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POACHING FEARS FORCE SUSPENSION OF THAI ELEPHANT EXPORTS

30th April 2009 – The RSPCA, Humane Society International (HSI) and IFAW (International Fund for Animal Welfare) congratulate the Thai Government for suspending elephant exports for five years following growing fears that animals are being poached from the wild to be sold overseas.

Thailand's Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation has announced a blanket suspension on all elephant exports until a new registration process for the animals is complete. Thai Environment Minister Suwit Khunkitti acknowledged that the current ID system and DNA checks are inadequate and do not stop poachers taking elephants from the wild.

The news vindicates the concerns of Australia's leading animal welfare groups, when they led the legal fight against the import of eight Asian elephants to Taronga and Melbourne Zoos in 2006.

“The Thai Government has recognised the ID system is fatally flawed—the animals exported to Australia could have come from anywhere.

“In fact, Thai NGOs at the time expressed great fears that sending the elephants to Australia only served to encourage an increase in black-market wildlife trading,” said Erica Martin, IFAW Asia Pacific Director.

The elephant's origin is just one factor in a trade that has more to do with profit than the long-term conservation benefits of the animal.

“Keeping an elephant in a zoo is like living in a hotel room for the rest of your life. Elephants have little opportunity to exercise, they are forced into unstable and small social groups and they have a greater propensity towards health problems like obesity and foot and joint stress,” said the RSPCA's Chief Scientist, Dr Bidida Jones.

There are no conservation benefits to Asian elephants from keeping them in zoos. No baby elephant from Melbourne or Taronga zoos' breeding program will go back into the wild—not ever.

“The best thing that can be done to save the endangered Asian elephant is to invest in their welfare and future in the wild in Thailand. Hopefully, this suspension will be the first step towards achieving a better future for Asian elephants in their home country,” said Nicola Beynon HSI Senior Program Manager.

MEDIA ENQUIRIES

Imogen Scott, IFAW Asia Pacific, 02 9288 4922 or 0402 183 113

Lisa Chalk, RSPCA Australia, 02 6282 8300 or 0419 748 907

Nicola Beynon, Humane Society International 02 9973 1728 or 0404 065 517