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CITES CoP20 feedback – *Adri Kitshoff-Botha*

As I leave from the CoP-20 closing session in Samarkand Uzbekistan, I extend Custodians' sincerest appreciation to Deputy Minister Singh, officials from the Scientific Authority, and the Department, for their unwavering commitment and leadership in presenting and defending South Africa and neighbouring countries' proposals on the global stage.

I also want to convey my appreciation to fellow South African and Global Sustainable Use organisations who made an assertive effort of ensuring a unified Pro Sustainable Use message. Although we faced setbacks on the giraffe, elephant, and rhino proposals, the experience has only strengthened our commitment to stand united with fellow sustainable-use organisations as we build towards a more coordinated, influential presence in future negotiations. With CoP21 set for Panama in 2028, our focus now turns to consolidating partnerships, refining strategy, and ensuring our collective voice is impossible to ignore. The networking opportunities at CoP20 was amazing!

SUO organisations

SUCO-SA, IWMC & others

CIC

EXCO: Jacques Senekal (chair) – Craig Kelly-Maartens - Douw Pelser – Jannie Otto – Mark Ivy – Michael Botha - Mike Currie - WJ Theron
CEO: Adri Kitshoff-Botha

Summary on proposals mostly affecting South Africa:

- **Deletion of Bontebok from Appendix II:**
  For trade/trophy-export, parties will rely on national regulations and non-detriment findings rather than CITES-based trade restrictions.

  The proposal to delete bontebok (Damaliscus pygargus pygargus) from Appendix II was accepted by Committee I and accepted and approved in the CITES CoP20 Plenary Session. The rationale for deletion is that population recovery, effective management, and a 2024 "non-detriment finding (NDF)" issued by the relevant authority in South Africa show that trade is no longer likely to be detrimental to the species' survival.

  Nonetheless, deletion from CITES Appendix II does not automatically authorize import into the U.S. Because USFWS relies on ESA processes, trophy imports remain subject to ESA permit requirements. U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) still requires an "enhancement finding" under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) before approving import of bontebok trophies — therefore, the export/import regime for bontebok trophies to the U.S. remains unchanged. For species that are subject to ESA import rules, the Service must determine that the import "will enhance the propagation or survival of the species." Such an "enhancement finding" remains a prerequisite for a trophy import permit.
  (** The good news is that Conservation Force is contemplating filing of an ESA downlisting petition, which will be strongly supported by Custodians).

- **Southern Giraffe:**
  The proposal to delete southern Giraffe African populations (Angola, Botswana, Eswatini, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, treated under Giraffa camelopardalis) from Appendix II was **rejected.**

  Acceptance of the proposal would have resulted in removing international CITES trade restrictions on these giraffe populations, potentially opening way for freer trade or exports (live animals, trophies, skins, etc.), depending on domestic laws. The rejection of the giraffe-population downlisting shows that regional motivation about population recovery has been disregarded by the majority of global CITES Parties.

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- **Rhino and Elephant:**
  All proposals for African rhinos and elephants were **rejected.**
  - A proposal by Namibia to allow international trade in registered stockpiled elephant ivory (raw ivory of Namibian origin) under African Elephant failed.
  - A proposal to allow trade in horn from Southern White Rhinoceros (from stockpiles or government/private holders) was rejected.
  - A proposal to transfer the South-western Black Rhinoceros from Appendix I to Appendix II — thereby allowing commercial trade in horns — was rejected.
  - All proposals to reopen commercial trade in rhino horn or elephant ivory (or parts / live elephants) from southern African populations failed to achieve the required two-thirds majority.

  These proposals were backed by range states with proven conservation track records, but they failed to gain the required two-thirds majority. This outcome has significant implications for African countries that have used science-based management, controlled hunting, and strong anti-poaching programs to rebuild elephant and rhino numbers.

  The decisions at CITES CoP20 may have closed the door on trade-based proposals for elephants and rhinos, but they cannot diminish the extraordinary conservation accomplishments achieved by African range states. Sustainable use remains a cornerstone of successful wildlife management in Africa, and Custodians will continue working with partners to ensure that these principles are defended, strengthened, and internationally recognised.

- **Several succulent plants** native to South Africa have been escalated to Appendix I (strongest CITES protection), a **significant tightening** of trade regulation for those species.

In closing, I will present detailed recommendations to EXCO to guide our strategy for being more visible, engaged, and influential in advancing a fair, science-based, pro–sustainable-use agenda. Far from slowing our momentum, CoP20 has invigorated the

efforts of sustainable-use organisations, reinforcing the importance of unity and proactive advocacy. Together with our partners, we will harness this energy and carry it forward into every forum that shapes the future of African wildlife—including the critical lead-up to CoP21 in Panama.

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