

Let's stand up for trophy hunting!

"US President Joe Biden must cleanse the nation's soul from the sins committed by the Trump administration", says Kitty Block, CEO of Humane Society of the U.S. (HSUS), erstwhile employee of the wacky extremist animal liberation group PETA. How? By banning trophy hunting of bears, wolves, coyote and caribou in Alaska, and the importation of elephant, lion, rhino, and leopard trophies from Africa. Meanwhile, a galaxy of celebrities has signed Trophy Hunting and Born Free's open letter calling on the UK and US governments to ban trophy hunting. So, the heat is on, my friends. But let's not panic.

The truth is that the celebrities are being misled by campaigners spinning myths driven by emotion, specious morality, and willful dismissal of the facts. Biden's predecessor called it fake news. As The Guardian (Celebrity power undermining global conservation efforts, scientists warn) for once reported accurately, on 15 January 2021, there is wide evidence, including from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), that for many threatened species such as the black rhino, white rhino, lion and markhor, well-regulated trophy hunting has brought population increases and reduced larger threats.

Both sides can campaign. As The Guardian also mentions, 133 leading scientists and community representatives wrote in 2019 to the journal Science, arguing that banning hunting without implementing viable alternatives to protect habitat and generate revenue for local communities would imperil biodiversity. Scientific opinion may not favour our opponents' stance, but they have, unfortunately, rarely cared about detail or the veracity of their arguments.

The danger, I suggest, is that when reason, facts and morality are missing and opinions still refuse to budge, abuse and force, as likely as not, will be substituted for persuasion. That is why it surprises me not that the opponents of trophy hunting are increasingly abandoning any pretense of participation in a fair exchange of ideas. Their modus operandi is now abuse and intimidation.

Things have got so bad that Adam Hart, professor of science communication at the University of Gloucestershire, told The Guardian: "A lot of conservation scientists are scared to get involved in this debate as it is so toxic. I have had people call me a shill for the hunting industry, which is absolute twaddle. We get personal slurs against our professional integrity just for trying to engage people with the science and trying to limit the wildlife loss that will come if trophy hunting is banned."

We will win this battle if we fight emotion with reason, science, and fairness, and if we fight back collectively. We must ensure that none of our voices are silenced by the animal rights mob led by the likes of Kitty Block. We must stand alongside courageous scientists such as Adam Hart and Amy Dickman, a conservationist I admire from Oxford University. We in the

Sustainable Use Alliance must press our case forcibly in support of efficacious conservation and sustainable use principles, which embrace unashamedly trophy hunting of multiple species. The hard facts tell us that in Africa and in the USA restrictions on trophy hunting reduce tolerance for a variety of species among communities where local people benefit from trophy hunting.

Whatever one thought of Donald Trump, Kitty Block knows that from the perspective of trophy hunting, the wokeness of the Biden administration marks a setback for our cause. The time has come to mobilise all our stakeholders against the forces lining up to quash trophy hunting and all other forms of sustainable use management. The bottom line is that we must not allow the extremism of Kitty Block and the ignorance of celebrities to prevail. Battle on.