

Report on the CITES MIKE South-East Asia Sub-Regional Meeting and CITES Trade in Asian Elephants Workshop

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Introduction

The CITES MIKE South-East Asia Sub-Regional Meeting and the CITES Trade in Asian Elephants (*Elephas maximus*) Workshop were held in Hua Hin, Thailand, from 30th to 31st January 2024. This important event brought together key stakeholders from across Southeast Asia, including government representatives, conservation organisations, and experts, to address pressing issues related to the conservation of Asian elephants and the regulation of international trade under CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora). The meeting provided an essential platform to discuss the role of the MIKE (Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants) programme in the region and the ongoing challenges related to the illegal trade in Asian elephants.

Key objectives

The main objectives of the meeting and workshop were to:

- Review MIKE programmes: To evaluate the progress of the MIKE programme in Southeast Asia, with a focus on monitoring and addressing the illegal killing of elephants.
- Enhance regional cooperation: To strengthen collaboration among South-east Asian countries on elephant conservation, particularly in tackling issues of poaching and illegal wildlife trade.
- Discuss CITES trade regulations: To assess and refine strategies to curb illegal trade in Asian elephants and their parts and ensure CITES regulations are being properly implemented.

Summary of discussions and outcomes

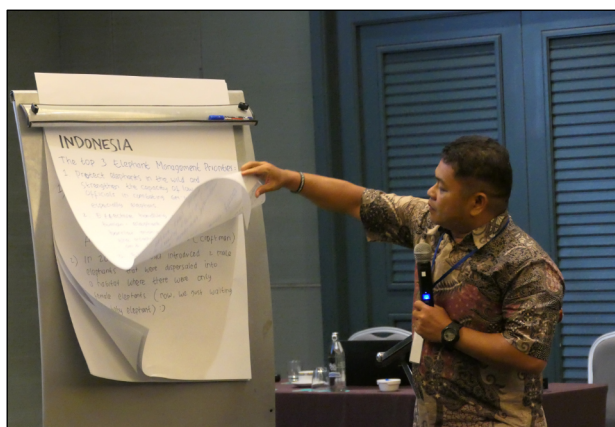
Asian elephant regional overview

A presentation by the IUCN SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AsESG) provided an overview of the current status of Asian elephants. The presentation highlighted the ongoing conservation challenges facing the species, including habitat loss, fragmentation, human-elephant conflict, and poaching. The presentation emphasised the critical need for coordinated conservation efforts across range states to ensure the species' survival. The AsESG stressed the importance of a multi-faceted approach to conservation, which includes the protection of elephant habitats, mitigating human-elephant conflict, and implementing effective anti-poaching strategies. The need for more robust data collection, including better tracking of elephant populations and movements, was also emphasised. The AsESG's commitment to fostering collaboration among governments, NGOs, and local communities was reiterated, with a focus on implementing practical, on-the-ground solutions to ensure the long-term protection of Asian elephants.

Range states updates

Representatives from Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam presented their na-





tional perspectives on the main threats to elephant populations, regulatory frameworks, and the actions taken to address these challenges. The updates also included details on MIKE site-level strategies adopted in each country, as well as initiatives for transboundary cooperation.

MIKE programme review

The meeting began with a comprehensive review of the MIKE programme's operations in Southeast Asia. It was noted that the programme has been successful in improving the monitoring of elephant populations and illegal killings. However, challenges such as data gaps, inconsistent reporting, and the ongoing threat of poaching were highlighted. Representatives from countries participating in MIKE discussed the need for enhanced capacity-building, particularly in terms of law enforcement and on-the-ground monitoring systems.

Illegal killing and poaching

The workshop extensively discussed the growing threats of poaching and the illegal killing of elephants in the region. Specific case studies from countries such as Thailand, Cambodia, and Myanmar were presented, illustrating the complex relationship between poaching, habitat loss, and the illegal wildlife trade. It was emphasised that stronger, coordinated efforts between countries are necessary to combat these threats effectively.

Key discussion focused on improving stockpile management of elephant ivory and other elephant products. Several countries are facing challenges in managing seized stockpiles and

ensuring that these items are not diverted into the illegal trade. Workshop participants discussed the importance of secure and transparent management practices, including the destruction of confiscated ivory to send a strong message against illegal trade.

Additionally, the forensic investigation of poisoning cases was highlighted as an emerging issue. Elephant poisoning is becoming a significant threat, with some countries reporting an increase in incidents. Forensic techniques are being developed to trace the chemicals used in poisoning and to support investigations into illegal elephant killings.

CITES trade in Asian elephants

A significant portion of the workshop was dedicated to addressing the illegal trade in Asian elephants and their parts. The workshop highlighted the need for stricter enforcement of CITES regulations and better coordination among law enforcement agencies in Southeast Asia. The importance of improving the traceability of elephant products, utilising advanced technology, and ensuring robust reporting mechanisms was underscored.

The CITES Standing Committee (SC77) was discussed in relation to key elephant conservation issues. The committee is actively monitoring the implementation of resolutions regarding the illegal trade in elephants, particularly addressing issues related to trade in elephant ivory and other products. There were discussions on ensuring that countries adhere to CITES regulations and take proactive measures to curb the illegal trade.



Sustainability of MIKE programme

There was considerable discussion about the sustainability of the MIKE programme, particularly with regard to securing long-term funding and ensuring the continued effectiveness of monitoring efforts. The importance of maintaining consistent data collection and expanding MIKE coverage to new sites was emphasised. Countries were encouraged to integrate MIKE data into national conservation strategies and decision-making processes to ensure its long-term impact.

Management priorities for the next 3 years

Group discussions were held and the groups agreed on the importance of continued regional cooperation to ensure the sustainability of elephant populations in Southeast Asia. Action plans were discussed, focusing on the need for more comprehensive data sharing, enhanced capacity building for enforcement agencies, and continued awareness-raising about the illegal wildlife trade. Countries were encouraged to implement stronger national policies and integrate elephant conservation into broader environmental and wildlife protection agendas.

Recommendations

The meeting concluded with several key recommendations:

- **Strengthening MIKE implementation:** Expand MIKE monitoring across the region and address data inconsistencies.
- **Improved enforcement:** Enhance law enforcement efforts and strengthen cross-border collaboration to curb illegal wildlife trade.
- **CITES compliance:** Strengthen the implementation of CITES regulations, focusing on the prevention of illegal trade in Asian elephants and elephant products.
- **Capacity building:** Provide targeted training for local authorities on elephant conservation and monitoring the illegal killing of elephants.

Conclusion

The CITES MIKE South-East Asia Sub-Regional Meeting and CITES Trade in Asian Elephants Workshop were a significant step forward in the region's efforts to protect the Asian elephant and combat the illegal trade in elephant products. The collaborative approach, strengthened by shared knowledge and resources, holds the potential to address the pressing conservation challenges faced by elephants in Southeast Asia. Continued regional cooperation, improved enforcement mechanisms, and a focus on capacity building will be crucial in ensuring the long-term survival of the species in the wild.

