

Evidence Over Emotion

Why a UK Hunting
Trophy Import Ban
will Harm African
Communities and
Wildlife

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Preface: A Critical Moment for Evidence-Based Conservation Policy

In June 2024, the Labour Party pledged in its election manifesto to introduce a ban on the import of hunting trophies to the United Kingdom. Now elected to government, that commitment could soon shape legislative proposals with far-reaching implications for international conservation efforts, local livelihoods, and Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities in Africa.

This report has been compiled to inform that moment. While the most recent legislative attempt — a Private Member’s Bill introduced by Conservative MP David Reed — failed to pass, the manifesto commitment signals continued political interest in the issue.

We offer this document not in response to a specific bill, but in anticipation of one. Our goal is to ensure that any future policy debate is guided by science, inclusive of affected voices, and rooted in the realities of conservation on the ground — not just the sentiments of distant publics.

By “**conservation**,” we mean **the active and responsible stewardship of nature and its resources — managing, sustainably using, restoring, and maintaining ecosystems so that they remain healthy, resilient, and able to support both biodiversity and human well-being, now and for generations to come.**

This understanding reflects how conservation is practiced across much of Southern Africa: not by excluding people, but by recognising them as part of nature’s future.

The decisions made in the UK will have consequences for communities and ecosystems thousands of miles away. Now is the time to get it right.

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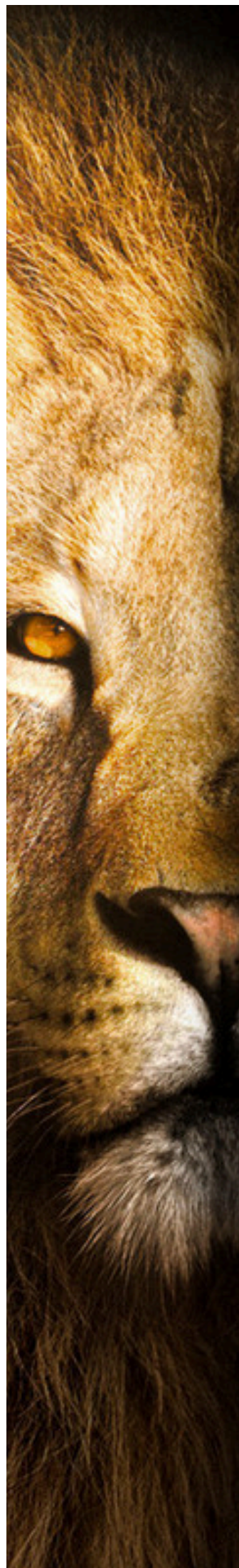
Executive Summary

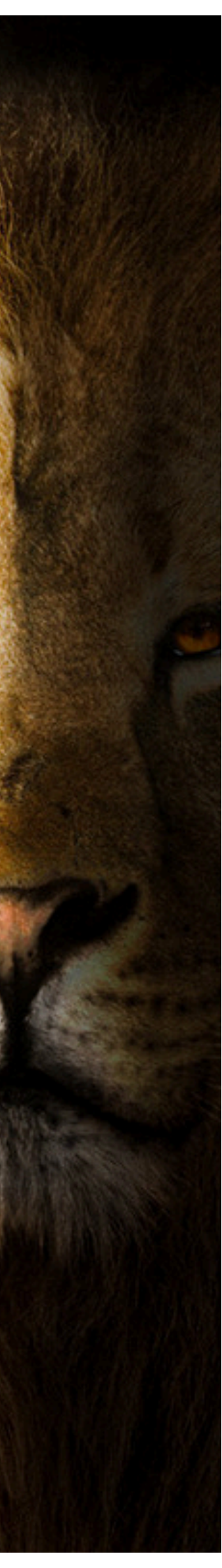
The Labour Government has committed to introducing a ban on the import of hunting trophies into Great Britain. While no legislation has yet been introduced, the commitment has gained political momentum and public visibility. This document offers critical evidence and perspectives for policymakers, advocates, and the public to consider — before a ban is developed.

At its core, the commitment seeks to protect wildlife. But without understanding the full ecological, social, and economic context in which trophy hunting occurs, such a ban risks doing the opposite.

