of values.

*Anthropocentrism* places the value of human well-being centre stage: conserving nature is considered important because of its *instrumental* value to humans, whether through e.g. direct resource provision or indirect aesthetic, spiritual or cultural benefits. Other approaches argue that nature has *intrinsic* value, independent from its value to humans. *Ecocentric* approaches argue that collective elements of the natural environment, such as species or ecosystems, have intrinsic value and therefore deserve moral consideration. *Biocentric* approaches focus on individual organisms from species other than humans, arguing that these entities are morally relevant, thereby creating a foundational claim for non-human individual rights.

### **Moral pluralism: do we all use the same reasoning to work out what is ethical?**

In addition to plural value systems, there are multiple differing theories about how to judge whether an action is ethical or not.

One approach is *consequentialist*: it argues that actions should be judged by their consequences, i.e. an ethically superior action is one that results in a 'better' outcome. In line with this approach, *utilitarianism* holds that ethical actions are those that lead to maximisation of welfare (or minimisation of suffering).

An alternative approach is *deontological*: it argues that some actions are in themselves inherently unethical, even if they lead to desired outcomes. In other words, the ends do not always justify the means. Deontology therefore emphasizes specific duties and uniform rules to apply to all situations. It also forms the basis for rights-based approaches, including arguments for human rights and animal rights.

Given that the future outcomes of actions are often uncertain, it is not always clear which of the above two approaches is ultimately the better guide for a specific action. To avoid this dilemma, a third alternative approach, *virtue ethics*, diverts the focus from a person's actions to their character. However, this approach is limited by its focus on individual agents, offering little guidance for collective ethical decisions or on how to overcome the issue of moral relativism.

# **Response to the WCEL Ethics Specialist Group submission to IUCN Council "Compatibility of Trophy Hunting as a Form of Sustainable Use with IUCN's Objectives"**

## **Consultation led by the SSC Sustainable Use and Livelihoods SG with other SGs engaged in sustainable use activities**

**5 November 2017**

### **Summary comments**

- The paper contains a number of inaccuracies, misunderstandings, use of "straw men", selective use of references, and generalisations. These weaknesses make its conclusions impossible to substantiate.
- The paper ignores the evidence that (whatever one's ethical viewpoint), well-managed hunting programmes can and do benefit wild species and their habitats, while at the same time supporting livelihoods of indigenous people and local communities. We refer the Council to the IUCN Briefing Paper "[Informing Decisions on Trophy Hunting](#)" for examples.
- Despite IUCN's fundamental rationale as a nature conservation organisation, the basic thesis of this document is that IUCN should reject the use of trophy hunting to achieve conservation on the basis of an unclear and subjective ethical analysis, which considers an undefined quality of this hunting intrinsically wrong regardless of its outcomes for conservation, and which does not consider the experiences, cultures and wishes of those countries where hunting is taking place.
- Achieving conservation on the ground is challenging, and becoming ever more challenging in the face of population and consumption growth and intense pressures for land. Conservation does not just happen - particularly where wildlife demands huge areas and involves heavy costs to life and livelihoods to local people. It requires funding and incentives. Over large areas that are not suited to photographic tourism, trophy hunting is currently the only feasible land use providing tangible incentives and revenue to help keep wild lands wild, make conservation an attractive land use for local communities and landowners, and/or help pay for anti-poaching, monitoring, fences and so forth. The report's authors make no recommendations for viable alternative approaches. To propose discarding this conservation tool elevates simple abstract principle over complex conservation realities.
- It is hard to see why the views of a certain group should be privileged over the views of the state agencies, experienced field conservationists, wildlife biologists, NGOs, and indigenous and local communities that have successfully used hunting as a tool to achieve conservation objectives.
- We recommend Council does not take this submission into consideration in their decision-making.

## Detailed comments

On a number of points, we agree with the WCEL ESG submission:

- The submission states that IUCN's objectives (“to influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable” (Art. 2)) cannot be interpreted in a way that emphasizes one aspect (e.g. “sustainable use”) at the expense of other aspects. We agree with this, but note that this is self-evident and uncontroversial, as conserving biodiversity is inherent in the very definition of sustainable use.
- We agree that scrutiny of organisations applying to join IUCN should be based on assessment of whether their objectives and “actual track record” contribute to IUCN's objectives, and not rely on claims or representations made by the applicant. We likewise believe this to be uncontroversial, and that admission of all hunting-related organisations in IUCN has been on the basis of their contributions to conservation<sup>1</sup>.

