

**Special Virtual Session for SBSTTA 24 and SBI 3 on Biodiversity, One Health
and COVID-19, 15-16 December 2020**

Intervention by David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation

Thank you, Chair.

As we meet, nearly 1.6 million people have lost their lives from COVID-19 and over 70 million people have been infected. Tens of millions of people risk falling into extreme poverty. Nearly half of the world's 3.3 billion global workforce are at risk of losing their livelihoods, and the World Bank predicts the deepest global recession since the Second World War. Meanwhile, IPBES warns us "*future pandemics will emerge more often, spread more rapidly, do more damage to the world economy and kill more people than COVID-19.*" We heard the workshop chair tell us that we will see a COVID-like event every decade.

If we're going to escape the pandemic era and achieve a transformation of our relationship with Nature, we need bold preventive policies that match the science and the threat. This means re-evaluating the draft Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework on the wildlife trade, particularly the targets on sustainable use. For 45 years CITES has tried and failed to achieve "*sustainable legal wildlife trade*". The few success stories are the exception not the norm. Continuing down this business-as-usual path, promoting sustainable trade with some safety regulations grafted on top, will not prevent the next pandemic.

To achieve a green recovery, we must shift from exploitation to precaution in the Post-2020 GBF. Specifically, for wildlife trade, this means amending the targets on sustainable use to support:

- Ending commercial legal wildlife trade and farming as much as possible and as fast as possible, with a just transition
- Ensuring subsistence wildlife use is safe and sustainable
- Stepping up the fight to end illegal wildlife trade, and
- Integrating knowledge and experience from Indigenous Peoples who know how to live safely and sustainably with wildlife.

I'm a lawyer. I've worked on CITES for 31 years, investigated the wildlife trade on the ground and written a textbook on the treaty's effectiveness to control the trade. Since my first CITES meeting in 1989, the global wildlife trade has increased exponentially (2,000% in value, according to the IPBES report). The Convention has one of the strongest systems among MEAs for its implementation and compliance. But despite this, it is an imperfect tool hampered by governance challenges. And to achieve "*sustainable legal wildlife trade*" you need near perfect governance conditions. What's more, CITES covers only a small proportion of species in trade – and not all those that may present a zoonotic risk. There are long delays in listing – up to 19 years after the IUCN first identifies a species as threatened. We don't have 19 years. Our current framework of international law will not succeed in preventing pandemics from the wildlife trade, legal or illegal – in fact the reverse if we continue to promote "*sustainable trade*". Legal gaps must be filled and the deep divide over to-trade or not-to-trade commercially in wildlife must be bridged through a *precautionary approach* that will end our unsustainable consumption and trade in wildlife.

We have a unique opportunity to re-calibrate our relationship with Nature. Let's not waste it. Instead, let's all focus on crafting *precautionary measures* based on the Discussion Note that will end our gross over-exploitation of wildlife and ensure a truly green recovery from COVID-19.