

**FROM NON-OFFICIAL MEMBERS OF  
THE NATIONAL BOARD FOR WILDLIFE**

The Member Secretary  
Central Zoo Authority  
Ministry of Environment and Forests  
Bikaner House, Annexe VI, Shahjahan Road,  
New Delhi – 110 011.

20 November, 2009

Sir:

**Subject: Requesting an urgent review of the Circular directing rehabilitation of zoo elephants in camps located in National Parks, Sanctuaries and Tiger Reserves.**

**Ref: Circular of the Central Zoo Authority dated 7<sup>th</sup> November, 2009.**

We the undersigned members of the National Board for Wildlife are writing in response to the directives issued vide Circular referred above which, in our opinion, requires an urgent review. In particular, we are deeply concerned about directive (i) -

*“Elephants are banned from zoo collections throughout India with immediate effect. All captive elephants in zoos should be rehabilitated in elephant camps / rehabilitation camps / facilities available with the forest department at National Parks / Wildlife Sanctuaries / Tiger Reserves for departmental use”.*

While this may seem positive from an animal welfare point of view, its ramifications for conservation are serious. While solving one problem, this decision is likely to create a much bigger one.

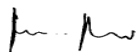
1. Elephant camps inside Wildlife Reserves have been shown to cause various negative impacts, including degrading of surrounding forests due to extensive lopping of vegetation by mahouts. Such camps also act as magnets for mahouts, support staff and their families and relatives to settle down, thus creating permanent human settlements and infrastructure even within core/critical habitat.
2. Unlike in the past, there is a complete ban on timber operations in wildlife reserves and there is no need for working elephants.
3. Since the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has already issued guidelines to relocate human settlements and even phase out tourism from core/critical tiger habitat, this decision of the CZA runs counter to the efforts of NTCA.

Furthermore, domesticated elephants invariably suffer from various diseases which, despite screening, may get passed onto wild elephants and other endangered species. While welfare aspects of a hundred odd domesticated elephants indeed need to be addressed, the long-term conservation interests of thousands of wild elephants, tigers and other endangered species precariously surviving in Wildlife Reserves, and facing numerous threats, should not be jeopardized.

A better alternative may be to set up elephant rescue centres at various places in the country - outside National Parks, Sanctuaries and Tiger Reserves to ensure comfortable conditions for domestic elephants.

Given these very real concerns, we request an urgent review of the CZA decision, pending which States may be directed not to initiate further action.

Sincerely,



**Praveen Bhargav, Wildlife First**

*Signed on behalf and in consultation with the following members: Shekar Dattatri, Biswajit Mohanty, Ravi Singh, Mahendra Vyas, Dr. Asad Rahmani and Dr. Bibhab Talukdar.*

**Copy to: The DGF & Special Secretary; The Addl. DGF (Wildlife) & Member Secretary NBWL**