Summary Briefing:
Tokyo Metropolitan Government Subsidies to Ivory Industry Lobbyists
Japan Tiger and Elephant Fund (JTEF) and Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA)
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Summary

While most consumer countries have closed their legal ivory markets to protect elephants from the threats posed by the trade in their ivory tusks, Japan's market remains open and its ivory industry supported by the national government. In Tokyo, Governor Yuriko Koike has taken the initiative to address the city's ivory trade and identify how to eliminate its contribution to the illegal ivory trade; however, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government has also been paying annual subsidies [recently an annual average of around 4 million JPY (33,000 USD)] to Tokyo's leading ivory industry association to support igniting the resumption of international ivory trade, increasing the domestic demand for ivory crafts and products, and facilitating the trade in ivory. The Tokyo Metropolitan Government must act to halt these subsidies to protect elephants from the trade in their ivory.

Background: Elephants, CITES, and Japan

The international commercial trade in ivory was banned in 1989 under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in response to a mass poaching crisis driven by demand for ivory. In 2016, to bolster the international ban, CITES Parties adopted a revised resolution by consensus, recommending that all countries with legal domestic ivory markets that contribute to poaching or illegal trade close them urgently.[1] While most consumer countries have closed their legal domestic ivory markets, Japan's market remains open and its ivory industry supported by the government.

Japan is the only country to have received ivory twice after the international ivory trade ban went into effect in 1990 via importing ivory auctioned by from southern African nations in CITES-approved sales in 1999 and 2009. Japan is an outlier in the global community, with thousands of government-registered ivory traders and an ivory industry that continues to manufacture new ivory products. Furthermore, there is evidence that its active legal domestic trade is linked to the illegal international trade.[2]

Tokyo's Approach to Ivory Trade

In response to an international appeal for action from Tokyo, in January 2020 Tokyo's Governor committed to undertaking an assessment of Tokyo's ivory trade and established an Advisory Council to make recommendations on steps Tokyo should take to prevent illegal trade and export. After two years of deliberations, the Advisory Council released a report with its official recommendations in March 2022. The Council's recommendations to the Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG) include considering legal measures to address trade in ivory.[3] After more than two years the Koike Administration has not acted to implement this recommendation, instead favoring and focusing on awareness campaigns to dissuade the illegal export of ivory.

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[1] Res. Conf. 10.10 (Rev. CoP19), paragraph 3 https://cites.org/sites/default/files/documents/COP/19/resolution/E-Res-10-10-R19.pdf

[2] EIA. (December 2020) Japan's Illegal Ivory Exports. https://us.eia.org/campaigns/wildlife/elephants/japan-ivory/
Sakamoto M. 2022. Smugglers' Source: Japan's Legal Ivory Market; An Analysis of Chinese Court Decisions of Ivory Illegally Exported from Japan. Japan Tiger and Elephant Fund
https://www.jtef.jp/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/IvoryNov22_E.pdf

[3] Report of Advisory Council on Regulation of Ivory Trade (March 2022)
https://www.seisakukikaku.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/documents/d/seisakukikaku/zouge_report_eng

About Tokyo's Ivory Industry Subsidies

The TMG's Bureau of Industrial and Labor Affairs has been providing subsidies to the ivory industry for decades to support efforts to increase domestic demand for elephant ivory products and to promote international lobbying for the resumption of international trade in ivory. These "Subsidies for business stabilization project in the tortoiseshell and ivory industries," to the Tokyo Ivory Arts and Crafts Cooperative Association (Tokyo Ivory Association), were initiated in 1994, and continue to be awarded[4].

Between 2018 and 2022, excluding 2021, annual subsidies amounting to approximately 4 million JPY (33,000 USD) were issued for two projects. In 2021, only one project was subsidized. All projects aim to either ignite the resumption of international ivory trade or increase the domestic demand for ivory crafts and products. The subsidized projects include:

Raw material security surveys – Tokyo subsidies funded an expert from an organization commissioned by the Tokyo Ivory Association to collect research on ivory stockpiles, elephant populations, elephant management policy and ivory trade policy in potential trade partner countries in southern African with the same stance as Japan and to lobby those countries. Example: In 2021, subsidies supported a Tokyo Ivory Association lobbying investigation to identify a viable strategy towards pursuing the resumption of international ivory trade at the 19th CITES Conference of the Parties (CoP19) in 2022.

