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April 20, 2020

The Honorable Gavin Newsom, California State Governor
 1303 10th Street, Suite 1173
 Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, California Surgeon General
 California Health and Human Services
 1600 Ninth Street, Room 460
 Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Newsom and Dr. Burke Harris,

We urge you to end the commercial wildlife¹ trade and sale for human consumption in California, including a ban on the import of nonnative birds, reptiles and amphibians. We also earnestly ask you to establish—with all the legal power vested in you—the rigorous enforcement of such bans and existing laws against the illegal trade of wild animals.

With public health now teetering on the threat of the next pandemic, swift action is needed.

A connection to wildlife markets and related trafficking has emerged as the cause of the novel coronavirus nCoV-2019 pandemic currently plaguing our world. The earliest cases of COVID-19 in December, 2019 were with people who had been around, or handled wild animals sold in a market as food. Scientists have proven that wild animals carry diseases that are transmittable to humans, and they are tracking this new coronavirus' passport from animals to humans.

Zoonotic viruses—animal viruses capable of being transmitted to humans—have also been found in birds, turtles, frogs, pigs, cattle, and others, including California animals. Zoonoses, responsible for three out of every four infectious diseases, have caused millions of deaths globally, and the rate of outbreaks is growing exponentially. Numerous studies have exposed that zoonotic diseases leap to humans through wildlife hunting, trade and trafficking, transporting and containing highly stressed animals plucked from their habitats, unsanitary practices of commingling species on the chopping board, and delivering diseased (often living) animals in paper and plastic bags.

The practices described above are found in meat markets called “live food markets” in large cities in California, among other states.

Congress²—in a bipartisan letter from 66 members—has called on The World Health Organization to close all wild animal markets, amid a froth of other similar outcries around the globe, including the Wildlife Conservation Society letter³ to all world governments, a 241-organization letter⁴ to the World Health Organization calling for a permanent, global ban on all live wildlife markets, and a long list of health experts, organizations and news journals.

¹For this document, the term ‘wildlife’ means wild animals in the wild or bred in captivity.

²Bipartisan Letter from Sixty-Six Members of Congress, April 9, 2020.

[https://www.booker.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/04.08.20 Booker Graham Quigley McCaul Final%20sBlock.pdf](https://www.booker.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/04.08.20%20Booker%20Graham%20Quigley%20McCaul%20Final%20Block.pdf)

³Wildlife Conservation Society Policy, February 18, 2020.

https://c532f75abb9c1c021b8c-e46e473f8aad72cf2a8ea564b4e6a76.ssl.cf5.rackcdn.com/2020/04/01/8294efiuzg_COVID_19_Summary_of_WCS_Policies_and_Messaging_March29.2.pdf

⁴World Wildlife Federation Policy for Vietnam Prime Minister Phuc, March 18, 2020.

[https://d2ouvy59p0dg6k.cloudfront.net/downloads/letter to prime minister re covid 19 and wlt feb2020 final.pdf](https://d2ouvy59p0dg6k.cloudfront.net/downloads/letter%20to%20prime%20minister%20re%20covid%2019%20and%20wlt%20feb2020%20final.pdf)

Dr. Anthony Fauci,⁵ the foremost U.S authority on COVID-19, has argued that the viral outbreak is a “direct result of [the wild animal markets],” stating that “we have so many diseases that emanate out of that unusual human-animal interface, that we [should] just shut it down.” Days later, the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, a nonprofit of 12,000 doctors, filed a Petition for Rulemaking⁶ with U.S. Surgeon General Jerome Adams, urging him to close all live animal markets in the United States.

Steven Osofsky, Professor of Wildlife Health and Health Policy at Cornell College of Veterinary Medicine, states, “At a time when the entire world is increasingly bearing the costs of the global wildlife trade, where billions of dollars of public health emergency costs and the depletion of the world’s wildlife are literally the trade’s primary byproducts, it is time to shut down these markets forever. It’s what’s right for public health, for biodiversity conservation, for the global economy, and for socioecological stability.”

