

A close-up photograph of two hippos in water. The hippo in the foreground is the primary focus, with its head and shoulders visible above the water. Its skin is dark and wrinkled, and its eyes are partially submerged. The second hippo is visible behind it, slightly out of focus. The background is a warm, golden-brown color, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall mood is serene and natural.

ifaw

**International
Fund for
Animal Welfare**

**adding hippopotamus
to the Ivory Act**

parliamentary briefing

background

The Ivory Act 2018 received Royal Assent on Thursday 20 December and will close the UK domestic ivory market for elephant ivory, with a few limited exemptions. The Government has said that when the Ivory Act is passed, it will then call for evidence to see if any other species of ivory bearing animal should be added to the Act and a similar ban introduced. The Government is looking at all ivory bearing species (narwhal - horn, hippopotamus - teeth, sperm whale - teeth, killer whale - teeth, walrus - tusk, warthog - tusk, etc), but the species of highest concern are those which are already being poached for their ivory or where markets exist for their products and there is a demand.

Currently the additional ivory bearing species of most concern is the hippopotamus, which was extensively poached in the late 1990s and early 2000s, resulting in dramatic declines in local populations over a very short period of time. Some countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo saw declines of 95 percent due to poaching. Hippos have become increasingly threatened by a demand for their teeth, meat and skin as well as the impacts of habitat loss and so should be added to the species protected by the Ivory Act 2018 as a precautionary measure to avoid future increases in poaching. With Hong Kong SAR, China due to close its legal elephant ivory market in 2021 there is an increased risk that traders will switch to hippo ivory. Currently Hong Kong SAR, China purchases 90 percent of all legal African exports of hippo teeth.¹

hippos have become increasingly threatened by a demand for their teeth, meat and skin

¹ Anderson, A & Gibson, L. (2017) Missing teeth: Discordances in the trade of hippo ivory between Africa and Hong Kong, *African Journal of Ecology*, vol 56, issue 2, pp. 235-243



key information on the hippopotamus

- At the beginning of the 21st Century, the population of the common hippo declined by more than 95 percent in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, mainly due to poaching.
- Hippos have been defined as a vulnerable species by IUCN and populations are estimated at between 115,000 and 130,000.
- Since 1975 more than 770,000kg of hippo ivory has been exported from Africa and represents approximately 148,500 individual animals based on a formula developed by the University of Hong Kong and export data from CITES.
- Between 1975 and 2016 more than 90 percent of all exported hippo ivory was sent to Hong Kong SAR, China and represents approximately 133,000 individual animals. Of this, 75 percent came from Uganda and Tanzania, according to CITES records, representing almost 100,000 hippos from these two countries.
- In January 2018, Tanzania auctioned 3.5 tonnes of hippo ivory for £9,600.²
- Academics at the School of Biological Sciences at the University of Hong Kong found substantial discrepancies between official African export numbers and Asian import figures on hippo ivory, leading them to conclude that illegal hippo poaching was taking place.
- In Côte d'Ivoire large numbers of hippos were reportedly killed during civil unrest up to 2012, with abundant hippo bones still evident in some locations. The current Côte d'Ivoire hippo population is now estimated at approximately 500 individuals.
- Hippos have been excluded from many of the strengthened ivory bans now being introduced across the world, making this species vulnerable and at increased risk from ivory poachers.
- Hippos could be targeted for their teeth as a substitute for elephant ivory when elephant ivory markets are closed in Hong Kong SAR, China in 2021.
- Many of the countries which have elephants also have hippo populations, so it becomes easy for elephant poachers to switch to killing hippos instead, as criminal infrastructure and smuggling routes already exist in those range states.
- Since hippos are dependent on water it also makes them easy to find in rivers and lakes, especially in the dry season when water becomes scarce and population densities increase.

² Search for *ibtimes vulnerable hippos* for full article

action you can take

- 1 [Please write to the Secretary of State for the Environment](#), asking that hippopotamus ivory is added to the Ivory Act as a priority species.
- 2 Please ask [Parliamentary Questions](#), on other ivory bearing species.
- 3 [Support adding hippo to the Ivory Act](#) on social media using #EndWildlifeCrime

other ivory bearing species

IFAW supports the protection of all species at risk of potential poaching for the illegal wildlife trade. Threats and protections vary between species.

Narwhal

The effects of climate change mean the hunting of narwhal needs to be better monitored and regulated, a WWF and TRAFFIC report from 2015 warned. The report did not consider the international trade in Narwhal parts to be a threat to the survival of the species today.

Sperm and killer whales

Illegal trade does not currently drive population declines and the whales are not currently hunted on the high seas.

Warthogs

Though populations are in decline, they are still abundant and are targeted mainly for their meat, rather than their teeth. The trade in their ivory products is not the driver of localised population declines. Warthogs are classified by IUCN as of 'least concern' and are common.

Walrus

Aboriginal subsistence quotas exist for this species and are regulated by governments in Canada and Greenland. Although historically commercial hunting took place on a large scale, this stopped in 1928 and the main threats to walrus today are climate change and habitat disturbance and destruction.

Mammoth

Ivory is a concern, due to it having a similar appearance to elephant ivory and although the mammoth is extinct there have been instances of adverts offering elephant ivory for sale but labelled as mammoth. Musical instrument makers and bow makers are using mammoth ivory as a legal substitute for elephant ivory and they would be impacted by any ban, unless an exemption is sought.



International Fund for Animal Welfare

IFAW is a global non-profit helping animals and people thrive together. We are experts and everyday people, working across seas, oceans, and in more than 40 countries around the world. We rescue, rehabilitate, and release animals, and we restore and protect their natural habitats. The problems we're up against are urgent and complicated. To solve them, we match fresh thinking with bold action. We partner with local communities, governments, non-governmental organisations, and businesses. Together, we pioneer new and innovative ways to help all species flourish. See how at ifaw.org.

further information

**David Cowdrey,
Head of Policy & Campaigns, IFAW UK**

Tel: +44 (0)20 7587 6712,
mob: +44 (0)7801 613 536,
email: dcowdrey@ifaw.org

Website: www.ifaw.org/uk
Twitter: [@IFAWWestminster](https://twitter.com/IFAWWestminster)

**Kevin Flack,
Parliamentary Officer, IFAW UK**

Tel: +44 (0)20 7587 6710,
mob: +44 (0)7769 657291,
email: kflack@ifaw.org

Website: www.ifaw.org/uk
Twitter: [@IFAWWestminster](https://twitter.com/IFAWWestminster)