



ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE (IWT)

A THREAT TO ENVIRONMENTAL BIOSECURITY, BIODIVERSITY, HUMAN HEALTH AND WELLBEING

THE PROBLEM: Illegal wildlife trade directly threatens tens of thousands of species. It is critical that it is taken seriously in order to safeguard our environmental assets and provide resilient landscapes for our unique flora and fauna.

WHAT IS IT?

The illicit sale or exchange of biological resources

i.e., naturally harvested, alien or non-domesticated animals and plants. These species may be protected under either domestic or international law, but have been harvested and traded without appropriate legal permission.



pet & ornamental trade



meat & timber trade



fashion trade

Each year, the **IWT:**

- Produces many thousands of tonnes of wildlife contraband, worth billions of dollars.
- Is a major component of transnational environmental crime and a driver of declines in biodiversity globally.
- Generates novel biosecurity and human health risks through the transport and introduction of alien and invasive species – as well as their pathogens and diseases.

HOW BAD IS IT?



In **2019** over **1 million** illegal wildlife items were seized across thousands of global incidents



IWT is increasing and Australia has had more high-profile wildlife seizures in the last three years than in the previous eight years combined.



There is good evidence that rare and endangered species are of higher value in illegal trade, and that the **IWT** is itself a source of endangerment for thousands of species.



WHY CAN'T WE STOP IT?

Global wildlife trade is regulated by the multilateral Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

While CITES aims to root out illegal trade, the **IWT** remains a pervasive regulatory issue. For instance, there is no international legal agreement on what constitutes wildlife crime.

Ongoing challenges:

Native Australian species protected under the EPBC Act are not automatically protected outside of Australia, and there is a popular international trade in Australian native species (e.g., reptiles).



Between 1999 and 2016 over 2,795 alien vertebrates were detected in Australia, and many of these were from illegal holding, breeding and importing. These species are a considerable risk to the Australian environment.



Agencies responsible for combatting wildlife crime and enforcing legislation need resources, and in Australia differences in State and Commonwealth legislation lead to difficulties in exchanging intelligence and driving national cooperation.



A lack of public awareness and responsiveness is conflated as illegal wildlife trade can be poorly enforced with low penalties and low rates of prosecution being commonplace globally.



THE SOLUTIONS: Through the [Centre for Invasive Species Solutions](#), researchers at the [University of Adelaide](#) are currently leading a project focused on developing automated data-mining/web-scraping code to identify and characterise the illegal or unwarranted selling of alien species through e-commerce platforms (e.g., Gumtree, Facebook, enthusiast forums, lost and found websites).



Designating greater enforcement and surveillance resources to the global wildlife trade, as well as an increased focus on existing and future risks from **IWT** to Australian environments, economies and human wellbeing.



Facilitating greater intelligence sharing between agencies responsible for enforcing wildlife crime legislation, as well as cooperating with researchers and practitioners working in environmental biosecurity and wildlife conservation and forensics.



Driving legislative improvements to increase the synergies between State and Commonwealth agencies – including coordination of permitting and surveillance/prosecution legislation, and higher penalties consistent across jurisdictions, which reflect the seriousness of **IWT**.



Improving public awareness and responsiveness to **IWT** through education campaigns and conducting social research to understand which aspects of behavioural change provide the greatest social de-incentive.



The recent emergence of COVID-19 is causing global human suffering and mortality, and has rapidly become the most acute public health emergency of our generation. While the origin of the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19 remains uncertain, there is strong evidence that novel zoonotic diseases are linked to human activities that bring wildlife and humans into increasingly intense contact; including the harvesting, trade and consumption of wildlife. By combatting the illegal harvesting and unsustainable trade of wildlife we can improve environmental health and animal welfare, while also reducing human health risks.

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