



Theresa Villiers MP
Secretary of State
Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

1st September 2019

cc. Priti Patel MP

Dear Theresa,

Wildlife crime has risen in profile and is a growing concern for many people who want to see wild animals and plants protected both nationally and internationally. That is why the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU) is such an important body playing a significant role in direct assistance to UK law enforcement as well as providing the UK focal point for EUROPOL and INTERPOL activity on wildlife crime.

The Government's commitment to animal welfare has been demonstrated with positive measures like the Ivory Act 2018 and it has also championed tackling illegal wildlife trade around the world, however legislation is only as good as its effective enforcement and the NWCU's capability to enforce wildlife crime is most important. The NWCU operates on a small budget of around £350,000 per annum funded by DEFRA and the Home Office on a 50/50 basis. The main problem is that funding is only ever guaranteed for 2 years and that is making recruiting and training officers difficult. In 2016 the Government did give 4 years of funding which was really helpful in enabling the Unit to stabilise but that is due to come to a end in 2020 which provides fresh uncertainty now.

Assessing the scale of wildlife crime is very difficult. This is partly because wildlife crime remains outside 'mainstream' crime and, so, it is not recorded in the way other crimes are. Nonetheless, there are many indicators, and considerable evidence, demonstrating the involvement of organised criminal networks involved in activities such as fraud, violence and money-laundering who have perpetrated wildlife crime, in particular trade of wildlife and wildlife products. There is a strong feeling that the majority of people would like police forces to take wildlife crime much more seriously. Without this Unit functioning effectively those forces would have to dedicate more of their own resources to enable this and would need to train officers. The alternative is not taking action against wildlife crime which the public, the Government and the police do not want.

There is a strong case for committing to long term funding for the NWCU from both DEFRA and the Home Office so that they can train and retain their staff. Additionally, they need a full time expert for cyber crime and Brexit will probably lead to more ports for CITES so they need to be able to ensure anyone joining their team to do this of the security of long term funding. Therefore, it would be welcomed by everyone if both Departments could look at confirming long term funding going past 2020 as soon as possible to avoid any stagnation and instead to enable NWCU to extend its training and knowledge to wider police forces and support them in enforcing wildlife crime. We do hope you will consider this request as our cross party membership is widely in support of long-term funding.

Yours truly,

Henry Smith MP, Lord `Trees, Angela Smith MP, Giles Watling MP, Baroness Mallalieu, Rebecca Pow MP
Officers of APGAW