

marine species of huge commercial importance. They also saw the value in the wood from the trees: several species of tropical hardwoods were added to Appendix II.

Key agreements on trade in elephant ivory were strengthened, to specify the need for campaigns to reduce demand. This is the best — and possibly the only — way to save elephant populations in the long term, say many researchers who study the illegal trade that takes poached ivory from Africa to markets in countries such as China and Thailand.

There are already promising signs that public awareness of the threat to elephants is growing in China, as demonstrated by the campaigning of one of the country's biggest (in more ways than one) celebrities, the basketball star Yao Ming. Similar campaigns against the trade in shark fins — whose status as a delicacy in some Asian countries is often blamed for declines in shark numbers — seem also to be finding a receptive audience.

At the CITES meeting, there was also success for attempts to clamp down on the ivory trade through increased forensic scrutiny of seized ivory and the stockpiles of tusks kept in many African nations. This is a significant victory. Such DNA analysis should provide crucial information on the illegal trade and open up new avenues to combat it (see *Nature* 494, 411–412; 2013). It is also a validation of the hard work and campaigning put into this problem. The solid evidence base produced by the CITES projects Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants and the Elephant Trade Information System has focused global attention on the resurging crisis of elephant slaughter.

These successes carry important lessons. Popular and scientific reports of the threats to elephants, sharks and other species have helped to tip the political balance in favour of strengthening regulations. Non-governmental organizations deserve credit for raising the

alarm, as do politicians for heeding the warnings.

Let us not get carried away. There were also disappointments at CITES — notably the failure to stop trade in polar bears and their parts. Some conservationists also wanted even tougher moves to clamp down on elephant and rhino poaching, including trade sanctions, which were rejected. Overall, however, the post-meeting mood was jubilant — and rightly so.

Serious questions must now be asked about the positive part that CITES can play in future marine conservation. If CITES wants to make progress in this sphere, then it must bring pressure to bear on special-

**“Delegates seem to have discovered a willingness to step on the toes of influential commercial interests.”**

ist fisheries-management bodies, many of which have attracted criticism for allowing species such as tuna to be fished beyond sustainable limits. Those bodies have three years to put their houses in order before the next CITES meeting, or CITES will be obliged to do it for them. (The convention does not have a perfect record here, however — it failed in efforts to protect tuna populations in 2010, and dodged the issue at the latest meeting.)

The decisions passed last week will not by themselves save a single animal or plant. Proper monitoring is essential. To build on the successes of the meeting, funders must provide stable financing for continued research on the welfare of those species that now fall under the protection of CITES — and those that do not.

CITES took a great step forward last week. Its success should inspire all those who push for evidence-based policy. Perhaps most importantly, it shows that international meetings that seethe with dissonant agendas and actors are not always toothless talking shops. ■

## A pope for today

*Latest pontiff looks to enhance social relevance of Catholic Church.*

Whether or not you are a believer, it is hard not to like the man. In the few days since the white smoke began to billow from the Sistine Chapel in Vatican City, the world has learned a little about Jorge Mario Bergoglio, the 76-year-old elected as Pope Francis I. The first pope from Latin America, as archbishop of Buenos Aires he eschewed the trappings of the office, forgoing a mansion for a small apartment, preferring to take the bus than use a chauffeur, and dedicating himself to pastoral work in the slums. The affable Pope Francis has also already wooed the public (and much of a fawning media) with his disarming humility and common touch — and his obvious flair for ad-libbing and humour. It is clear that Francis's papacy marks a break with the past, a new distinctive and refreshing papal style, and an ambition to focus on social relevance and justice. “How I would like a Church which is poor and for the poor!” he said.

We also learnt that the man obtained his first degree in chemistry, a later one in philosophy and another in theology, and that he has taught literature and psychology at universities. That broad education, academic bent and humility are hardly a surprise because Bergoglio is the first Jesuit pope. The Jesuits, the largest order in the Catholic Church, are its intellectual elite and known for their independent thinking. They also vow to live lives of austerity and never to seek high office in the Church — let alone pope. They have focused on issues of social and economic injustice, and less on doctrine than do career clergy. They have long worked as missionaries, and are probably best known for their creation and running of some of the world's top schools and universities. Many are also scientists.

We know little about Bergoglio's views on scientific issues, which he has hardly written about. The hordes of scientists among the Church's 1.2 billion baptized members would like to hear more. And his chemistry degree in itself says little about the Pope's attitudes to science. But what is clear is that, contrary to widespread belief, the modern Catholic Church is science-friendly and Pope Francis will no doubt continue, and perhaps deepen, that tradition. The Church's strong support for Darwinian evolution, for example, contrasts sharply with the backwards unscientific belief in creationism of many US evangelicals and lawmakers — a concept that Pope Benedict XVI rightly criticized in 2007 as “absurd”. Priests also gave us Mendelian genetics and contributed to the theory of the Big Bang.

Moreover, recent popes have substantially increased efforts to engage in dialogue with scientists on a host of issues, from embryonic stem-cell research and genetically modified crops to *in vitro* fertilization, abortion and euthanasia — and in the future will no doubt increasingly do so on advances in neuroscience and genetics, including prenatal screening. Scientists who have taken part in such discussions tell of thought-provoking and constructive debates, with the Church being open to ideas and often changing doctrines as a result. A damaging exception is its long-held opposition to the use of condoms to prevent the spread of HIV, and it can only be hoped that Pope Francis will have a more enlightened approach.

But whereas doctrines can be tweaked, the Church will not compromise on its central dogmas, such as the sanctity of human life and that life begins at conception. Science and faith can provide complementary world views, with progress in science informing and often challenging the rationale of Church doctrines, and vice versa: faith can often add much-needed dimensions of ethics and social justice to advances in science and their impact on society. Clashes are inevitable between people

of different beliefs, but both science and religion are best served by building bridges across the divides. How Pope Francis responds to issues where the two meet will be an important mark of the man. ■

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