INVESTIGATOR

Spring • 2022



environmental **ET** investigation

A global treaty to tackle the world's plastics plague has come one giant step closer

worrying lack of ambition

The EU's proposed Methane Italian traders have been We expose how tiger farming Regulation is showing a breaching sanctions to import facilities in Laos have been illicit teak from Myanmar





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INTRODUCTION



Welcome to the Spring 2022 Investigator magazine.

Inside, you can read about the success of our

Ocean team in spearheading work in pursuit of a treaty to tackle the growing crisis of plastic pollution.

There's also news of other key activities, including reports of the decisions – good and bad – taken at the 74th meeting of the Standing Committee to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) in Lyon.

After the long months of working remotely, it was good to be able to travel again to attend in person, while other campaigners have also been able to again work in other countries. Our London office has remained open in recent months, albeit on a restricted basis to ensure staff safety.

Once more, my sincere thanks for all your support, without which we simply couldn't achieve so much.

Mary Rice, Executive Director

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In November, EIA joined with many other international conservation organisations to urge the 88 member countries of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) to adopt a new 50-Year Vision to save whales, dolphins and porpoises from extinction.

As the IWC celebrated its 75th anniversary, we participated in an online event to lay out a strategy for the organisation over the next half-century.

Many cetacean (the collective term for whales, dolphins and porpoises) species are facing increased threats from chemical, plastic and noise pollution, fisheries bycatch, marine debris, ship strikes, habitat loss and climate change as well as continued direct persecution from commercial killing and dolphin drive hunts.

Our Ocean Campaign Senior Advisor Clare Perry told the online event: "Threats to the marine environment, including from plastic pollution and climate change, are increasing alarmingly.

"It is vital that the IWC has the vision to use its unique scientific expertise gained over 75 years to implement an internationally collaborative 50-Year Strategy to ensure that cetacean populations are afforded the highest protection so they can thrive and contribute to ocean recovery."

Originally established in 1946 to conserve whales in order to maximise hunting quotas, the IWC has subsequently evolved to address human-driven threats posing an immediate danger for many populations of cetaceans.

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CITES meeting fails the vaquita

The CITES meeting in Lyon in March dealt a terrible blow to critically endangered vaquita porpoises, just eight of which may still exist.

The vaquita is found only in the upper Gulf of California, Mexico, and the world's most endangered marine mammal, but it has been devasted by illegal fishing, entangled in nets set to catch endangered totoaba fish for the totoaba bladder (or maw) trade.

Despite this, CITES Standing Committee voted to permit Earth Ocean Farms, an aquaculture facility in Mexico, to trade in captive-bred totoaba.

EIA's Clare Perry warned: "A legal trade in totoaba, whether it includes swim bladders right now or not, will only complicate enforcement and increase demand for the wild fish that shares the same habitat as the vaquita."



Above: Vaquita porpoises are being pushed to extinction, caught in gillnets set to catch endangered totoaba fish

Of the 90 species, 12 subspecies and 28 subpopulations of cetaceans identified and assessed to date, 22 are listed as 'Critically Endangered', 22 as 'Endangered' and 16 as 'Vulnerable'. Without globally co-ordinated conservation actions, many species and populations will go extinct within our lifetimes

Celebrated primatologist and environmentalist Dr Jane Goodall DBE, a UN Messenger of Peace, gave the keynote speech at the virtual event and warned: "Some 80 per cent of the world's oxygen comes from the ocean. Our seas, along with our forests, are literally the lungs of our planet.

"Tragically, the vast marine habitat is increasingly threatened by our human actions. We are polluting it with toxic substances, large areas become acidified, the water is warming, commercial fishing has endangered many species and its biggest and so-loved residents – whales, dolphins and porpoises – are suffering."



In November, the European Commission published its long-awaited proposal for a new law seeking to stop commodities such as palm oil, beef, soy or coffee produced through deforestation being placed on the EU markets.

The move is something for which our Forests team has long campaigned and, in 2020, tens of thousands of EU citizens polled across 25 member countries agreed that new laws are needed to ensure the products sold in the bloc do not contribute to global deforestation.

Moreover in 2021, more than 1.2 million EU citizens responded in record numbers to an EU consultation on this very proposal.

Forests Campaigner Siobhan Pearce said: "EIA welcomes this law – it would be the very first of its kind to ensure products are deforestation-free."

The proposal may change as it moves between the European Parliament and member state ministers, but we and our colleagues in other NGOs will be keeping a close eye on its progress.

