

The World Society for the Protection of Animals Response to MOPAC Draft Police and Crime plan 2013-2017

March 2013

Introduction

The World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) seeks to create a world where animal welfare matters and animal cruelty has ended. To achieve this we work directly with animals and with the people and organisations that can ensure animals are treated with respect and compassion.

We campaign effectively to combat the world's most intense and large-scale animal welfare issues, bringing about lasting change by:

- Helping people understand the critical importance of good animal welfare
- Encouraging nations to commit to animal-friendly practices
- Building the scientific case for the better treatment of animals
- Encouraging a worldwide movement towards better animal welfare.

Locally, we improve animals' lives and prevent cruelty by working directly with communities and owners. Working on the ground with local partners for greatest effect, we are active in more than 50 countries.

Globally, we introduce animals into the most pressing global debates and prove the links between animal welfare and successful sustainable development. We have consultative status at the Council of Europe and collaborate with national governments, the United Nations, the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Organisation for Animal Health.

WSPA is the world leader in animal-focussed disaster response and risk reduction.

In the UK, WSPA partly funds the work of the Metropolitan Police Wildlife Crime Unit and is a partner in Operation Charm (www.operationcharm.org), the Metropolitan Police initiative against the illegal trade in endangered species in London.

WSPA is, therefore an active participant in the fight against wildlife crime and this submission has been prepared in the light of our experience in working with the Metropolitan Police Wildlife Crime Unit.

Consultation Questions

1. What, if any, other objectives and goals would you add to the Mayor's objectives and goals?

The World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) is disappointed that tackling the significant issue of wildlife crime is not currently within the Mayor's objectives and we strongly recommend that this is reconsidered for the final police plan 2013-2017.

London plays a significant role within global wildlife crime as it acts as a hub for wildlife trade coming into the UK and beyond and therefore needs to be dealt with not only globally, but also regionally, nationally and at a London-specific level.

The multi-cultural nature of London society, the increasingly varied ways in which illegal products or items can be moved around the globe and the burgeoning economies of countries whose ex-patriate citizens are often affluent and eager consumers of wildlife products (traditional medicine, ivory goods, bushmeat) has created something of a perfect storm for the illegal trade into London.

Wildlife crime both globally and in the UK has clear links to serious and organised crime through connections between those engaged in each illegal activity and therefore wildlife crime has to be seen within this context. Wildlife crime is of course of a serious nature on its own accord, however it's established links with other crimes demonstrates just how seriously it needs to be tackled.

Some types of domestic wildlife crime have increased. These include deer poaching and hare coursing. The methods used by wildlife criminals have also become more sophisticated. For example, the internet is used extensively to facilitate illegal wildlife trade.

Without long-term planning, including secure funding beyond the short-term, for specialist enforcement agencies such as the wildlife crime unit, London cannot be seen as fully committed to tackling either wildlife crime or its perpetrators. WSPA does not believe an effective policing strategy can be developed when agencies such as the WCU don't know from year to year if they will still exist. This situation is being exploited by criminal gangs trafficking wildlife who recognise that the relative risks and penalties of importing illegal items into London are outweighed by the end value of the items that they will achieve through not having been caught. It is inevitable that in this situation trafficking will not just continue, but increase.

Last year the Environmental Audit Select Committee in Parliament called for wildlife police to be given more long-term certainty, including funding, in order to avoid a hand-to-mouth existence. **WSPA implores the Mayor to heed the advice of the Committee by ensuring wildlife crime is included as a policing priority for 2013-2017.**

2. What, if any, other things could be done to address police performance and resource issues?

The role of Police Wildlife Crime Officers (PWCOs) must be recognised as a mainstream, specialist role within the police service and long-term funding needs to be secured for the modest number of posts concerned to ensure the continued development of this critical and specialised role.

In the present economic climate it is essential that funding is safeguarded to ensure that PWCO posts are retained and developed in UK police forces. At present individual forces continue to adopt a rather piecemeal approach to wildlife crime and the perception remains that wildlife crime is seen as an optional extra which can be dropped if resources are tight.

WSPA believes that the status of PWCOs should be the same as that of other specialist officers, given the specialist knowledge required to undertake the role effectively. Wildlife crime should be included in London's Policing Plan and an enforcement model adopted which ensures that there is a spread of expertise across London with training is provided and continuity planned.