Key concerns:

1. **Trophy hunting is not a major threat to any species imported into the UK¹.** In well-regulated contexts, it has contributed to conservation success, including the recovery of black and white rhino² populations.
2. **Bans remove the very incentives that keep land wild and wildlife valuable.** In parts of Southern Africa, regulated hunting conserves vast areas unsuitable for other uses, preventing habitat loss and land conversion — the leading driver of biodiversity decline.
3. **Bans cut off a major source of funding for conservation and communities.** Hunting revenue pays for rangers, anti-poaching operations, infrastructure. it puts money in household pockets and funds community services such as schools and clinics. Without it, conservation systems falter and incentives for communities to tolerate wildlife diminish.
4. **Bans break down coexistence between people and wildlife.** Without tangible benefits, communities facing the costs and dangers of living alongside species such as elephants and lions are more likely to resort to retaliatory killing.





5. **Those most affected — Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities — have not been meaningfully consulted.** Their rights, experiences, and proven conservation successes are being sidelined.
6. **The UK already has one of the most rigorous import control systems in the world.** All imports must be legally sourced and scientifically assessed as non-detrimental to wild populations - standards that are stricter than those applied to hunting within the UK itself.
7. **A ban would apply a harmful double standard,** undermining the UK's credibility in global conservation while contradicting its own commitments under CITES, the CBD, and the Global Biodiversity Framework.

Our Recommendation

We respectfully urge UK policymakers to resist calls for a blanket ban and instead:

- **Insist on rigorous, peer-reviewed analysis** of the full conservation and livelihood implications of trophy hunting;
- **Undertake meaningful, equitable consultation** with affected governments, Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities ;
- Ensure that any legislative **decisions reflect international best practice**, including the IUCN's guidance on sustainable use³ to:
 - Base decisions on sound analysis of how trophy hunting contributes to conservation and livelihoods;
 - Undertake meaningful and equitable consultation with affected range states, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities;
 - Explore opportunities to improve governance and sustainability before removing hunting as a tool;
 - Identify and fully fund viable, long-term alternatives that offer equal or greater conservation and livelihood benefits; and
- **Champion conservation that delivers**, for biodiversity, for climate, and for those who share their landscapes with wildlife every day¹.

A hunting trophy import ban may sound simple and principled. But effective conservation policy must do more than sound good — it must work.

Let's ensure the UK is part of the solution, not part of the problem.

Voices from Southern Africa: What We Stand To Lose

Joint statement from Southern African government representatives in the United Kingdom

As representatives of our respective Southern African governments, we are all proud of our world-leading conservation records.

We have national and international responsibilities to manage our unique wildlife resources for the present and future generations – a responsibility we deliver on.

Our region holds more than half of the world's lions, buffaloes, elephants, rhinos, and many other species. In fact, according to the Megafauna Conservation Index (MCI) which ranks countries' contributions to conservation, four of the top five contributors are African countries.

As the vital importance of biodiversity in fighting climate change becomes ever more apparent, we are grateful for what African conservation can contribute to the planet.

It may surprise those in the Global North, but trophy hunting is an integral part of Southern Africa's conservation success. It is well regulated in our countries, and it is controlled by scientific techniques. We are only able to conserve so much land for wildlife because of the sustainable revenue generated by trophy hunting. These trophy hunting areas are immense and remote, lacking infrastructure to support complementary revenue streams such as photo-tourism. In many places, regulated trophy hunting is the only viable conservation-compatible land use available today.

We remain concerned about ongoing efforts in the UK — including a recent Private Member's Bill and the Labour Party's current manifesto commitment — to prohibit the import of hunting trophies. Trophy hunting is not a key threat to any of our species of which trophies are imported to the UK. In fact, some animal populations have grown beyond the carrying capacity of the protected areas in which they reside.

If income streams from trophy hunting were substantially reduced – as would be the outcome of such a ban – land would be abandoned and subject to poaching, or converted to less biodiversity-friendly uses, such as agriculture and livestock production. Local communities who live near and with wildlife would suffer.

This position is also held by the UK Government's nature conservation advisors, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, and the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

We call on British policymakers to recognise that animal rights and wildlife conservation are two different subjects. The principles of animal rights do not apply to wildlife conservation practices, which are focused on managing the ecology of populations, and on funding the preservation of the ecosystem in which they live. It is our hope that you will consider the rural communities who live alongside our wildlife, and who will, therefore, be directly affected by any future ban on trophy imports.

Southern Africa's track record on conservation is world- leading, and we use trophy hunting to do it. Let us continue to do so.