However, we see a number of serious weaknesses throughout the rest of the document that undermine its conclusions.

### *i. The document addresses the wrong question*

It is not clear why the WCEL ESG addresses whether organisations that are supportive of trophy hunting should be eligible for membership under the IUCN statutes, given that the discussion was sparked by the application of organisations that campaign against trophy hunting (either specific examples or generally).

However, the conclusion that organisations that support trophy hunting should not be part of IUCN would exclude some of IUCN’s most mainstream and respected members, including WWF and WCS as non-state members, probably over 100 state party members to IUCN (including members from e.g. Canada, USA, France, Germany, New Zealand, the UK, South Africa, Namibia, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan), as well as one of IUCN's few Indigenous Peoples' organisations. All these run or support programmes involving hunting that would qualify as trophy hunting under most definitions. This is a very far-reaching and quite extraordinary conclusion.

### *ii. The document assumes a single ethical approach should guide the whole of IUCN*

The document asks whether trophy hunting is an acceptable means to achieve IUCN's objectives. But acceptable to whom? It is hard to see why the views of a certain group should be privileged over the views of the countries, organisations and communities who have successfully achieved conservation objectives using hunting. Is it appropriate for IUCN to tell, for instance, an indigenous community in Namibia, an international NGO in Pakistan, or a state agency in the USA that

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<sup>1</sup>We note that this procedure appears to have been faulty in the case of Born Free Foundation, who made bare claims in the application process and failed to substantiate them in practice.

their actions are unethical, regardless of their success in conservation? This seems a fundamentally inappropriate approach for IUCN to take, as a membership body bringing together very diverse organisations united by their commitment to nature conservation.

*iii. The document does not define what it means by "trophy" hunting*

Trophy hunting is not a clearly defined term, and may cover a wide array of hunting practices, contexts, and motivations. The authors do not specify what they mean by trophy hunting, and in particular do not specify exactly what elements need to be present for certain forms of hunting to be considered ethically unacceptable. This makes the logic of the analysis and the extent of its implications very unclear.

*iv. The document makes no credible attempt to evaluate the peer-reviewed literature on conservation or livelihood impacts of hunting*

The paper comments on the impacts of trophy hunting on species and ecosystem conservation (mainly p3), without any evaluation of the existing scientific information on this topic. There is a very extensive peer-reviewed literature on hunting and conservation, and without any meaningful engagement with this literature it is not possible for WCEL ESG to provide any meaningful advice to IUCN on this topic. We note the WCEL ESG made no attempt to consult with the many SSC experts who have worked and extensively published on this topic.

Trophy hunting is a complex topic. A fundamental problem with the authors' arguments here and elsewhere is that it is highly simplistic - they refer to trophy hunting as if it is all the same, and all hunters are the same. In practice, however, there are good and bad examples of trophy hunting, in terms both of conservation and/or community rights and livelihoods. This distinction is fundamental to SSC's view and existing policies. Citing examples of detrimental impacts tells us little about the overall role trophy hunting plays in relation to conservation.

It is quite clear that trophy hunting, where well managed, can be a powerful and effective tool that is currently helping to conserve and recover threatened species and maintain and restore wild lands, just as it is quite clear that where poorly managed it has a number of detrimental impacts (indeed, many more than are mentioned by these authors). In a scientific sense, the discussion here is simply grossly inadequate, selective and highly misleading.

*v. The document incorrectly characterises the debate on trophy hunting as "economics" vs "ethics"*

The paper characterizes the debate around trophy hunting as involving economic benefits (on one hand) vs fundamental ethical objections (on the other)(pp2-5). However, this characterization of the debate is inaccurate. This inaccurate premise shapes much of its subsequent argument, and means most of it is irrelevant.

There are indeed arguments made for trophy hunting that emphasize certain direct financial and economic benefits. However, from a conservation standpoint, the arguments in favour of (certain, locally appropriate, well-managed) examples

of trophy hunting are *not* based on these direct economic benefits, but on the significant indirect conservation impacts that the incentives and revenue generated by hunting can have. This is a fundamentally ethical argument motivated by the values that conservationists ascribe to wildlife populations and ecosystems.

In addition, arguments often address the social and livelihood benefits that indigenous and local communities gain from some trophy hunting programmes. But analysis of these benefits cannot be purely in simple economic terms, but within a framework of justice and distributional equity, given that these are the people who pay the costs of living with wildlife.