The model currently operated by the Metropolitan Police consists of a small, centrally-based unit which is supported by a network of local PWCOs across the London Boroughs, although, the status of the Borough Wildlife Crime Officer has not been put on a proper footing in every Borough. WSPA urges the Mayor to ensure that his Police and Crime Plan 2013-2017 addresses this issue.

It is vitally important that police managers must give the same recognition to these posts as they would to other specialist policing roles and include them in their policing plans.

The growth of the internet and its scope to facilitate trade poses a significant new threat and enforcement agencies are attempting to keep up with the relatively new demands that this has placed upon them. There have been successful prosecutions of internet traders but we would like to see the police in a position where they are able to do more. In particular, WSPA would like to see a more pro-active approach adopted so that, rather than merely responding to reports of crimes, police are able to pro-actively investigate the activities of suspects.

To do this the police need to be able to access closed on-line forums using computers which cannot be traced. At present this requires authorities under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 and these authorities are not routinely given. WSPA believes that it should be simpler for the police to carry out these pro-active enquiries in future.

The sheer volume of internet trade poses a major logistical problem at present and, given the present low profile of wildlife crime and the level of resources available, police in the UK struggle to provide the level of response that is needed.

The stretched resources of existing officers within the WCU have tended to result in reactive rather than proactive policing. Intelligence gathering about the extent of trade, most frequently traded items, trade routes and methods of smuggling, are all key aspects of wildlife crime enforcement and need to be prioritised in terms of resources so that a fuller picture of the on-going problems are determined. In this respect, further synergy with organisations like WSPA who can assist in sharing the resource burden of intelligence

gathering could be beneficial providing it is conducted within the law and with the agreement of police authorities.

The Policing and Crime Plan needs to support the WCU in ensuring access to covert computers are available to Wildlife Crime Officers in order for officers investigating wildlife crime to monitor internet forums and trade.

5. What, if any, other things could be done to prevent crime?

Historically, wildlife crime has not enjoyed a high profile and there remains a very low level of public awareness of this issue in London and the UK generally. This makes it relatively easy for criminals to commit crime and escape justice but it also means that crimes may be committed by people and companies who simply do not realise that they are breaking the law.

The latter point is particularly relevant in the illegal trade in endangered species in London and the UK and the experience of Operation Charm suggests that many consumers are unaware of the illegal trade in this country and do buy products that they probably would not buy if they knew what they were. Many endangered species products are not obvious in their appearance (e.g. traditional Chinese medicines and some fashion and decorative items) and are often bought and sold in ignorance.

WSPA believes that the most important role that London and the UK has in this area is to reduce consumer demand for endangered species products in our country and this needs to be addressed by education and information. Clearly, we cannot expect other countries to take more action against the poaching of rhinos, tigers, elephants and other endangered species in their own countries if we are not prepared to do our utmost to stop the illegal trade in the same species in our own country.

In London, Operation Charm has cast light on an alarming range of endangered species products sold in the capital but these efforts must be furthered.

The main responsibility for crime prevention rests with the police and initiatives to inform and educate consumers and traders alike must form a key part of police forces' crime reduction strategies but this area also provides opportunities for partnerships with other agencies. Some work is being done on this in London already but, in our experience, the widespread public perception remains that the endangered species trade exists only in other countries and we believe that much more needs to be done to highlight this issue here.

WSPA would like to see the Mayor adopt a strategy to increase public awareness of illegal wildlife trade in London so that the issue achieves a much higher public profile in future. This could be done by using a range of electronic, broadcast and printed media, including television, radio and newspaper advertising and packages for schools and specialist traders and professional bodies covering, for instance, traditional medicine practitioners and antiques traders.

In addition, the fines and penalties for those involved in the illegal wildlife trade do not act as any sort of disincentive or dissuasion. Home Office sentencing guidelines are outdated and have added to the lack of consistency in application of the law, which is generally seen as failing to deal with the issue at the level at which it is operating globally – recent estimates by

WWF and others have put the trade at \$20billion a year, behind only the trade in drugs and weapons. While there is the potential for such huge sums to be made out of trafficking of wildlife and a lack of commitment to the adequate enforcement of the law through provision of proper resources, criminals will continue to see wildlife crime as a low-risk, high-value activity that can be exploited to supplement and underwrite other more high-risk activities such as drug and arms trafficking.