Pearce added: "We will continue to work hard to ensure that this proposal delivers what it says on the tin, from which products will be covered and what companies will have to do to prove their supply chains are free from deforestation and abuses of rights to how it will be checked and enforced on the ground.

"We must ensure that forests, biodiverserich habitats and the rights of people who
depend on these forests are strengthened
and upheld. Moreover, we will need
the EU to engage in strong meaningful
partnerships with producer countries to
address the root causes of deforestation,
support national processes and create
systemic changes that will have longlasting effects."

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Indonesia must act to protect its forests

We've strongly urged the Government of Indonesia to renew its three-year ban on converting forests to new palm oil plantations amid mounting fears that it may abandon it

The Palm Oil Moratorium was implemented in 2018 as a response to growing international concerns about the rising levels of deforestation due to palm oil cultivation

The Government should also revise the Indonesian Sustainable Palm Oil certification scheme to ensure it is not undermined by new legislation brought in during 2020 to stimulate the pandemic-hit economy.

In our October report *Deforestation and Deregulation – Indonesia's policies and implications for its palm oil sector*, produced with Indonesian partner Kaoem Telapak, we warn that illegal forest clearance, human rights violations and corruption continue to tarnish the country's palm oil sector.

Siobhan Pearce said: "The moratorium has been a useful tool for curbing the worst excesses of palm oil expansion, but this is not the time to end it."

Opposite page: Indonesia has long suffered the consequences of deforestation

Right: oil palm plantation in Kalimantan. Indonesia





Italian traders breach sanctions to import Myanmar teak

In November, we revealed that despite trade sanctions imposed to ban imports of Myanmar teak into Europe, more than 300 tonnes worth more than €2 million has since entered into Italy.

Economic sanctions against Myanmar came into force following the military coup in February 2021. In particular, they were imposed on the country's State-owned Myanmar Timber Enterprise (MTE), which is responsible for trade in the highly valued timber much sought after for the decking of superyachts.

Asset seizures and sanctions

As much of the world looked on in horror at Russia's invasion of Ukraine and sanctions against Russian interests and oligarchs were put in place, our Forests team issued a reminder that we should be hitting the criminal trade funding despots in the first place.

In March, Italian authorities seized the superyacht Sailing Yacht A, owned by Russian billionaire Andrey Melnichenko, because of his alleged connections to the regime of Russian President Vladimir Putin

Sailing Yacht A has been on EIA's radar for some time – in 2016, we identified a

shipment of teak being used aboard the vessel, imported from Myanmar in direct violation of the European Union Timber Regulation (EUTR).

Forests Campaigner Leader Faith Doherty said: "Seizing his superyacht in the current situation is one thing, but we believe those who built and furnished Sailing Yacht A

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Our Forests Campaigns Leader Faith Doherty said: "There's absolutely no excuse for these criminal imports of teak from Myanmar – it's deliberate sanctions-busting and the only parties to benefit are the traders and Myanmar's violent military regime.

"The EU needs to move quickly and demonstrate that its sanctions are more than cosmetic window-dressing by making a firm example of these importers in the courts."

In September last year, our report *The Italian Job: How Myanmar timber is trafficked through Italy to the rest of Europe despite EU laws* exposed some Italian traders involved in the import in illicit timber and the shocking lack of meaningful enforcement by the authorities

Even before sanctions were imposed, the EU had taken a tough stance on imports

of teak from Myanmar by member states. The European Union Timber Regulation (EUTR), which has been in place since 2013, aims to prohibit traders in Europe from placing illegally harvested timber and products on the EU market.

Since 2017, the EU – spurred on by cases compiled by EIA – has taken the common position that it is impossible to guarantee that timber from Myanmar had been legally felled due to failings in documenting the chain of custody. The EUTR requires due diligence by importers to trace timber right back to the moment a tree is chopped down through to importation by another country and, as this is not possible, any timber imports from Myanmar have been in violation of the law.

Opposite page: Benetti's yacht building facilities in Viareggio and Livorno, Italy

with illegal Burmese teak should also be investigated and prosecuted to the full extent of the law

"The traders who have benefitted from the timber trade in and out of Russia, Belarus and Myanmar must also be held to account as enablers of corrupt autocracies as well as for breaching international law."







Methane emissions resulting from the petrochemical industry's extraction and production of coal, gas and oil are responsible for a whopping 25 per cent of overall global warming and tackling them is an essential element of the world's fight against catastrophic climate change.

But our Climate campaigners, together with partners, warned that the Regulation fails to address the issue of fossil fuel imports.