Botswana

His Excellency Shimane Kelaotswe
High Commissioner Botswana



Namibia

Her Excellency Linda Scott
High Commissioner Namibia



South Africa

His Excellency Jeremiah N. Mamabolo
High Commissioner South Africa



Tanzania

His Excellency Mbelwa Kairuki
High Commissioner Tanzania



Zambia

Her Excellency Macenje Mazoka
High Commissioner Zambia



Zimbabwe

His Excellency Colonel (Rtd)
Christian M.Katsande
Ambassador Extraordinary &
Plenipotentiary

Why a Trophy Hunting Import Ban Will Fail Communities and the Wildlife it Aims to Help

It Will Accelerate Habitat Loss and Land Conversion

Wildlife matters — ecologically, culturally, economically. But in rural landscapes where people must decide how to use their land, that land must provide something in return: food, income, safety, stability, and/or a future for their families. **When wildlife provides tangible benefits, it becomes a viable land use.** When it doesn't, communities are under pressure to convert land to other uses.

In many parts of Africa, regulated hunting occurs in areas too remote, under-resourced, or ecologically marginal to support photo-tourism, and often poorly suited even for agriculture. Hunting concessions — often leased from or co-managed by communities — conserve vast ecosystems that would otherwise have little justification to remain wild.

Land conversion is a leading driver of biodiversity loss^{7,8,9,10}.

If wildlife-based land use is no longer viable, communities are left with little choice. Land is cleared for farming - even where soils are poor and yields unsustainable. Trees are cut. Wildlife is displaced. Fragile ecosystems degraded.

Trophy hunting safeguards

500,000mi²

of wildlife habitat in Southern Africa⁷



***That is
6 x Britain***



The ecological consequences are far-reaching:

- Habitat destruction for countless species;
- Reduced carbon sequestration and increased soil erosion;
- Greater climate vulnerability for local and regional ecosystems.

Keeping land under wildlife management — whether through hunting, tourism, or other sustainable uses — supports healthy rangelands, functioning ecosystems, and natural carbon sinks. In fact, studies show that wildlife-managed landscapes contribute meaningfully to soil health, clean and reliable water systems, and climate resilience^{11,12,13}.

It Will Remove the Funding that Sustains Conservation and Community Benefits

Conservation costs money. Hunting revenue is one of the few consistent, self-sustaining sources of conservation finance. It pays rangers and game scouts, funds anti-poaching operations, maintains infrastructure, and supports community services such as schools and clinics^{1,4}. Government budgets alone cannot cover these costs¹⁷, and tourism cannot replace hunting everywhere — it requires high wildlife densities, easy access, and significant infrastructure. Emerging tools like carbon credits or biodiversity offsets remain complex, evolving, and not yet capable of providing reliable income at scale^{17,18}.

Removing one of the few proven funding mechanisms risks creating a conservation vacuum. When management disappears, poaching, encroachment, and degradation fill the gap.

Replacing earned income with unpredictable aid is not a solution. Aid funding often flows through international NGOs and administrative systems, rarely reaching the rural households who bear the costs of living with wildlife. Even well-meaning programmes struggle to deliver consistent, reliable income at the household level — and aid cannot replace the dignity and autonomy that come with generating value from one's own land, wildlife, and labour. This shift risks creating new forms of dependency and undermining decades of locally driven progress.

In many parts of Africa, trophy hunting is not a threat to conservation — it is what makes conservation possible.

Even if aid dependency were a viable alternative, the UK's own recent cut to its 0.7% ODA commitment raises serious questions about the credibility and longevity of such promises.



(c) Gail Thompson

It Will Break Down Coexistence Between People and Wildlife

Living alongside elephants, lions, leopards, and other dangerous wildlife is not a romantic notion for many rural communities in Southern Africa. The cost of conflict can be high and is often invisible to outsiders. In Africa, it is common for an elephant herd to destroy an entire season's crops in one night, a hyena to kill a herd of goats or several cattle, or for a crocodile to kill a man fishing.

Without meaningful incentives to endure these risks, many communities resort to killing wildlife through snaring, poisoning, and/or shooting. These acts are not driven by malice — but by necessity.