In our view, the ethical dilemma underpinning this debate is more correctly characterized as a consequentialist approach (on one hand), which takes as important the actual conservation outcomes of actions, *vs* a deontological approach (on the other), that considers some actions as fundamentally wrong in themselves regardless of outcome. Under a consequentialist analysis trophy hunting will be acceptable or not based on its outcomes for nature and for people, whereas under a deontological approach it may be considered (for some individuals) as intrinsically wrong.

As IUCN is fundamentally concerned with conservation of the integrity and diversity of nature, we think that it is appropriate for members to judge the ethical import of actions against their outcomes for these values.

*vi. The paper gives a selective review of IUCN's resolutions on this issue*

The paper highlights a number of IUCN resolutions that may well be relevant to this issue, although we note that the conservation benefits of (well-managed) sustainable use are well embedded in some of these documents (particularly the early foundation documents), and there are many other IUCN Resolutions that are likewise relevant, including those that support the conservation value of various forms of sustainable use of wild resources, and the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities to participate in and make decisions on wild resource management. A full review of relevant IUCN resolutions is not undertaken in the CEL paper.

Resolution 011 *Closure of Domestic Markets for Elephant Ivory* is stated as “effectively banning” trophy hunting, a curious term to use for an NGO/IGO Resolution. The resolution in fact calls on a number of bodies to take various actions to close domestic markets for ivory products. Hunting trophies of CITES listed species (such as elephants) can not in any case be legally traded on domestic markets (under longstanding CITES provisions), so implementation of the resolution would have no impact on the current situation. The WCEL ESG document further suggests the Resolution states that trophy hunting “threatens the survival of many populations of savannah and forest elephants, and undermines the ecological integrity of savannah and forest ecosystems”. However, the Resolution text in fact reads “ALARMED that the illegal killing of elephants and trade in their ivory remains a major problem across much of Africa, threatens the survival of many populations of savannah and forest elephants, and undermines the ecological integrity of savannah and forest ecosystems...”. Regulated trophy hunting programmes do not involve illegal

killing of elephants, so this statement is irrelevant and the WCEL ESG's text is misleading. This also demonstrates the lack of scientific understanding underpinning this document.

*vii. The ethical considerations in relation to the rights and livelihoods of indigenous people and local communities are entirely ignored*

There are certainly examples of trophy hunting that ignore or undermine the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities and that return few benefits to them. However, there is also an array of examples where trophy hunting is providing meaningful benefits to communities, and some where communities are themselves choosing to use hunting on their land to meet needs such as healthcare and education, and to provide much needed income to conserve and protect wildlife populations (and not only huntable populations). The ethical implications raised in relation to community rights and livelihoods and the potential losses thereof are entirely absent from this document.

*viii. The paper reaches an unsupported and illogical conclusion that even trophy hunting that benefits conservation is inconsistent with promoting ecological integrity and diversity and sustainable use*

The WCEL ESG paper (p7) refers to the SSC Guiding Principles and the IUCN Briefing Paper, and their conclusion that well-managed trophy hunting programmes can and do deliver important conservation benefits. It then goes on to ask how this form of hunting can be consistent with IUCN's commitments to promoting ecological integrity and diversity. But on the face of it, the paper has answered the question itself in the preceding paragraph.

This is a central contention of the WCEL paper – that despite the conclusion of the SSC's conservation scientists that well-managed trophy hunting programmes can positively contribute to species and ecosystem conservation, for some unclear and unarticulated reason trophy hunting is not consistent with IUCN's commitments to ecological integrity and diversity. It likewise makes the very odd statement that "Trophy hunting is not consistent with sustainable use". The paper does not provide any supporting argument to clarify why forms of trophy hunting that do not lead to any decline in any species (either the target species or other affected species), and/or that assist with species recovery should not be considered "sustainable use", in defiance of both popular and technical understandings of this term.

It is our view that well-managed trophy hunting is an important form of sustainable use, and there is substantial evidence that it can contribute significantly to the conservation of wildlife species and their habitats. While there clearly are cases where it is poorly used and poorly managed, nevertheless it remains an important conservation tool for government agencies, conservation organisations and community bodies. Its appropriateness for IUCN should be judged on its outcomes for conservation and for the people who live with wildlife, not against subjective ethical preconceptions.