The California Fish and Game Commission adopted policy in 2010⁷ to ban the import of nonnative turtles and frogs—which are procured and sold in our live food markets—yet it was never codified as regulation. The Department of Fish and Wildlife tracks a running list of zoonoses,⁸ but continues to do business as usual. Wildlife trafficking, as the primary cause of zoonotic diseases—now a seismic global health issue—must end. California can no longer continue to ignore it.

The latest figures from Johns Hopkins University show that COVID 19 is responsible for 2.3 million cases and 150,000 deaths worldwide, including over 1,000 in California. Prohibitions and absolute strict enforcement against illegal wildlife trade and wildlife markets will help to prevent future zoonotic pandemics.

We are grateful for your leadership in California and the nation during this crisis. We urge you now to put the prevention of future pandemics at the top of your priority list, even as you, your team and our state, city and county officials and industry professionals struggle in real time to save lives.

⁵Fox News Interview of Dr. Anthony Fauci, April 3, 2020.
<https://video.foxnews.com/v/6146846185001#sp=show-clips>

⁶Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine Petition for Rulemaking to U.S. Surgeon General Jerome Adams
<https://www.pcrm.org/news/news-releases/doctors-urge-surgeon-general-shut-down-us-live-animal-markets>

⁷California Fish and Game Commission Meeting Summary, April 7-8, 2010.
<http://pawpac.org/markets/fgc-april2010.pdf#page=11>

⁸Zoonotic Diseases, Wildlife Investigations Lab, California Department of Fish and Wildlife.
[https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Laboratories/Wildlife Investigations/Monitoring/Zoonotic Disease](https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Laboratories/Wildlife%20Investigations/Monitoring/Zoonotic%20Disease)

Surgeon General Dr. Burke Harris and Governor Newsom, we ask you now to take swift action to:

1. permanently ban the commercial wildlife trade and sale for human consumption through live animal markets and other means in California;
2. cease all importation permits of nonnative birds, amphibians and reptiles;
3. ensure punishment of wildlife crimes is commensurate to the dimensions of the global threat they pose; and
4. require the Department of Fish and Wildlife, through guidance from humane education organizations, to establish an educational program to inform the public of the risks of wildlife trade to human health, ecosystem preservation, biodiversity and the global economy

Again, we urge you to end the commercial wildlife trade and sale for human consumption through live animal markets and other means. Please call on us to assist you in any way to make this happen. Together, we will save lives.

Sincerely,

/s/ René Rowland

René Rowland, Chair
PawPAC

/s/ Madeline Bernstein

Madeline Bernstein, President
spcaLA

/s/ Pei Feng Su

Pei Feng Su, Founder
ACTAsia

/s/ Eric Mills

Eric Mills, Coordinator
Action for Animals

/s/ Susan Tellem

Susan Tellem, Executive Director
American Tortoise Rescue

/s/ Paula Burton

Paula Burton, U.S. Director
Animals Asia



/s/ Craig Downer

Craig Downer, Wildlife Ecologist
President, Andean Tapir Fund

/s/ Stephen Wells

Stephen Wells, Executive Director
Animal Legal Defense Fund

/s/ Jen Riley

Jen Riley, Chair
Animal Rights National Conference

/s/ Anita Krajnc

Anita Krajnc, Co-founder
Animal Save Movement

/s/ Angela Grimes

Angela Grimes, Chief Executive Officer
Born Free USA

/s/ Kierán Suckling

Kierán Suckling, Executive Director
The Center for Biological Diversity

/s/ Will Tuttle

Dr. Will Tuttle, Co-founder
Circle of Compassion

/s/ Colleen Patrick-Goudreau

Colleen Patrick-Goudreau, Author
Animal Advocate

/s/ Michael Colbruno

Michael Colbruno, Co-founder and Chair
East Bay Animal PAC

/s/ Catrina Steedman

Catrina Steedman, Founder and Trustee
Emergent Disease Foundation

/s/ Leda Huta

Leda Huta, Executive Director
Endangered Species Coalition

/s/ Michael Cintas

Michael D. Cintas, Olympic Coach
Owner, Equestrian Centers Intl.