Coexistence breaks down when people are asked to tolerate danger and loss — but are denied the means to benefit from the species causing them

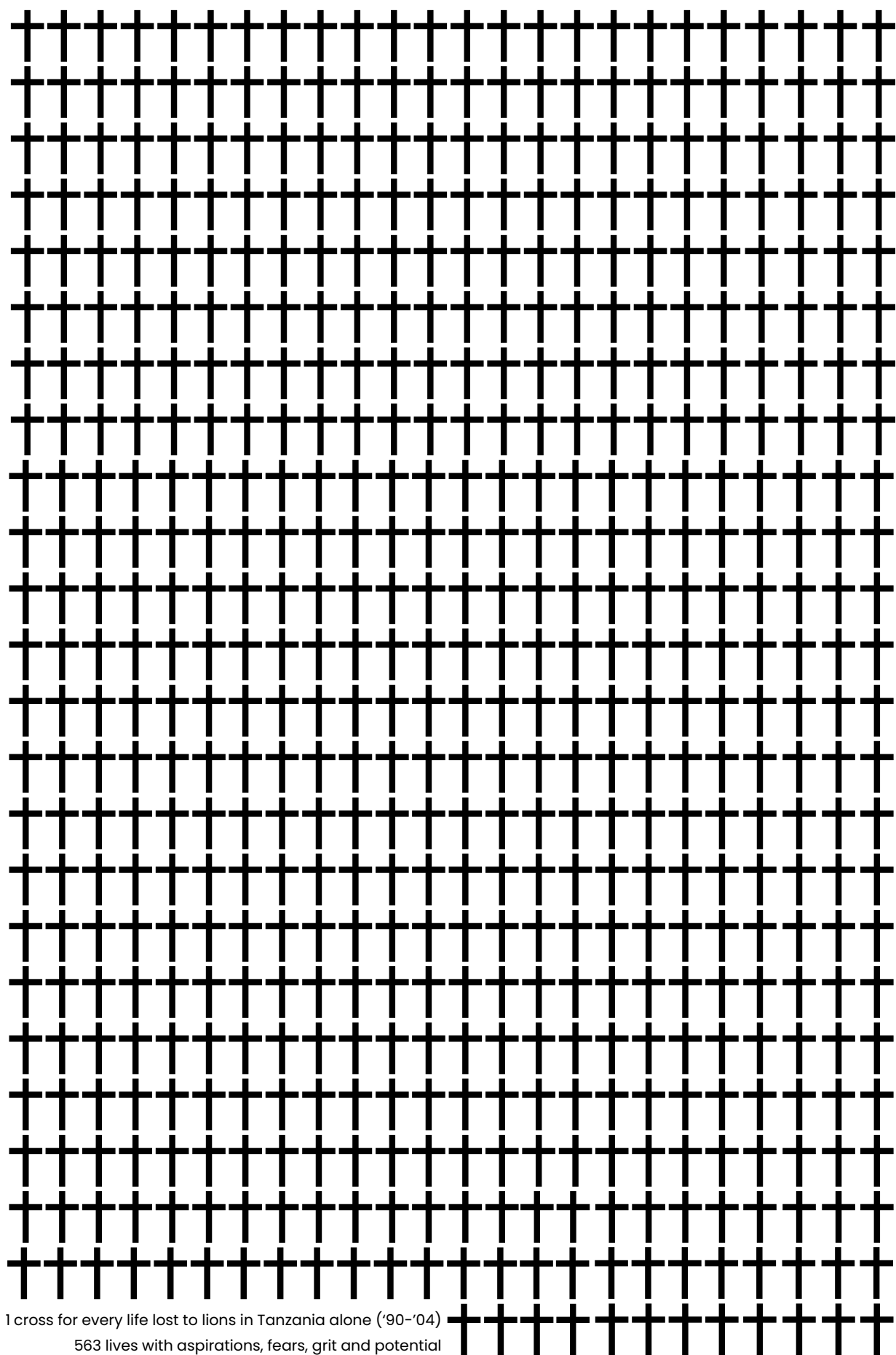
Sustainable use through trophy hunting has been shown to increase tolerance for wildlife¹⁴. When trophy hunting revenues put money in household pockets, help build schools, clinics, boreholes, or provide meat during times of scarcity, people see value in conserving wildlife — even dangerous species.

If the UK bans hunting trophy imports — even from legal, scientifically managed hunting programmes — it sends a message: the voices and realities of people who live with wildlife can be ignored in favour of misinformed public opinion elsewhere. That message has consequences. It:

- Undermines trust between rural people and conservation authorities;
- Emboldens those who see no reason to conserve species that bring hardship;
- Removes a key tool in managing dangerous species and maintaining coexistence; and
- Erodes the social contract needed for coexistence.

In areas where photo-tourism is not viable and donor funding is unreliable, regulated trophy hunting is often the only source of support for conflict mitigation.

