

CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES
OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA



Sixteenth meeting of the Animals Committee
Shepherdstown (United States of America), 11-15 December 2000

Implementation of Decision 11.97

CONSERVATION OF SEAHORSES AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY SYNGNATHIDAE

This document has been prepared by Project Seahorse* and submitted by the North American regional representative on the Animals Committee.

Introduction

1. At its 11th meeting (Gigiri, 10-20 April 2000), the Conference of the Parties (CoP) to CITES decided to initiate action on behalf of seahorses and their pipefish relatives (see Decisions 11.97 and 11.153). These Decisions includes five key components: (1) the Secretariat is to convene a technical workshop to consider current knowledge about these species and their trade and conservation status; (2) the Parties are to be asked to contribute existing information about the syngnathid species occurring in their territory, fisheries, trade and applicable domestic legislation; (3) the Secretariat is to encourage scientific research on this family; (4) the Secretariat is to explore ways to involve interested parties in the management of syngnathids; and (5) the Animals Committee is to undertake preparation of a discussion document for CoP12. Project Seahorse was requested by the North American regional representative on the Animals Committee to make suggestions to help advance initiatives undertaken by the Parties.

Technical workshop

2. Decision 11.153 directs the Secretariat to:
 - b) *contingent on the availability of external funding, cooperate with other relevant bodies, including the fisheries sector, to convene a technical workshop to consider and review biological and trade information that would assist in establishing conservation priorities and actions to secure the conservation status of seahorses and other syngnathids.*

It may be helpful for the CITES Secretariat and the Parties to the Convention to know that Project Seahorse intends to hold a symposium on syngnathid biology in the first half of 2001, subject to funding. Such a meeting would bring together syngnathid biologists from around the world to discuss research findings and plan a new research agenda. Preliminary and summary outputs from this meeting would hopefully be of use to the Parties at the technical workshop. They may also be interested in

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knowing that Project Seahorse will also be producing a substantial new international monograph on the global trade in seahorses and other syngnathids in the first half of 2001. This work will update the trade surveys of 1993 and 1995. It will make it clear that the trade is larger than previously recognized and that incidental capture in trawls and other fisheries is a significant pressure on these fishes. This research will hopefully also be of use to the Parties at the technical workshop. Draft sections of the monograph on trade will be circulated to relevant Parties for their input prior to publication.

Information gathering

3. Decision 11.153 directs the Secretariat to:

- c) *request Parties to provide, for discussion at the technical workshop, all relevant available information concerning the status, catches and bycatches of, and trade in, seahorses and other syngnathids and on any domestic measures for their conservation and protection, and to review the adequacy of such measures.*

Project Seahorse encourages collection, collation, synthesis and assessment of a range of data and is very mindful that some Parties will be able to produce only a limited subset of the information identified as important. Knowledge of these fishes is so scanty that all quantitative and qualitative input (even anecdotal) will be valuable and may be incorporated into conservation planning and action. It is recommended that the following information be requested from the Parties:

I. Status

To assess the conservation status of syngnathid species and increase our biological knowledge as a basis for effective management, all available information on syngnathids should be collated. This would include (with justification provided in *italics*):

- a) data on national syngnathids such as species, national distribution, habitat, depth, and reproductive season; *because long-term conservation of syngnathids depends upon understanding their basic biology;*
- b) a directory of national research on syngnathids; *because coordinating global scientific research on syngnathids depends upon understanding historical and ongoing research efforts,*
- c) a reference list of national literature on syngnathids, both scientific and grey literature; *to enhance our collective understanding of syngnathid biology;*
- d) a list of national medicinal, ornamental, and curiosity uses of syngnathids (by species); *because assessing the sustainability of exploitation depends upon understanding the nature of exploitation;*
- e) a list of locations and contact details for nationally-held collections of syngnathid specimens; *because resolving taxonomic confusion regarding syngnathids depends upon coordinating efforts globally and improving our knowledge of syngnathid distribution;*
- f) names and contact details of government department(s) responsible for approving, facilitating and/or conducting research on syngnathid biology; *because the long-term conservation of syngnathids depends upon knowing far more about these species in the wild and in captivity, and because networks of specialist researchers are sorely needed.*

II. Catches and bycatches

Data on the level of syngnathid exploitation both as target catch and bycatch are essential to monitoring changes in wild populations and evaluating the sustainability of current demand. These would include:

- a) syngnathid landings data (direct and bycatch, by species and gear type); *because assessing the sustainability of demand depends upon understanding levels of exploitation;*
- b) names and contact details of government department(s) responsible for maintaining syngnathid landings statistics; *because the long-term conservation of syngnathids depends upon ongoing monitoring of levels of exploitation;*
- c) a description of bottom trawl fleets including size of fleet, size of boats, gear type (mesh size, net size), regions and depths of operation, target catches and bycatch, and other variables (see the

Annex as an example of a data sheet); *because bottom-trawling is known to pose a significant threat to syngnathid populations.*

III. Trade

Information on the nature and magnitude of trade is a cornerstone of effective syngnathid conservation. Parties should be requested to provide the following:

- a) a list of relevant trade codes, permit processes and other legislation for import, export, and re-export of live and dried syngnathids; *because compiling appropriate global trade data requires an understanding of regional coding systems;*
- b) trade statistics for import, export, and re-export of live and dried syngnathids, for as many years as possible; *because assessing the sustainability of syngnathids depends upon understanding current and historical trade levels;*
- c) names and contact details of government department(s) responsible for maintaining syngnathid trade statistics; *because the long-term conservation of syngnathids depends upon ongoing monitoring of levels of trade supported by a global network of key authorities.*

IV. Domestic measures for syngnathid conservation and protection and their assessment

Parties may currently have in place legislation and carry out management initiatives relevant to syngnathid conservation. These should be documented and their effectiveness assessed. They include:

- a) legislation specific to syngnathids and legislation potentially affecting syngnathids (e.g. fisheries closed seasons, fisheries gear restrictions, marine protected areas, licensing requirements for aquaculture projects); *because developing appropriate measures for the long-term conservation of syngnathids depends upon understanding existing relevant legislation;*
- b) national syngnathid or coastal resource conservation projects; *because developing appropriate measures for the long-term conservation of syngnathids requires an understanding of existing conservation efforts;*
- c) evaluations of current management and enforcement capacity for relevant fisheries and trade legislation.

Comments from the Secretariat

4. The Secretariat generally welcomes this input but is concerned that requests of similar detail have previously met with relatively poor response rates from the Parties. The Committee is accordingly invited to comment on the collection of information in the light of the recommendations made (and on a possible agenda and list of participants for a technical workshop to review such information).

Example of a data sheet for providing descriptions of fishing fleets

Home harbour of fleet (location): _____

Number of boats in fleet: _____

Average size of boats (m or tonnage): _____

Gears: mesh size stretched: _____ net length: _____ net width: _____

Average duration of fishing trips: _____

Number of trips / month and months fished per year: _____

Depth of fishing: _____

Distance from shore: _____

Approximate area fished (km²): _____

Habitat fished (seagrass, sand etc.): _____

Species caught as target: _____

Species caught as bycatch: _____