/s/ Alex Hershaft

Alex Hershaft, Co-founder and President
Farm Animal Rights Movement

/s/ Gene Baur

Gene Baur, President and Co-Founder
Farm Sanctuary

/s/ Patricia McPherson

Patricia McPherson, President
Grassroots Coalition

/s/ Megan Moon

Megan Moon, President and Founder
Humane Education Coalition

/s/ Kitty Block

Kitty Block, President and CEO
Humane Society of the United States

/s/ David Phillips

David Phillips, Executive Director
International Marine Mammal Project

/s/ Rande Levine

Rande Levine, President and Founder
Karma Rescue Inc.

/s/ Kris Kelly

Kris Kelly, Founder
The Kris Kelly Foundation

/s/ Louie Psihoyos

Louie Psihoyos, Executive Director
Oceanic Preservation Society

/s/ Jennifer Conrad, DVM

Jennifer Conrad, Founder and Director
The Paw Project

/s/ Bob LeRoy

Bob LeRoy, MS EdM RDN
Founder, President and Co-Coordinator
Plant-based Prevention Of Disease (P-POD)
Conference

/s/ Camilla Fox

Camilla Fox, Founder & Executive Director
Project Coyote

/s/ Tim Gorski

Tim Gorski, Director
Rattle the Cage Productions

/s/ Kerry Kriger

Kerry Kriger, Ph.D., Executive Director
SAVE THE FROGS!

/s/ Paul Watson

Captain Paul Watson, Founder
Sea Shepherd Conservation Society

/s/ Clare Staples

Clare Staples, Founder and President
Skydog Ranch

/s/ Todd Steiner

Todd Steiner, Executive Director
Turtle Island Restoration Network

/s/ Karen Davis

Karen Davis, PhD, President
United Poultry Concerns

Veterinary Association for the Protection of
Animals

/s/ Armaiti May, DVM, CVA

/s/ Linda Middlesworth

Linda Middlesworth, Founder
Vegan Mentor, Vegan Health Coach
Food for Life Nutrition Instructor, PCRM

/s/ Debra Voulgaris, DVM, MA, CVA, CCRP
Pitcairn Institute of Homeopathy

/s/ Debbie Dahmer

Debbie Dahmer, Producer
Animal Advocates Radio "Voices Carry For
Animals" on Blog Talk Radio

/s/ Melissa Resnick, DVM

/s/ Daniela Castillo, DVM

/s/ Anna Marie Reams

Anna Marie Reams, Director
Wildlife Care of SoCal

/s/ Erika Sullivan, DVM

/s/ Ben Williamson

Ben Williamson, US Programs Director
World Animal Protection

/s/ Rob Laidlaw

Rob Laidlaw, Founder
Zoocheck

/s/ Alex Pacheco

Alex Pacheco, President
600 Million Stray Dogs Need You



NEWS RELEASE
For Immediate Release

Coalition of Organizations Urges Governor Newsom and State Surgeon General Burke Harris to Ban California Sales and Importation of Wildlife and Non-Native Species

LOS ANGELES — April 20, 2020 — Public health and global economies are currently under siege with no end in sight due to the rapid spread of COVID-19. By reframing our interaction with and treatment of the natural world, particularly that of trafficking wild animals, diseases and resulting pandemics that upend society can be prevented. Wildlife markets and zoonoses — diseases that can be transmitted to humans from animals — have emerged as the cause of the novel coronavirus nCoV-2019 pandemic currently plaguing our world. In California, industries exploiting and trafficking wildlife as commodities for live food markets pose just as much a threat to public health and safety as do other wildlife farms and markets around the world. As a result, **PawPAC, a California-based humane legislative group with a 40-year history of advocating for animals**, has sent a [letter](#) to Governor Gavin Newsom and State Surgeon General Nadine Burke Harris urging them to take immediate action to ban the sale and importation of wildlife and non-native species — specifically birds, amphibians and reptiles — in the state of California for human consumption.

Founded in 1980, PawPAC is a statewide committee that advocates for all nonhumans and their environment, to encourage transparency in the California State Legislature through humane scorecards while promoting more humane laws throughout the state. PawPAC has engaged with California policy makers since 1993 on live food market issues in the state, on the basis of health, the humane treatment of animals and biodiversity stewardship.

