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Department for Environment  
Food and Rural Affairs

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From the Minister for Biodiversity, Landscape and Rural Affairs  
Barry Gardiner MP

*Dear Friends*

I have received a number of emails from members of the Humane Society of the United States raising concerns about the commercial international trade in turtles and turtle products from the Cayman Islands. I hope that this response can be posted on your website to address the concerns expressed by your members.

First let me assure you and your members that there has been no change in policy on this issue, nor is one currently planned. There are very strict controls on trade in any species subject to the provisions of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). Under this Convention, some 169 countries including the UK are working together to help conserve endangered species by restricting and monitoring international trade in them. CITES does not aim to end trade in animals and plants but seeks to ensure that any international trade is carried out in a sustainable way that ensures the long-term survival of all species.

CITES prohibits the commercial, international trade in wild-taken specimens of the most endangered species listed in Appendix I of CITES. Although green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) are listed on Appendix I, commercial trade in captive-bred specimens of Appendix I species may be allowed. Applications to import these are considered on a case-by-case basis and import permits may only be issued when certain conditions have been met. For example, before granting an import licence for any live CITES-listed animal, we must be satisfied that the import will have no harmful effect on the conservation status of the species concerned, and that the intended accommodation is adequately equipped to conserve and care for it properly.

Your campaign letter asks that we refuse to issue permits to allow the export of any marine turtles from the Cayman Islands to any other country. The UK CITES Management

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Authority is not responsible for issuing CITES permits for the Cayman Islands. The Cayman Islands has its own Management Authority which implements CITES and so this is a matter for the Cayman Islands Government and the country of import.

Finally, although registration as a captive-breeding operation would allow the Farm to sell to visiting tourists the turtle carapaces obtained as a by-product of meat production, the Cayman Island Government does not intend to apply for registration at the 14<sup>th</sup> Conference of CITES Parties next year.\* The Farm provides a significant conservation benefit by providing a legal source to supply the strong local cultural demand for turtle meat and a viable alternative to meat from wild turtles – for which there is a small legal regulated harvest in the islands. By doing so from a captive-bred source, the Cayman Turtle Farm enables the Cayman Island authorities to reduce demand for wild turtle meat and illegal harvesting.

I do trust that this addresses any fears you may have had about the UK's practices in this area. Thank you for raising enough about our national report to ask the trouble to write.

Yours sincerely

Rory Casidino

\*Highlighting by The HSUS/HSI.