Coexistence is not a slogan; it is a choice people make when they believe living with wildlife brings more hope than harm. A ban would take away one of the few tools that make that choice possible.



1 cross for every life lost to lions in Tanzania alone ('90-'04)
563 lives with aspirations, fears, grit and potential

It Silences the Voices of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities

Conservation policy cannot succeed when it sidelines the very people who live with and manage wildlife. DEFRA's own 2021 Impact Assessment¹⁵ acknowledged that local people would likely bear most of the costs of a trophy import ban. Yet **no meaningful consultation has taken place with the governments, Indigenous Peoples or Local Communities who would be most affected.**

Instead, their perspectives have been ignored in favour of public sentiment shaped largely by animal rights campaigns and celebrities - narratives that often omit key facts about conservation governance, regulation, and community benefits. However, when provided with more context, polling shows public opinion becomes far more nuanced¹⁶.

By sidelining local expertise in favour of external sentiment, the UK risks undermining the achievements of Southern African countries, who have developed some of the most successful community-based conservation models in the world.





These models link conservation to development, human rights, and self-determination. A ban would unravel that progress by criminalising one of the key tools these countries rely on to make conservation viable in challenging contexts. It would send a damaging message to African nations:

Your models don't matter, your people don't count, and your methods will not be supported unless they look like ours.

International frameworks — including the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples — affirm the right of communities to determine how natural resources are used, provided it is lawful and sustainable. A ban would ignore those rights, substituting local decision-making with external moral preferences.

This is not leadership; it is a return to top-down, externally imposed conservation — an approach that has repeatedly failed.

The Dangerous Double Standards That Undermine the UK's Credibility

The UK allows and regulates hunting within its own borders - from deer stalking in the Scottish Highlands to pheasant and grouse shooting on private estates. These activities are accepted — even celebrated — as part of countryside management, rural culture, and conservation.

Yet when African nations use similarly regulated models — often more strictly monitored and delivering greater ecological and social returns — those same practices are condemned. In the UK, deer are routinely hunted to prevent overpopulation and ecological damage; game birds are reared and released for shooting; antlers, tusks, and other remains are kept as trophies or even sold as novelty items. Hunting trophies are legally exported from the UK to other countries.

The perception of moral superiority carries real consequences. In Southern Africa, where governments and communities have invested decades into making conservation work through sustainable use, an import ban would signal that their success does not count — that UK moral preferences outweigh African evidence, sovereignty, and lived experience. It would suggest that British rural residents can manage their wildlife, generate income, and keep trophies, but Africans cannot benefit from legal, regulated trophy hunting that supports conservation and economies.

Leadership requires consistency, not moral exceptionalism. The UK cannot claim to support Indigenous rights, sustainable development, and evidence-based policy while ignoring the voices of those most affected and applying conservation standards unevenly.

The world is watching — and so are the countries that still choose to engage the UK as a partner in conservation and development.

The UK's Trophy Import System Already Works

Before considering new legislation, it is important to evaluate whether current controls are already meeting conservation and legal standards — and evidence shows they are¹. In fact, **the UK's current hunting trophy import system is one of the most stringent in the world** — fully aligned with international frameworks and backed by scientific oversight.

Under the UK's retained version of the EU Wildlife Trade Regulations^{5,6}, all hunting trophies from species listed under Annex A and Annex B require a government-issued import permit before entry and must meet two legal thresholds:

- a. Proof of legal acquisition in the country of origin; and
- b. A scientific non-detriment finding showing that the import will not negatively impact the survival of the species in the wild.

For Annex A species — typically the most strictly protected — the UK goes further still, requiring evidence that the import will directly contribute to the conservation of the species, not merely avoid harm.

The rules were strengthened as recently as 2021, when permit requirements were extended to cover all Annex B species, significantly expanding the scope of regulated imports.

This precautionary, evidence-based approach means **no imported trophy can come from an unsustainable hunt**. If there is any doubt, the permit is not issued. This ensures that only trophies meeting the highest legal and ecological standards enter the UK.

A ban would replace a targeted, science-led system with a blunt, one-size-fits-all approach that ignores legality, sustainability, and species status. It would remove incentives for range states to maintain high standards, eroding the very transparency and accountability that the current system promotes.

Rather than dismantle a working system, the UK should be championing it internationally as a model of good governance and science-based wildlife trade regulation.

Why a Ban would Undermine the UK's International Commitments

The UK is a Party to some of the most important international agreements governing biodiversity, trade, and Indigenous rights. A ban on hunting trophy imports from legal, scientifically managed, and CITES-compliant systems would contradict these commitments in both spirit and practice.

