

Comments on the COVID- 19 EU anti-hunting ban proposal

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The failed attempt by the Nordic Green Left Group to attach anti-hunting amendment AM 79 to an EU bill which is aimed at a coordinated action to combat the COVID – 19 pandemic on 16 April 2020 is cause for a deep reflection on and concern about the morals of this and other anti-hunting groups. It was a deeply questionable attempt to attach a rider which promoted the self-interest of a particular group to a bill on a pandemic which has affected or claimed the lives of millions of people globally. Moreover, the supposed link of the infection of humans by a wild animal from a market in Wuhan has yet to be proven beyond any doubt as the virus could also have escaped from a local laboratory which is involved in viral research. Verifying the true cause may also never be possible.

The proposed amendment

The proposed amendment which was tabled requested the EU Parliament to ban:

- The trade, keeping and consumption of all wild animals
 - The use of wildlife in traditional medicine.
1. This amendment contained several factual and terminological errors and advocated the selective well-being of animals as it ignored the production and use of domestic livestock, poultry and marine resources which still are the main global food resource of the human population. It covers all forms of wildlife production under the faulty umbrella of “wildlife farming” (**intensive wildlife production** and ignores the fact that **extensive commercial wildlife production** has been a key tool to promote wildlife conservation on privately owned land in southern Africa. It has been the tool which has allowed numerous

wildlife conservancies in southern Africa to use their wildlife resources wisely on a free-range basis to relieve formerly poor rural communities from poverty and give them a sustainable base for economic development while promoting the conservation of their natural resources. It also ignores the fact that extensive commercial production of wildlife has led to a substantial improvement of the conservation of the wildlife of South Africa with the wildlife resource outside the official national parks and game reserves now vastly exceeding that inside them.

The anti-hunting lobby

The majority of the animals being hunted in Africa serve as a food source for the hunters and their families and are not hunted by affluent, foreign trophy hunters. Moreover, the species which are being hunted are mainly large mammal ungulates which do not carry or transmit dangerous zoonotic diseases to humans. The main transmitters of zoonotic diseases are the non-human primates, rodents and bats which are often being harvested for the illegal, uncontrolled bushmeat trade. The recent emergence of dangerous zoonotic pathogens such as the RNA viruses have mainly emerged from deeply rooted African and Asian cultural beliefs which are alien to modern westernized cultures and are not unique to the COVID – 19 pandemic. Well-controlled ethical hunting also does not contribute to the illegal bushmeat trade

Traditional medicine

Recent studies have shown that the hype about the traditional use of animal products as medicine in the East is mainly a fabrication of the western media and environmental pressure groups. Moreover, where such medicine is being used it is being phased out as more modern medication becomes available.

The root cause

All the current anti-hunting campaigns attempt to rectify the perceived ***symptoms*** rather than the ***causes***. While they may be sincere these attempts do not change the quality of life of millions of people or wildlife, especially not those in underdeveloped countries where people increasingly invade, destroy and fragment the habitats of wild animals. As these populations will be virtually or actually enclosed the principle of wildlife management through sustainable use will have to be applied to prevent overpopulation, protect the habitat and numerous other plants and animals which do not have such a high profile from being impacted.

The mandatory need to harvest excess wildlife from such enclosed areas to prevent the overutilization of the habitat can become a major force in providing food security for millions of starving African people. The record also shows that extensive commercial wildlife production on a wise-use basis has already saved a number of high profile wildlife such as the bontebok, black wildebeest, white rhinoceros, roan antelope and Cape mountain zebra in South Africa from extinction and has made a substantial conservation contribution.

Moot questions

The following moot questions remain:

- Who gave this or any other such group the mandate to act as the “guardians” of millions of wildlife?
- If the brain capacity of our early human ancestors had not increased markedly following the addition of meat to their diet would the possibility of adding this amendment have ever developed?
- How many of the people who were affected by the COVID - 19 pandemic would support such a ban?

- How many of the people who campaign for such a ban have at any time suffered from acute poverty and hunger?
- How would the implementation of such a ban improve the quality of life of any given animal?
- How much of the annual income which is generated by the anti-hunting groups is being used to improve the quality life of any given animal?
- How many of the commonly hunted wildlife carry dangerous zoonotic diseases?
- How would such a ban affect the lives of millions of people who live in poverty, lack adequate food and water and have no access to modern medication?
- Has any of the numerous existing bans on the use and keeping of wild animals ever stopped the illegal trade in wildlife and their products?

Conclusions

The cardinal conclusion is that it is not ethically and morally acceptable to force people who suffer from perpetual poverty and hunger to accept western norms on the conservation and use of wildlife. It will also be of real benefit to the wildlife conservation if the environmental pressure groups were to combine their campaigns and instead attack the root causes of poverty, hunger, habitat destruction and fragmentation of ecosystems and campaign for the creation and proper management of functional ecosystems with viable populations of wildlife and no human encroachment.