Methane emissions are 86 times more potent than carbon dioxide and tackling the energy sector has been identified as the most cost-effective way of reducing them.

The Commission's Regulation puts in place a framework with obligations on measurement, reporting and verification, leak detection and repair plus a ban on the routine venting and flaring of gases, which are the three main pillars of

effective methane emissions mitigation.

However, despite numerous calls from European policymakers and recommendations from leading NGOs, the Regulation lacks a key element – extending the framework to all oil, gas and coal consumed in the EU, imports included, and to the petrochemical sector.

The EU imports more than 80 per cent of the fossil gas, 90 per cent of the crude oil and 40 per cent of the coal it consumes, long after methane has been emitted outside EU borders.

Climate Campaigner Kim O'Dowd said: "The Commission is hiding behind excuses. With this regulation, the EU will continue to drive global methane emissions in other countries, turning a blind eye to its role."

Top: The EU imports 80 per cent of its fossil gas. A regulation that excludes imports would be a half-hearted attempt to solve one of the climate's most pressing emergencies

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Chilling inaction from Romania over HFC crime

In July last year, our investigations revealed that Romania was a major illegal entry point into the EU for Chinese-made, climate-harming hydrofluorocarbon (HFC) refrigerants.

But when we followed up more than two months later, we were disappointed to find that zero enforcement action had been taken

Although the precise scale of the illegal HFC trade is difficult to estimate, we believe it is likely 20-30 per cent of the legal trade.

Senior Climate Campaigner Fionnuala Walravens said: "With the potential climate impact of this illegal trade amounting to the greenhouse gas emissions of more than 6.5 million cars driven for a year, the lack of response from enforcement authorities in the EU and, especially, Romania smacks of alarming complacency.

"We have the tools needed to tackle this crime – namely, coordinated intelligence-led enforcement, higher penalties and better monitoring of HFCs entering and transiting through Europe – but they need to be taken out of the box to be at all effective"

Above, right: Screenshot from our undercover footage meeting traders selling illegal HFCs in Romania



UKRAINE INVASION

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February, EIA issued a statement condemning the unprovoked, violent attack and standing in solidarity with the people of Ukraine.

With Europe importing 90 per cent of its gas, 40 per cent of which comes from Russia, we urged governments and companies to immediately divest and embargo all Russian fossil fuels and commit to the rapid and just transition to clean and renewable energy.



The rise of plastic pollution as a critical environmental threat has been a growing priority for of EIA's Ocean Campaign in the past decade.

First encountered as one of the threats facing whales, dolphins and porpoises in the form of marine litter, it didn't take our Ocean campaigners long to realise the damage done by plastic pollution was a far wider issue.

Plastic is found in the air we breathe, on the land and in the seas; it's in the food we eat and, most recently, researchers have found it in human blood and in our lungs.

The plastics problem is clearly a planetary emergency as such it demands a global solution.

Photo: EIA Ocean Campaigner Tom Gammage faces up to the plastic onslaught at UNEA





The 10 billion tonne plastic pollution bomb

In September last year, we released *The Truth Behind Trash: The scale and impact of the international trade in plastic waste,* making plain the scale of the problem.

The report analysed available plastic waste export data to give the most comprehensive picture to date of the world's mounting plastic waste trade problem.

It's key finding was shocking – that, to date, humans have produced a staggering 10 billion tonnes of plastic – of which about six billion tonnes is now plastic waste in landfill sites or polluting the open environment.

Ocean Campaigner Tom Gammage pointed out: "There's no getting away from the fact that the world has an horrendous plastic pollution problem and, with plastics lasting for hundreds to thousands of years, we're leaving a toxic legacy to our descendants and all other lifeforms on the planet.

"The trade in plastic waste is just a secondary symptom of rampant overproduction and consumption. We urgently need a global plastic treaty to do for plastics what the Montreal Protocol did for harmful gases destroying the ozone layer – radically phase them down."

Above: The plastic pollution crisis has swiftly emerged in recent years as one of the world's most pressing environmental problems

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Getting the bigger picture

Following the publicity and attention our waste trade report received, we followed it up in January this year with *Connecting the Dots: Plastic pollution and the planetary emergency.*

This took a wider look at this issue, drawing together recent scientific data on the broad impact of plastics on climate, biodiversity, human health, and the environment – and concluded that the scale of the threat is an existential one that only a robust global treaty for plastics could effectively address.

Connecting the Dots was intentionally released ahead of a major United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) meeting the following month.

