

Project Update: February 2022

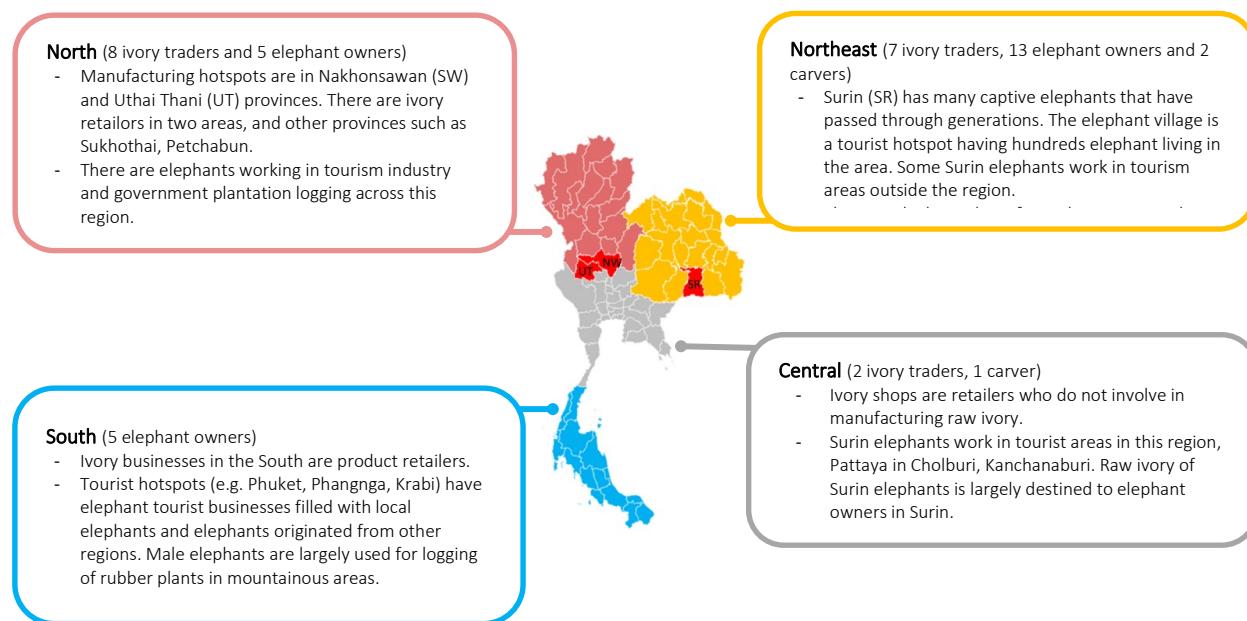
An assessment of the sustainability of the legal ivory trade in Thailand

This study has explored important information on the supply of locally sourced elephant ivory in Thailand in aspects of trade chain and amount of ivory produced from Thai domesticated elephants. Data collecting techniques were qualitative research and document analysis. The report has been presented in two parts in correspondence with objectives of the study as follows.

Objective 1 Understanding the Thai ivory trade chain and potential factors involving ivory stock

The data collection for this part of the study was conducted using interviews that were completed in 2020. In total, there were 43 participants, including 23 elephant owners, 17 ivory traders and three ivory carvers, living in north, northeast, central and southern regions of Thailand (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Map showing sampling areas and descriptions in four different regions of Thailand.



Based on the data, we developed a picture of the Thai ivory trade chain consisting of the activities of five key groups: elephant owners, intermediaries, ivory product manufacturers, product retailers, and ivory users. Raw tusks enter the supply chain through direct transactions involving the elephant owners or via an intermediary. There are two main manufacturing sites, Nakhonsawan and Uthai Thani in the north, and Surin in the northeast of Thailand. Manufacturers in Surin sourced raw ivory either from local elephants or other regions. Surin traders are advantaged in sourcing raw material via established connections or networks among elephant owners. Nakhonsawan and Uthai Thani, have no access to raw ivory within provinces, and rely on materials from other areas. Ivory sourcing by the northern traders is facilitated through intermediaries, who are

also local elephant owners. Most ivory items pass to buyers via manufacturers, after the production processes. In some cases, whole tusks are purchased directly by users without the participation of manufacturers. These tusks are generally pairs of complete tusks, which are mostly used for decorative purposes.

Factors influencing the raw ivory supply to the trade chain vary among three relevant steps in the chain: tusk harvesting, tusk use, and sale destination, but the financial needs of elephant owners and market factors are particularly influential across these steps. Elephant owner decisions also depend on elephant management, sentimental values, ivory beliefs, tusk forms, and legal awareness.

A manuscript describing these results entitled "Domestic ivory trade: the supply chain for raw ivory in Thailand is driven by the financial needs of elephant owners and market factors" has been submitted for publication to Human Dimensions on Wildlife journal in December 2021; the current status of this publication is 'under review'.

Objective 2 An estimate the potential ivory supply

The data collection involved compilation of relevant raw ivory data from of the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (DNP), Department of Provincial Administration and Department of Livestock Development in the Thai Government. We were unable to fully deliver on this part of the study due to the constraints on travel imposed by COVID 19 pandemic (the study is situated in Thailand but I am based at a university in Australia). Overseas travel was restricted during the period of data collection meaning that the field work in Thailand, for compiling data from government records was cancelled. The raw data are stored in hard copy, and careful extraction is needed by persons who understand the ivory trade. In addition, the data are accessible only by government staff. Data collection using other transcribers turned out to be protracted. In addition, access to hard copies from abroad was limited preventing full validation of the raw data. In the end, validated records were only used for estimates, therefore, the numbers represent minimum volumes.

The estimates were based on new raw ivory obtained during 2015 -2019 from elephant management cuttings, breaks, and removals from dead elephants. The annual ivory production from domesticated elephant in Thailand is at least, 376.8 kg on average. Around 36% of the weight was under commercially held possession. The raw ivory obtained by ivory manufacturers during 2016-2019 was 170 kg a year (minimum). The contribution to commercially held stock largely came from new ivory (83%), while the remaining proportion was that transferred from pre-law registration stock. Key sources of raw ivory are northeast (37%), south (31.5%), north (31%), and others (0.5%). Most of northeast ivory was obtained from Surin elephants, either living locally or working in other areas, while ivory from other regions came from elephants working in tourism businesses and plantation logging.