The UK has committed to:

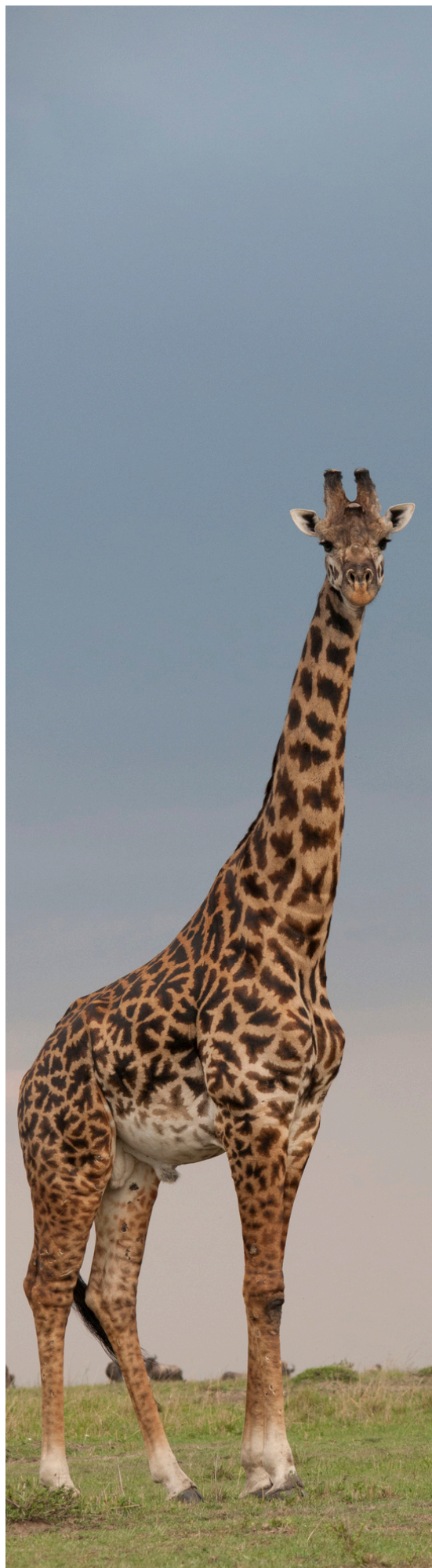
- **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)**, a binding agreement that regulates international trade in wildlife through science-based sustainability assessments and legal acquisition findings. The UK has been a Party since 1976 and helped design the very system a ban would bypass.
- The **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)** and the **Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF)**. The UK played a key role in negotiating and funding the GBF, which explicitly calls for the sustainable, legal, and equitable use of wild species (Target 5), and for those benefits to support Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (Target 9).
- The **Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)**. IPBES has found that sustainable use is essential for both biodiversity and the well-being of the people who depend on it. Their reports caution against policy interventions that undermine local governance systems.
- **Stated UK policy on decolonising conservation and supporting Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities**. The UK Government has publicly committed to rights-based approaches, Indigenous leadership in conservation, and “local solutions for global biodiversity loss.”

Replacing evidence-based regulation with a blanket prohibition would undermine the UK's credibility in implementing the very agreements it has championed, weaken trust among conservation partners, and send a signal that public sentiment outweighs science and global consensus.

Recommendations to UK Policymakers

To ensure future policy decisions are effective, equitable, and grounded in recognised best practice, we recommend the UK Government — in line with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) guidance on sustainable use — to:

1. **Withhold support for a blanket ban** on hunting trophy imports, which risks undermining conservation outcomes, marginalising Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, and weakening the UK's credibility as a fair and evidence-based global partner.
2. **Base decisions on rigorous, peer-reviewed analysis** of how trophy hunting impact biodiversity management and community well-being.
3. **Undertake meaningful and equitable consultation** with affected range states, Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities before any legislative change.
4. **Explore opportunities to improve governance and sustainability** before removing trophy hunting as a tool.
5. **Support viable, conservation-compatible economies** through sustainable use and complementary models such as nature-based tourism, carbon markets, and other landscape-level approaches.
6. **Align with international commitments** — including CITES, the CBD, and the GBF — by supporting the sustainable, legal, and equitable use of wild species.



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In 2024, CAMPFIRE Zimbabwe imported a stag's head from the UK in 2024 to demonstrate their objection to and hypocrisy of a UK hunting trophy import ban

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