Again, the report was circulated to get the attention of government delegates

who would be attending the meeting to convince them of the scale of the threat and the need to take strong measures.

Tom stressed: "There is a deadly ticking clock counting swiftly down. Plastic emissions into the oceans alone are due to triple by 2040, in line with growing plastics production, and if this tidal wave of pollution continues unchecked, the anticipated 646 million tonnes of plastics in the seas by that date could exceed the collective weight of all fish in the ocean."

Above: EIA reports have been key in making the case for a Global Plastics Treaty

Following the science

But we didn't want those meeting for UNEA to take our word for it and, as the critical meeting drew near, our campaigners set out to extend our case further.

The result was a 'Scientists' Declaration' and, at the time of writing, it is currently endorsed by 500 individual scientists and 37 institutions around the world.

The Declaration addressed significant shortcomings in current commitments to tackle plastic pollution, which often focus heavily on waste management and domestic approaches to recycling and single-use plastics.

In particular, the scientists urged that a plastics treaty must be based on scientific evidence or it would not be sufficient to address the crisis, identifying clear failings in the current fragmented approaches used to tackle plastic pollution and making a strong case for the need for a non-toxic circular economy that minimises waste while addressing the full lifecycle of plastics.

An historic moment

And so, after three years of anticipation, UNEA finally got under way in Nairobi on 28 February.

Three members of our Ocean team attended, putting in incredibly long hours in a whirlwind of briefings to international media covering the meeting, forging and strengthening alliances with key government contacts and colleagues in other organisations and taking every opportunity to drive home the message to 'follow the science'.

With EIA playing such a major role in setting the ball rolling on this issue, we're delighted and immensely proud to report that UNEA was a massive success.

On the third day, the assembly confirmed the adoption of a legally binding and ambitious mandate towards a global treaty to address the full lifecycle of plastics from creation to disposal, securing the backing of all nations.

EIA Ocean Campaign Leader Christina Dixon jubilantly reported: "This is a truly historic moment for our planet. This resolution finally recognises that we cannot begin to address plastics in our ocean and on land without intervening at source – fundamentally, the plastics tap must be turned off if we are serious about tackling the problem.

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"We are just at the start of a journey towards securing a legally binding treaty on plastics throughout their lifecycle, but the mandate adopted gives the scope to consider actions both upstream and downstream and the impacts on all environments."

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Meeting ahead of the next Conference of the Parties (CoP19) in November, in Panama, the session delivered a mixed bag of results for endangered wildlife.

A worrying trend which emerged is the push back from some Parties, especially China, against valid CITES decisions to take action to save some of the worlds most threatened species

There was good news for tigers as recommendations were adopted encouraging improved monitoring, inspection and enforcement efforts to stop the leaking of tigers from captive facilities into illegal trade.

And after five years of waiting, CITES Secretariat missions to countries with captive tiger facilities of concern – China, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, South Africa, the USA and the Czech Republic – will finally go ahead.

EIA and 20 other NGOs took the opportunity to highlight the threat to leopards from China's licensed trade in leopard bone medicines.

For elephants, we lobbied hard for trade sanctions on Nigeria – a primary export hub for ivory trafficking – over its failure to comply with the National Ivory Action Plan (NIAP) process, but it was given a stay of execution until May.

We also intervened on behalf of 11 NGOs to stress the need for the NIAP process to be reviewed to ensure it is still fit for purpose.

SC74 accepted comments seeking species-level identification and reporting of seized pangolin specimens, as well as the urgent establishment of stricter controls in securing stockpiles of pangolin derivatives, which could prove instrumental in identifying vulnerable

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Protecting rosewood in West Africa

The Standing Committee took unprecedented strong action to protect West African rosewood from illegal and unsustainable trade.

For almost a decade, EIA has repeatedly documented how the rosewood crisis has been devastating West African forests and communities' livelihoods.

A report by Senegal showed persisting illegal trade by criminal networks which continue to evade harvest and export bans, resulting in range states calling on CITES for solutions at a regional level.

In response, SC74 took decisive steps, immediately beginning a compliance procedure including all range states which gives range states 30 days to show their exports are legal and sustainable or to set a zero export quota; failure to do so could result a trade suspension.

In addition, all export permits for rosewood will need to be verified prior to acceptance by importing countries, a truly remarkable outcome which could halt the illegal trade of rosewood from West Africa in a matter of weeks.

Below: Log yard of a Vietnamese-led timber company operating in Cameroon in violation of local timber export and labour laws



pangolin populations and helping enforcement.