Necropsies of diseased frogs and turtles from California's live food markets revealed a host of diseases including salmonella, pasteurella and E. coli, among others. This evidence, along with concerns for the ecosystem, led the Fish and Game Commission to adopt policy in 2010 to "cease issuing importation permits for any live non-native turtles or frogs." However, the recommended policy was never added to the California Code of Regulations. Consequently, non-native turtles and frogs are currently still sold in California live food markets with a reported two million bullfrogs and 400,000 turtles imported into the state each year. The Department of Fish and Wildlife conducts ongoing studies of zoonotic diseases, which are known to be found in birds, turtles, frogs, pigs, cattle, and other animals. As humans continue to encroach upon the natural world, increasingly animals are being displaced and in many cases poached from their habitats to be sold in wildlife markets and sometimes even online. This trafficking results in stressed animals who are more susceptible to disease. When commingled with other species in tight quarters when shipped, or while awaiting slaughter at these animal markets, this creates a petri dish of contagion just waiting to infect the next victim.

Just last week, it was confirmed that there was a highly pathogenic avian flu outbreak in South Carolina. As of April 17, 2020, the USDA reports it has detected the outbreak of virulent Newcastle disease at 476 premises in California, resulting in the euthanasia of millions of birds. The disease has not yet seriously endangered humans; however, the commingling of various species, and human contact with them in the markets are a ticking time bomb for the next pandemic. We must be far more vigilant in stopping the potential risk of disease at the source before it starts. We are therefore calling on Governor Newsom and State Surgeon General Burke Harris to immediately end the practice of selling live wild animals in our markets for human consumption.

Ben Williamson, U.S. Director of World Animal Protection states, "We commend Governor Newsom's efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19 in California. Given the undeniable link between infectious diseases in humans and their transmission through wildlife, we're calling on him to use his authority as Governor to bring an immediate end to the commercial wildlife trade in California. We can help prevent future pandemics by protecting people from diseases originating in wild animals, and by protecting wild animals from being cruelly farmed or poached and sold for human consumption."

Founder and CEO of the global animal protection nonprofit Animals Asia, Jill Robinson, says change is long overdue: "No continent, no country, no city is immune or without blame as we reflect on the changes we know have to be made, or risk the next punishment for our behavior that is already waiting in the wings. Change is possible if we look at our habits, the lives that we live, and start the ripple of that change in our own backyard."

In light of the current health crisis, we must act swiftly to finally end the wildlife trafficking so vitally linked to viral outbreaks. **PawPAC Chair René Rowland** states, "With public health now teetering on the threat of the next global crisis, now is the time for California to take action to end the practice of selling living animals for food right here at home. Let's remove the possibility of California becoming the next pandemic epicenter, and in so doing we'll raise our humane standards, boost biodiversity and even offset the effects of climate change that stem from species destruction and trafficked wildlife."

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Notes to Media:

PawPAC Coalition Letter to Governor Newsom and State Surgeon General Burke Harris:

<http://pawpac.org/legislation/2020/letters/governor/letter-markets-coalition-2020-04-20.pdf>

About PawPAC:

PawPAC was founded in 1980 by a group of animal advocates, most notably the late Virginia Handley, and seeks to benefit all nonhumans by bringing transparency to the work of the California Legislature through its annual humane scorecard, which helps to inform its endorsements of candidates for statewide office. Ms. Handley helped to blaze a trail on the issue of California's live animal food markets, yet the issue still faces us today.

Interviews available by request with PawPAC representatives by contacting:

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877.484.2364

Organizations in Support

PawPAC
spcaLA
ACTAsia
Action for Animals
American Tortoise Rescue
Animals Asia

with:

Andean Tapir Fund
Animal Legal Defense Fund
Animal Rights National Conference
Animal Save Movement
Born Free USA
Center for Biological Diversity
Circle of Compassion
Climate Save Movement
Colleen Patrick-Goudreau, Author and Animal Advocate
East Bay Animal PAC

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Endangered Species Coalition
Equestrian Centers Intl.
Farm Animal Rights Movement
Farm Sanctuary
Grassroots Coalition
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