



March 23, 2015
Senator Floyd Prozanski
Chair, Senate Judiciary Committee 900 Court Street NE, S-415
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: Testimony in support of S.B. 913

Dear Chairman Prozanski:

My name is Danielle Grabiell and I am a Senior Policy Analyst with the Environmental Investigation Agency or EIA. EIA is an international campaigning organization dedicated to investigating and exposing environmental crime and protecting endangered species and the natural world. EIA has been working to put a stop to wildlife trafficking for 25 years. We have completed more investigations into the ivory trade than any other organization. Our findings have shown again and again that ivory and rhino horn trade are not compatible with species conservation.

I'd like to tell you a little more about why laws that ban ivory and rhino horn trade work and why you should support this bill.

Bans work because they send an unequivocal message to consumers. Bans work because they eliminate cover for illegal laundering operations, and bans work because history proves that they do.

At the dawn of the 20th Century, it is estimated that 1.3 million elephants roamed the African savannah. By the late 1980's, nearly half of these magnificent creatures had been wiped out to supply the then-legal international ivory trade. In response to this, the first global elephant poaching crisis, the first-ever ivory import ban was implemented – by us, by the United States.

The U.S. ban on ivory imports was crucial in cutting off a major ivory market. It prompted similar policies from the other major ivory consuming nations and provided the impetus for a total international trade ban, which was agreed in 1989. The global ban worked. The world's major ivory markets were shut down; the price of and trade in ivory dropped; the illegal killing of elephants declined, and many elephant populations began to stabilize and rebound.

The international ban on commercial elephant ivory trade worked because it sent a simple, clear and public message to the ivory consumers of the world: buying ivory leads to the slaughter of elephants and it would no longer be tolerated. It worked because it made enforcement straightforward. Trading ivory across borders was illegal. The markets responded, demand plummeted and domestic trade collapsed.

Do you want to know why we are facing another global poaching crisis? Because the international ivory trade ban has been undermined. When the countries of the world agreed in 1999 and 2008 to allow “one-off” exceptions to the ban, to permit the sale of ivory to Japan and China, a dying industry was resuscitated. Consumers, particularly increasingly wealthy middle-class Chinese consumers, once again believed it was OK to buy ivory. And buy they did.

Proponents of the “one-off” sales theorized that they would meet the demand in China and Japan, flood the domestic markets and reduce ivory prices as well as the demand for ivory goods. Instead, the sales helped to stimulate the market demand, confused consumers, and provided an avenue to launder illicit ivory from Africa through poorly regulated legal domestic ivory markets. For example, our recent investigations in China revealed a remarkable consistency amongst ivory dealers, who claimed that 90% of the ivory on the market is illegal.

Poorly controlled “legal” domestic markets, ineffectual enforcement, and corruption remain the primary driver of the sharp rise in elephant and rhino poaching in Africa today.

But, don’t think that the problem is limited to China and Japan; indeed, the U.S. remains one of the top destinations for illegal ivory and rhino horn.

And that is why national and state-level bans are absolutely essential to our global work to save elephants and rhinos. Despite the best efforts of enforcement officers, most wildlife contraband crosses international borders undetected. Without strict national and state level measures to control and limit domestic trade, illegal wildlife products are easily laundered onto the domestic market and passed off as legal to unsuspecting consumers.

Domestic trade bans, such as that proposed by the Obama Administration, and state level bans such as that proposed in SB 913, pull the rug out under the smugglers and illegal traders by removing their cover.

My friends, we are again facing an elephant and rhino poaching crisis. More than 30,000 elephants were slaughtered last year to supply the global ivory trade and to line the pockets of organized criminals and terrorists. There is a very real possibility that the African elephant will be extinct before my 6-year-old daughter graduates from high school.

I’m not being dramatic when I say that time is running out for Africa’s elephants and rhinos. We, as Oregonians, have an important opportunity today to do our part to make sure extinction doesn't happen on our watch. Please join me in supporting SB 913.

Thank you,

Danielle Fest Grabiell
Senior Wildlife Policy Analyst
Environmental Investigation Agency