

EU-Indonesia trade negotiations

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The EU must show leadership on animal protection

From frogs and reptiles to chickens and apes, Indonesia is home to a tremendous amount of biodiversity. Many of these animals suffer from destruction of their natural habitats or from their own exploitation for economic purposes – or both. A lack of attention in an EU-Indonesia free trade agreement¹ could only intensify these problems.

The harsh reality of orangutans and gibbons is probably the most well-known. The great and lesser apes are nowadays only present in the rainforests of Sumatra and Borneo but they are facing great danger due to the loss of their natural habitat resulting from deforestation. Yet they are not the only ones at risk. Reptiles and frogs also face threats to their survival. Frogs' legs are surprisingly the main meat product exported from Indonesia to the EU, and reptile skin represents a subsequent part of the EU imports of animal-based products.

The trade in animal-based products between the EU and Indonesia has grown in the last decade. As the two countries enter the fourth round of their trade negotiations this week, it is vital that they start considering more seriously the impact that any agreement can have on the animals and on sustainable development more generally. An EU-Indonesia FTA needs to ensure that habitats and animals will be better protected. So far, the relevant language contained in the EU's proposals terribly lacks ambitions.²

Indonesia, our first source of frogs' legs

Despite Indonesia being only the fifteenth source of meat for the EU, frogs' legs are interestingly the main single export product. The frogs from which the meat is derived are usually not farmed but caught in the wild. Beyond issues linked to their handling, their killing is likely to have a detrimental impact on the conservation of certain frog species.^{3 4}

¹ The FTA is currently known as the EU-Indonesia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement or CEPA.

² see the proposals published by the EU on trade and sustainable development (TSD) and sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures.

³ It is very difficult to distinguish frog species. The few studies made on the topic show that many batches of frogs' legs exported by Indonesia and described as originating from several species actually only contain parts of individuals issued from a single species.

⁴ Warkentin, "Eating frogs to extinction", Conservation Biology, Volume 23, No. 4, 2009

Trade in live reptiles

Value wise, Indonesia is the EU's fourth source for live reptile imports (312,829 EUR in 2016, behind the US, Uzbekistan and China). In 2015, according to Eurostat, it represented 407,214 specimens. Special attention should be paid to this trade. Although the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) is a powerful tool to reduce or even ban the international trade of threatened species, there are several criminal ways to circumvent it (export quotas may be systematically exceeded or inappropriately set).⁵ A lack of knowledge and expertise in reptile species also contributes to an increase in the trade of more endangered species.

The increase of reptiles being raised as pets is another concern. A scientific study showed that at least 75 percent of reptiles adopted as pets died within one year in their new home.⁶ Many are also abandoned as people do not realise the amount of care needed when they get the animal. The accidental or deliberate release of reptile pets in the nature can lead to the establishment of invasive alien species, which can disrupt ecosystems and displace local fauna.

Trade in reptile skin

The trade in reptile skins and the welfare-related issues linked with reptile slaughtering should not be taken lightly. In some places, reptiles are still swelled with water alive, leaving them to suffocate to death.

The trade in skins can also be used to achieve large scale laundering of endangered species. Once these species are bred in captivity, their trade becomes legal, with the right documents. Yet many of the reptiles allegedly bred in captivity are actually caught in the wild, as shown by field data from 2009 to 2011 which suggested that 80 percent of green tree pythons (*Morelia viridis*) exported by Indonesia as captive-bred came from the wild.⁷

Farming practices

At global level, Indonesia ranks 9th in terms of chicken meat production⁸ and 7th for the eggs.⁹ With the demand for those products increasing locally, the industry is developing quickly. Although the EU does not import these products from Indonesia, there is a need to ensure that farming practices in these industries are sustainable and respect the animals' needs. The number of laying hens and broiler chicken has likely increased since the

⁵ It is for instance the case of several tortoise species originating from Indonesia like the Parker's snake-necked turtle (*Chelodina parkeri*) for which Indonesia has set a collection quota of 150 specimens from West Papua and Papua each, while it is classified by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as Vulnerable and has only a limited distribution.

⁶ Toland, E., Warwick, C. & Arena P. (2012) The exotic pet trade: pet hate. *The Biologist* Vol. 59, No 3 pp.14-18.

⁷ Another survey found that all specimens of two lizard species (the emerald tree monitor - *Varanus prasinus* - and Timor monitor - *Varanus timorensis*) exported by Indonesia in 2006 as captive-bred were in fact wild-caught.

⁸ <https://www.mapsofworld.com/world-top-ten/chicken-meat-producing-countries.html>

⁹ <https://www.mapsofworld.com/world-top-ten/egg-producing-countries.html>

sector has grown but already in 2011, there were around 200 million laying hens and 2 billion broiler chickens in Indonesia.¹⁰

Protection of the biodiversity

Industrial exploitation (coal, palm oil), deforestation, and even agricultural projects all contribute to the destruction of habitats of several species of apes living in Indonesia, such as orangutans and gibbons.

The illegal trade of live orangutans is also a problem. Despite Indonesian law prohibiting the private keeping of these species, the enforcement of the rules remains weak. 85 percent of the illegal trade occurs within Indonesia, proving that they are kept privately.

The right time to act

The trade in animal-based products between the EU and Indonesia has grown in the last decade. From the risk of trading in more endangered species to continuously destroying natural habitats, any trade deal between the EU and Indonesia needs to seriously consider animal protection and sustainable development.

As seen in the texts proposed by the EU, provisions on animal welfare are seriously lacking ambition. To take into account the needs of animals, the EU cannot propose such weak language. The EU should carry out an updated Sustainable Impact Assessment (focusing only on Indonesia rather than the ASEAN region), including the potential impacts on animals, before concluding any agreement. While the available EU proposals do mention animal welfare as part of the scope of the sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) chapter¹¹, the EU should have gone further and proposed a text closer to that offered to other trade partners during current negotiations. Proposals made to Mercosur and Mexico included a mention of animal sentience and the need to better enforce OIE standards, and the text agreed in 2016 with Vietnam – a more alike country - at least mentioned capacity-building and technical assistance.

The trade negotiations, as well as the structures that such trade agreement can establish, should be used as an opportunity to discuss with Indonesia the enforcement of CITES-related rules to better protect endangered species (not only apes but also reptiles) and the welfare of farmed animals. The EU should be more ambitious on conservation and not only work on animal welfare when there is a direct threat to its producers. If trade is really about projecting European values, it should ensure that liberalisation not only does not imply more animals suffering but also promotes a better fate for all living creatures.

¹⁰ <https://www.ciwf.org.uk/media/5235021/Statistics-Laying-hens.pdf> & <https://www.ciwf.org.uk/media/5235303/Statistics-Broiler-chickens.pdf>

¹¹ The provisions affirms the need to “enhance” collaboration on animal welfare.