



New circular will decide fate of our country's bears

A new circular currently being drafted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) will reinforce the government's commitment to phase out and end bear farming in Vietnam, or will it?

The new circular will replace Decision 95/2008/TT-BNN issued by MARD on 29 of September 2008, and includes many improvements that should benefit efforts to manage bears on farms. However, a single clause that is proposed for inclusion in the circular would permit bear farmers to breed and raise cubs born on their farms.

Experts are rightfully concerned about this provision of the revised new circular that would allow cubs to be born, registered, and kept on farms. Allowing bear farm owners to produce more bears on their farms is in conflict with MARD's commitment to end bear farming in Vietnam. It would also directly undermine the significant progress that has been accomplished over the past eight years by MARD, local law enforcement and authorities to phase out bear farming in Vietnam and bring an end to the illegal hunting and trade of bears.

Key issues relevant to this argument are as follows:

- The number of bears on commercial farms will increase as cubs are born and registered, and these bears could be exploited for bear bile in violation of the law. MARD's commitment to phase out bear farming in Vietnam will fail. Illegal commercial bear farming will continue indefinitely.
- Hunting, smuggling, and trade in wild-caught bears will also continue as owners claim to authorities that new cubs discovered on their bear farms were captive-born, not wild-sourced. Authorities will have difficulty distinguishing between wild and captive-born bear cubs at farms, leading to a breakdown in enforcement and compromising Vietnam's wildlife protection laws, intended to protect bears and other endangered wildlife.
- More than 30 bear cubs have been confiscated by authorities since 2010. Wild-caught bears originate not just in Vietnam, but also Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, and other countries. Vietnam has a responsibility to help protect the region's bears by suppressing illegal activities, such as commercial farming of bears in Vietnam, that have had a devastating impact on wild bear populations in the region.



An unregistered bear cub, which was born on a bear farm in the south. According to farm employees, cubs born on this farm have been sold in the past. Under the new draft circular, owners will be allowed to keep bear cubs born on farms. This is in direct conflict with MARD's commitment to end bear farming in Vietnam and in opposition to the interests of wildlife protection

Photo: ENV

Enforcement briefs

Going after rhino horn trade

Last year, 668 rhinos were shot and killed in South Africa alone. Dozens of Vietnamese nationals have been arrested in South Africa, Mozambique, and Thailand attempting to smuggle rhino horn back to Vietnam; and since September 2012, there have been four seizures of rhino horns in Vietnam documented by ENV. In the spirit of a new cooperation agreement between Vietnam and South Africa signed in December 2012, the Prime Minister issued Decision 11 in January 2013 banning the importation of rhino horn trophies (formerly legally imported with permits).

However, we are just getting started. Much remains to be done in order to put an end to the smuggling and trade of rhino horns destined for Vietnam.

In addition to closely scrutinizing passengers returning from Africa at our country's airports and borders, we must identify and shut down organized criminal networks that are bringing rhino horn back into the country, often in the hands of "mules". These criminal networks often have family members living in South Africa, running businesses such as hotels or wildlife farms, or studying at university. Financial resources must be dedicated to investigating, collecting evidence, and prosecuting key members of these networks to send a clear and strong message to would-be smugglers and traders, that Vietnam will no longer tolerate the smuggling of rhino horn across our borders.

At the same time, we must act immediately to address the very small but devastating demand for rhino horn amongst the financial elite, which is priced at about 100 million VND for 100 grams. These people mistakenly believe that rhino horn is both a magical form of medicine to improve their health and a way to show off to others that they are important or successful. Their whim is costing the



The cooperation agreement signed between South Africa and Vietnam is just the beginning - much more work remains to be done to reduce the demand for rhino horn in Vietnam, and to shutdown criminal networks smuggling rhino horn into the country

Photo: Dr. Markus Hofmeyer. Reprinted from Murder, Myths & Medicine with permission from Rhishja Cota-Larson

lives of rhinos globally. Until this very small segment of the population comes to realize that the rhino horn they hold in their hand is a symbol of death, not life, and in fact no different from the horn of a common buffalo or the tips of their fingernails, this crisis will continue.

ENV urges members of the National Assembly, relevant ministries, and provincial governments to "get involved", urging would-be consumers to save their money and feel good by protecting the world's rhinos.

ENV embarked on a campaign in early 2012 focused on consumers, and is ready to work with government partners to bring this message to consumers, and help put an end to Vietnam's involvement in the rhino horn trade as quickly as possible.

Report corruption

If you are aware of authorities accepting money or gifts from individuals involved in wildlife trade or wildlife farming, please report the incident to the National Anti-corruption Department at

080 48 228