

Written Evidence submitted by John Shields (AAB0003)

By way of disclaimer, I have experience (as trustee of a UK conservation charity) in practical conservation initiatives in the farmed and hunted landscape. In Zambia I am helping a local community-owned hunting concession (recovered over the last twenty years from heavily wildlife-depleted farmland using anti-poaching associated with trophy fees) to diversify into non-TH sources of revenue, exploring fieldcraft courses, volunteer programmes, and, if possible, limited photo tourism. I do not receive, nor have I ever received, any money from TH, and whilst I engage in deer stalking for food in the UK, I personally deeply dislike any hunting of predator or keystone species in Africa and I hope it does eventually get phased out.

Nevertheless, I feel that I must stress quite how limited the options are in the short- and medium terms for most areas in sub-Saharan Africa. This is something that can really be felt if you drive from our current house in Leopard's Hill, Lusaka, out in to the bush, and speak to village headmen, who have seen much of their natural and cultural inheritance destroyed by (very understandable, given the pressures) rampant illegal snaring of wildlife, and who are desperate not to have to cut down their trees to sell for charcoal.

Opponents of TH, which currently protects more than half of all land dedicated to wildlife in sub-Saharan Africa (more than national parks), like to suggest that there are photo tourism operators ready to jump in and provide the same value to wildlife and its habitat, and the same benefits to local communities. This is simply not the case. Were it so, such operators would already be competing and buying up hunting blocks. They are not. And nor are the anti-TH campaigners, who are perfectly free to fund alternatives out of their own pockets. But they are not - even when auctions for such areas come up and the countries concerned beg them to join in the process and contribute funds of their own to the collective effort.

Such finance on the ground is needed. It's easy for people to sit back in their UK homes and hold forth about African conservation, and to send money to UK-based NGOs to lobby Parliament. But none of this fire-and-forget animal rights campaigning helps conservation – it prioritises one completely over the other. And however well-meaning (and I don't doubt it genuinely is well-meaning), it doesn't make a blind bit of difference where it matters. Tragically, it may be engineering precisely the opposite of what's intended, throwing lions and other charismatic species, right off the cliff into extinction.

Indeed, in the face of all conservation scientist advice & the express wishes of the communities most affected, those campaigning against TH are trying to remove the one bulwark that exists in most areas against the rampant loss of habitat that has occurred elsewhere. It is a perfect example of making the perfect the enemy of the good.

TH has in some places spectacularly successful at turning species back from the brink, and funding large-scale landscape preservation and recovery - all under local direction and with local ownership and economic benefit. Some of the community schemes in Namibia,

Botswana, and even Zambia where I am based are truly inspirational. But undoubtedly at the same time, there are less reputable jurisdictions and TH operators where the system isn't working. However, even where the system isn't working, turning diverse habitat and its resident species over to be snared indiscriminately, and then clear felled for charcoal and put to the plough/cattle is no 'victory' for conservation. It may feel like a nice and profitable campaign narrative to rage against 'cruelty', and it may satisfy a yearning in people to talk of leaving alone 'unspoilt wilderness' when so little of this remains closer to home. But it is a greater cruelty to leave such lands open to more rampant exploitation and it is also greater wrong to erase locals out of the solution, and to deny them the right to exploit - and so give value to - their own natural resources.

In short, Africa isn't a moral playground in which to work through the neuroses of urban animal rights campaigners, who seem to be approaching this subject with the same colonialist zeal as 19th century missionaries, wilfully denying realities on the ground that they are privileged never to have to face themselves.

Africa's countries have diverse, human-shaped landscapes, in which pressures on land are many and great. If we genuinely want to help, we should admit that sanctions on TH simply makes the situation worse, that we should be in listening mode, and that we should not be arrogantly dictating non-existent solutions to people who have lived alongside these creatures since time immemorial, and who know better than we ever will do how best to ensure their rightful place in the landscape.

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