

# Trophy hunting: Broaden the debate

In their Letter "Trophy hunting bans imperil biodiversity" (30 August, p. 874), A. Dickman *et al.* argue against trophy hunting bans, but the bans they mention are neither blanket nor hunting bans. France only suspended lion trophy imports, whereas Australia and The Netherlands banned import permits for trophies of several species (1) but other trophies continue to be collected worldwide and domestically. Indeed, a ban on the import of a trophy into a nation does not constitute a ban on hunting by its nationals; Dickman *et al.* confound the two, which is disingenuous and raises the question of whether hunting is a sport or a form of commodity acquisition (2).

International movement of trophies is regulated under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), governed by member states. Unless there is evidence of trade threatening the survival of a species, sovereign states can allow hunting and export trophies, but potential importing states also have sovereignty over their response to concerns of their constituencies and have the right to implement what CITES calls "stricter domestic measures" (3). Debates around this have been politicized, which typically happens when scientific data are too inconclusive to guide policy formulation (3).

Dickman *et al.* misrepresent the responsibility of importing states over hunting policy; ironically, they may stimulate blanket bans by arguing against opt-outs for some countries for certain species. Moreover, they fail to mention that where hunting zones are protected areas recognized by civil law, they would remain so. In addition, habitat in hunting zones is often not effectively protected, and the collapse of trophy hunting observed in certain areas is not due to trade bans but to a failing balance of costs and benefits (4, 5). Trophy hunting is neither the main threat to nor the main opportunity for wildlife conservation, and we encourage a broader debate.

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## REFERENCES AND NOTES

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5. B. Chardonnet, "Africa is changing: Should its protected areas evolve? Reconfiguring the protected areas in Africa" (IUCN, 2019).

## COMPETING INTERESTS

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