Unfortunately, calls to close domestic markets for pangolin products were not accepted, failing to address the root causes of pangolin trafficking – legal markets and consumer demand.

Finally, an EIA intervention on behalf of 15 organisations brought the catastrophic increase in rhino poaching in Botswana to the attention of all Parties. While no action was taken, the issue is likely to receive increased attention at COP19

Opposite page: Members of both our UK and US teams represented EIA at CITES Standing Committee

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We first exposed illegal wildlife trade there in 2015, but although Laos' tiger farms were ordered to close in 2018, a loophole allowed them to convert to 'zoos' and continue operating.

The captive animal populations we originally documented are estimated to have doubled and are kept in rows of concrete enclosures. This growth is in direct contravention of an international ruling that tigers should not be bred

for trade in their parts and products and of the Government of Laos' own commitment to shut down such facilities

EIA called on CITES to issue trade suspensions against Laos until the Government shows it is willing to take action to end tiger farming, but once again it was given a reprieve.

Above: Expanded tiger-breeding facilities in Laos

The danger of traditional Chinese medicine's growth in Africa

The aggressive expansion of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) in many African countries poses a direct threat to some endangered species.

In recent years, the Chinese Government has heavily promoted the use of TCM in Africa as a key aspect of its controversial Belt and Road Initiative. Major companies and countless clinics have already been established across

the continent and some retailers plan to establish full supply chains, from sourcing to sales.

But our new report in November, *Lethal Remedy*, warned that such a massive

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Lasting impression of Vietnam's wildlife crime on Africa

In November, our report *Vietnam's Footprint in Africa* revealed that despite efforts to reverse the tide of illegal wildlife trade, Vietnameseled criminal networks continue to play a major role in fuelling poaching in Africa.

The report analysed the role of these networks while acknowledging the encouraging domestic efforts made in the past decade to address wildlife crime in Vietnam

However, we warned that the country's global reputation continues to be tarnished by its status as the primary destination for illegal wildlife products sourced from across Africa to meet demand in Vietnam and beyond.

And we highlighted the need for Vietnam

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to receive cooperation from governments in source and transit countries in Africa where the criminal activities are taking place, as well as from those international agencies tackling illegal wildlife trade and the corruption underpinning it.

Above: Vietnamese authorities seized a staggering 138kg of rhino horn originating from South Africa at Tien Sa port in July 2021

expansion of the TCM market, coupled with the clear perception in the industry of Africa as a potential source for ingredients, is a prescription for disaster for some endangered animal species, such as leopards, pangolins and rhinos.

We urged far stricter oversight of TCM alongside Government action to dissuade TCM pharmaceutical companies, practitioners and traders from using threatened wildlife in their products.

NOTORIOUS WILDLIFE TRADE KINGPIN JAILED

of one of Southern Africa's most prolific wildlife trafficking syndicates jailed for 14 years in September in Malawi for dealing in and possessing rhino horn and for money laundering. Chinese national Yunhua Lin was the head of the 'Lin-Zhang gang',



Hometown London

Education

BA in Broadcast Journalism and MA (distinction) in Media and Communications.

Campaign specialism

Oceans – in particular, working on plastics and pollution from fisheries.

What first interested you in environmental issues?

A deep dedication to the punk scene in my teens got me interested in activism on a range of topics, including environmental ones. Getting involved in activism through music, I met so many people from around the world and, in hearing about their experiences, I became passionate about the interlinkages between the environment, human rights and the power of community. I spent a lot of time during my A-levels documenting the environmental protest movement in London, which

opened my eyes to the world of campaigning.

In my career, I've worked on various facets of environmental campaigning, from animal welfare and wildlife conservation in various countries to combating the scourge of ghost fishing gear in the world's oceans. For the past few years, I've been working on plastics policy in both the UK and internationally, which is something I find fascinating because of the multi-faceted nature of the issue. We encounter plastics every single day, yet the way we produce, use and dispose of this material really meets the definition of a 'toxic relationship', so I'm interested in finding ways to solve this.

What is your most memorable experience at EIA?

Being in the room at the United Nations Environment Assembly in Nairobi when the gavel dropped on the decision to adopt a resolution initiating negotiations for a legally binding treaty to end plastic pollution. My team and I have been working on this for several years alongside partners around the world and it was a truly historic moment. The hard work is just beginning and now we have to keep pushing through two years of negotiations to ensure the ambition remains high and the final agreement reflects the severity of the challenge at hand, but with so many voices calling for a robust agreement I believe we can do it. I still get shivers thinking about that moment •



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