



## International Coalition Working Equids Position Statement

### DONKEY SKIN TRADE

#### Summary

The global donkey population is an estimated 54 million (FAO, 2024), with around a tenth, or more, of this population, estimated to be slaughtered each year\* to meet demand for the product 'eijao', which is extracted from donkey-hide gelatine and used in Traditional Chinese Medicine.

This demand has led to a rapid and unsustainable depletion of the number of donkeys globally and poses a threat to their health and welfare. Demand cannot be met through China's own supply, causing skins to be imported, with traders in other countries slaughtering donkeys for the purposes of exporting their skins. This has caused a sharp decrease in donkey population in some regions of the world, impacting the millions of people who rely on donkeys for their livelihoods. The skin trade also poses serious biosecurity threats due to unhygienic slaughter conditions posing disease risk, not only to donkeys but to other species. There is a lack of oversight or efficient management of transportation and cross border smuggling of donkeys and hides. Any use of equines for production purposes needs to be carried out in a way that is sustainable and where equine welfare is prioritised. This is simply not possible in this trade.

On 18 February 2024, the African Union adopted a moratorium on the slaughter of donkeys for the skin trade. This was a recognition of the devastating impact of this trade in Africa and the need to take action. The Abidjan Declaration presented at the Pan-African Donkey Conference in June 2025 called for Member State implementation, and stringent monitoring and reporting mechanisms. It was also stated that national livestock and rural development policies must be aligned with donkey welfare policies, with appropriate investment into veterinary services and programmatic interventions, to domesticate the moratorium into law and ensure an indefinite ban on donkey slaughter for skins.

ICWE partners are working both independently and collaboratively to end the trade in donkey skins across the world and help both the donkeys and communities who are impacted by it.

#### Position

- ICWE believes that the donkey skin trade poses an unsustainable threat to the health, welfare and survival of donkeys worldwide and should be ended for good.
- ICWE believes that the donkey skin trade poses a severe biosecurity risk.
- ICWE believes that the donkey skin trade poses a severe threat to people's livelihoods.
- ICWE does not support breeding donkeys for the sole purpose of the skin trade due to this being an impractical and unsustainable alternative, which cannot be solved by regulation.
- ICWE seeks to understand sustainable, science-based, non-animal-based alternatives to donkey skins for eijao production, such as cellular agriculture.
- ICWE supports and will collaborate with activities to learn more about the skin trade and the impacts of it.

#### Desired Outcomes

- A cessation to the slaughter of donkeys for their skins.
- The donkey skin trade is recognised as a severe threat to donkey welfare and species survival, along with a threat to the livelihoods of those who rely on them.
- Support finding alternative livelihoods for those relying on the skin trade for income.
- The biosecurity threats from the donkey skin trade are recognised and action plans are put in place to help reduce illegal smuggling and slaughter of donkeys for their skin.

# ICWE

INTERNATIONAL COALITION FOR WORKING EQUIDS



- Support for the African Union countries' implementation of the donkey skin trade moratorium within their borders, through ensuring enforcement, compliance and associated policies, and ensure a cessation in donkey slaughter for their skins.
- Support for other regions and countries globally who are impacted by this trade to help them develop control measures and formal agreements to ensure a cessation in donkey slaughter for their skins.

## Challenges

- The donkey skin trade is a global issue and will require global effort to action change.
- The donkey skin trade has been associated with other illegal trade, e.g. wildlife, drugs, stolen goods.
- The increase in demand for ejiao in recent years.

## Clarifications

- Whilst ICWE partners do work collaboratively, there are differences in partners' activity in challenging the global skin trade.

## About ICWE

The International Coalition for Working Equids (ICWE) is comprised of leading working animal NGO's Brooke Action for Working Horses and Donkeys (Brooke), The Donkey Sanctuary, Working Animals International and World Horse Welfare. ICWE was established to work with the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) and its members to implement the WOAH Terrestrial Code Chapter 7.12 on the Welfare of Working Equids. Since ICWE has developed and now covers three main themes of work: collaboration with the WOAH, high-level advocacy and collaboration on equine disease control.

\*Figures based on calculations from Bennett et al (2019) using ejiao output estimates from Hui (2017) and Li (2022)

- Bennett R. & Pfuderer S. (2019) Demand for donkey hides and implications for global donkey populations. Discussion paper presented at the Agricultural Economics Society, 93rd Annual Conference, April 15- 17, 2019, Warwick University, Coventry, UK
- Hui, L (2017) China Focus: Donkey shortage turns TCM remedy into a luxury product, Xinhua, Available from: [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-12/20/c\\_136840390.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-12/20/c_136840390.htm)
- Li et al. (2022), Foresight 2022: Panorama of China's donkey-hide gelatin industry. Prospective Industry Research Institute. Available from: <https://www.qianzhan.com/analyst/detail/220/220420-523a1348.html>