Wildlife Justice Commission

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Convergence of wildlife crime with other forms of organised crime

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Executive Summary

Over the past two decades, wildlife crime has become a form of transnational organised crime, generating billions of dollars annually and affecting almost every country. As wildlife crime has increased in seriousness and profitability as a crime type, so too have reports of its convergence with other forms of organised crime. However, these reports have been mostly anecdotal, and the nature of this relationship is still largely undocumented.

Through its own investigations and intelligence analysis, the Wildlife Justice Commission has also collected evidence of criminal networks that are dealing in wildlife alongside other illicit commodities. This report aims to present some of these examples, along with information collected from open sources, to contribute to the knowledge base on this issue. It sets out 12 case studies that illustrate a range of converging crime types and typologies that have transpired in different regions of the world to increase the understanding of how these intersections can occur on the ground. The case studies include six cases involving the trafficking of terrestrial wild animals, three cases involving fisheries crimes, and three cases involving timber crimes *(although they are collectively referred to as wildlife crime throughout the report)*.

The cases demonstrate that criminal groups may have a range of motivations to diversify their activities and engage in wildlife or other types of crime. Convergence can occur opportunistically on an ad-hoc basis, as a complete "career shift" in response to changing conditions, or as part of a diversification strategy to increase profits across a range of illicit commodities. It can also occur transactionally when criminal groups in different markets exchange goods or services with each other or could be embedded to such an extent that the crimes are inextricably linked.

Intelligence analysis is an essential tool to identify cases where convergence exists and to manage the highest threat from organised crime. Yet there is a lack of focus on the collection and analysis of wildlife crime data and information. Few governments hold their own comprehensive datasets, and unlike other illicit commodities, there is no standardised data collection for wildlife. Furthermore, there is inadequate sharing of the information that does exist, meaning that opportunities to fully understand the threat posed by convergence are being missed and resources are not being allocated appropriately in response to the problem.

Several commonalities can be observed in the case studies, particularly elements of bribery and corruption that are an underlying factor present in almost every case, and money laundering as a converging crime linked to the proceeds generated from wildlife crime. The clear and frequent intersection of these crimes highlights the need for financial and

corruption investigations that run in parallel or in response to wildlife crime cases; however, few countries are currently undertaking these types of investigations. Financial investigations in particular are an important but under-utilised technique to identify and trace the proceeds of crime, with the aim of ultimately seizing or confiscating funds or property derived from crime and removing the financial incentive and expected reward for criminals.

The cases also demonstrate that wildlife crime is a cross-cutting criminal activity which cannot be tackled in isolation from other crimes. Multi-agency investigations and task forces can be an effective strategy to address convergence, offering alternative legislation, powers, and expertise of other law enforcement agencies to enable the application of the full force of the law to the crime. The Wildlife Justice Commission's investigations have frequently shown that high-level wildlife criminals can also be less operationally savvy compared to top-level criminals in other crime types, which can sometimes present an easier entry point for the investigation of organised crime. These are opportunities that could be better leveraged by law enforcement agencies to target and remove the common nodes between networks, have a greater impact on disrupting transnational organised crime groups, and prevent networks from reforming.

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Crime convergence should be further studied and integrated as part of the approach to tackle wildlife crime and organised crime more broadly, as improved understanding of this intersection can help to identify more strategic policy and law enforcement responses to address it.

This report offers a set of recommendations for law enforcement authorities and policy makers that could assist in this regard:

i **More consideration** should be given to intelligence collection and sharing in a timely and secure manner, and for governments to develop their own comprehensive wildlife crime information systems.

ii **Organised crime** group mapping should be an essential tool to identify how and where convergence may be occurring, and to tackle wildlife crime as an organised crime threat.

iii **Multi-agency cooperation,** joint investigations and task forces should be utilised where appropriate to bring the necessary law enforcement expertise to target convergence and explore all angles of the criminal scenario.

iv **Consideration should** be given to using alternative legislation relating to the convergent or ancillary offences where relevant and appropriate.

v **Financial and corruption** investigations should be conducted in parallel or in response to wildlife crime cases to identify any associated money laundering or corruption offences, payment methods, and to identify the proceeds of crime to facilitate asset recovery.

vi **Greater utilisation** of specialised investigative techniques such as communications interception, undercover operations, the use of listening and tracking devices, and controlled deliveries to gain a better understanding of where crime convergence may exist.

Law enforcement and legal experts fighting transnational organised wildlife crime.

Wildlife Justice Commission

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