Sponsoring delegates to the CITES Conference of the Parties – Subsidies supported the attendance of Tokyo Ivory Association representatives to CITES CoPs to collect information about the resumption of international trade in ivory and lobby relevant participants. Example: Two Tokyo Ivory Association delegates attended CITES CoP19 to lobby the international community against conducting future discussions about the closure of Japan's ivory market by touting Japan's ivory trade controls.

Public relations activity on ivory crafts and related public awareness – TMG subsidies funded various activities and events to increase the demand for ivory crafts and products. Example: In 2018, the Tokyo Ivory Association held events to promote the ivory industry and enable its survival, share progress on import permits within CITES, and increase demand for ivory.

Ivory Industry Subsidies: Implication and Analysis

TMG's subsidies for projects aiming to ignite the resumption of international ivory trade lack situational awareness about the resumption of international ivory trade and ignore efforts by the majority of the international community to protect elephants from the ivory trade. Within CITES, the international trade in ivory has not been permitted since 2007, when a one-off sale was approved at CoP14. Since then, every proposal to reopen the international ivory trade has been rejected; the majority of the CITES community has opposed lifting the international ivory ban, including most African elephant range states. Issuing subsidies to projects aiming to ignite the resumption of international ivory trade is essentially spending public money on a goal that is objectively unachievable under current circumstances.

TMG's subsidies for projects to increase the domestic demand for ivory crafts and products conflict with Japan's commitment under CITES. CITES Resolution Conf.10.10 urges the Parties, including those with a legal domestic trade in ivory, to engage in public awareness campaigns, including on supply and demand reduction.[5] Therefore, actions by a government agency that intentionally promote demand for

[4] The subsidies guidelines for the projects for stabilizing the tortoiseshell industry and ivory industry were established by TMG's Bureau of Industrial and Labor Affairs in 1994 and revised in 1997, 1999, 2007 and 2018.

[5] CITES Conf. 10.10 (Rev. CoP19) Paragraph 7 d)
https://cites.org/sites/default/files/documents/COP/19/resolution/E-Res-10-10-R19.pdf
This recommendation was newly added to Resolution Conf.10.10 at CoP16 in 2013.

ivory can be considered contradictory and noncompliant. Japan has become the sole CITES Party with a significant legal market supported by domestic demand for ivory;[6] demand which is being encouraged by the government. Furthermore, even within Japan, major retail businesses including Aeon, Ito-Yokado, Rakuten, Yahoo, and Mercari voluntarily ended ivory sales, clarifying their intention to not to meet consumer demand for ivory in Japan, and avoiding the risk that ivory purchased on their platforms legally could be exported illegally. TMG's ivory industry subsidies also seem to conflict with the intent behind the process initiated by Tokyo's Governor Koike in January 2020 through the Department of Policy and Planning: an assessment of Tokyo's ivory trade to identify how Tokyo could limit its role in the illegal trade in and export of elephant ivory products. In this process, the Governor signaled support for tightening trade restrictions to prevent illegal trade, yet the subsidies support ivory industry lobbyists' intent to liberalize trade, which would increase the risk that Japan's market would contribute to illegal trade.

Conclusions

Tokyo Metropolitan Government has paid subsidies to Tokyo's leading ivory industry association with the goals of igniting the resumption of international ivory trade, increasing the domestic demand for ivory crafts and products, or facilitating the trade in ivory. TMG's support is noncompliant with a CITES Resolution, ignoring efforts by the international community, and demonstrates a lack of global situational awareness. In recent years, under Governor Koike, TMG signaled a new approach to ivory trade; the TMG subsidies expenditures to bolster the ivory industry undermines Tokyo's current approach to ivory trade. Review of all ivory industry subsidies in accordance with TMG's new ivory trade position is needed urgently.

Recommendations for Tokyo

- Cease any issuance of subsidies for projects aiming to help resume international trade in ivory, increase domestic demand for ivory crafts and products, or facilitate the trade in ivory as a matter of urgency by: a) closing the ivory industry subsidization program entirely, or b) allocating the funds to projects focused on the conversion of ivory to alternative materials and/or assistance for job-change.
- Issue a public statement clarifying TMG's policies on ivory trade and the ivory industry to demonstrate clear dedication towards a reduction in demand for ivory and restriction of legal ivory trade in the jurisdiction of Tokyo via stricter controls.
- Implement the Advisory Council's recommendations by "considering legal or other effective means to prevent contributions to poaching and illegal trade," including by enacting an ordinance adopted by the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly to close the ivory market in Tokyo with only narrow exemptions.

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https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/cop/16/doc/E-CoP16-26.pdf
[6] CITES CoP19 Doc. 66.3
https://cites.org/sites/default/files/documents/E-CoP19-66-03.pdf