

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



Twenty-fifth meeting of the Animals Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 18-22 July 2011

Sturgeons and paddlefish

SECRETARIAT'S REPORT

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.
2. In Resolution Conf. 12.7 (Rev. CoP14) on *Conservation of and trade in sturgeons and paddlefish* the Conference of the Parties, "directs the Secretariat to provide at each meeting of the Animals Committee a written report, including references to relevant documents, on its activities related to the conservation of and trade in sturgeons and paddlefish". The present document is the third such report and covers the period from April 2009 to April 2011. An oral update will be given of activities undertaken since 1 May 2011, when this document was prepared.

Export quotas

3. Concerning annual export quotas:

Quotas from 01/03/09 to 28/02/10

- a) No changes were made following the Secretariat's report submitted at the 24th meeting of the Animals Committee (Geneva, April 2009).

Quotas from 01/03/10 to 28/02/11

- b) After receiving the information required under paragraph a) in the second RECOMMENDS of Resolution Conf. 12.7 (Rev. CoP14), the Secretariat was able to publish [export quotas for caviar and meat](#) of certain species from the shared stocks in the Caspian Sea, details of which can be found on the CITES website. For the same period, for the shared stocks in the Amur/Heilongjiang River and in NW Black Sea and lower Danube river, the Secretariat did not receive the required information. Consequently, in accordance with paragraph a) v) of Resolution Conf. 12.7 (Rev. CoP14), a zero export quota was published. However, for the latter shared stock, Ukraine did notify the Secretariat of a zero export quota, in accordance with paragraph c) in the second RECOMMENDS of Resolution Conf. 12.7 (Rev. CoP14), and this was duly published.

Quotas from 01/03/11 to 29/02/12

- c) With the exception of Ukraine, which again notified the Secretariat of a zero export quota, the Secretariat did not receive the required information. Therefore a zero export quotas has been published for all shared stocks in accordance with paragraph a) v) of Resolution Conf. 12.7 (Rev. CoP14). In December 2010, Canada advised the Secretariat that they intended to establish an export quota for *Acipenser oxyrinchus* caviar originating from the Saint John River/Bay of Fundy stock which is shared with the United States of America. At the time of writing the present document, discussions are ongoing with these Parties over the publication of such a quota and with Romania which requested publication of export quotas for fertilized eggs from a number of species produced in aquaculture.

The evaluation of the assessment and the monitoring methodologies used for shared stocks

4. This matter is dealt with in document AC25 Doc. 16.2.

Regional cooperation for shared stocks of sturgeons

5. In addition to the information which must be submitted by exporting Parties in response to the second RECOMMENDS of Resolution Conf. 12.7 (Rev. CoP14), the Secretariat was sent copies of the minutes of the 30th session and 31st sessions of the *Commission on Aquatic Bioresources of the Caspian Sea* (Bandar Anzali, 15 to 16 July 2009 and Tehran, 14 to 16 May 2010, respectively). The Secretariat also received the summary of the *China-Russia Fishery Specialist Negotiation Meeting of Amur River and Wasulijiang River* (Harbin, 9 to 12 November 2009). The Secretariat received an invitation to attend the *IVth regional meeting on sustainable management of sturgeons of NW Black Sea and lower Danube river* (Sarulesti, Romania, 9 to 11 February 2011), but was unable to attend.

Trade controls and enforcement

5. The Secretariat has no matters to raise in relation to the caviar trade database. It continues to encourage relevant Parties to supply copies of permits and certificates to UNEP-WCMC on a regular basis and in a timely manner.
6. The Secretariat continues to maintain the [Register of licensed exporters and of processing and repackaging plants for specimens of sturgeon and paddlefish species](#) called for in Resolution Conf. 12.7 (Rev. CoP14). It has, however, no way of monitoring whether the information recorded is current and accurate. It recently became aware, for example, of a company that was not registered but which was advertising caviar for trade. In this case, it brought the matter to the attention of the relevant Party. It is important, therefore, that Parties review information on the CITES website, ensure it is accurate, and advise the Secretariat of any necessary amendments, additions or deletions.
7. A Technical Workshop on Combating Illegal Sturgeon Fishing and Trade was co-organized by the CITES and FAO Secretariats in Antalya, Turkey, from 28 to 30 September 2009. This was an attempt to bring together the Caspian Sea littoral States to discuss enforcement-related matters. Whilst the workshop was regarded by its participants, and the two Secretariats, as having been useful and successful, it was significantly hampered by the absence of representatives of the Russian Federation, whose Management Authority did not respond to invitations. The report of the workshop, in English and Russian, was provided at the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (Doha, 2010) as information document [CoP15 Inf. 47](#).
8. In comparison with previous years, the Secretariat has received relatively little intelligence relating to illegal trade in caviar. Its contacts in the caviar industry suggest that this is because of:
 - a) the increasing difficulty for poachers to find any significant numbers of gravid females; and
 - b) the demand for caviar being supplied by the current extensive aquaculture operations, which are now spread throughout many parts of the world.

This latter aspect has resulted in poachers and illegal traders finding it difficult to compete in the existing market. It is several years since the Secretariat received any information from sturgeon range States about poaching or illegal trade. The Secretariat's enforcement-related staff, who not so long ago devoted very significant amounts of time in assisting the combating of illegal trade in caviar, now spend hardly any time on this matter. Whilst the Secretariat is aware that seizures of illegal-origin caviar continue to take place, those it learns of appear to be in countries of transit or destination and are much smaller than in previous years. From time to time, it learns of suspicious advertisements of caviar on the Internet and brings these to the attention of relevant Parties. Caviar, however, continues to be a very expensive commodity and demand for it does not appear to have lessened. A kilogram of high-quality caviar retails in Geneva for almost USD 10,000.

Conclusion

9. Despite the best efforts of the CITES community, it appears that the goal of legal and sustainable harvest of caviar, especially in its historical centre of the Caspian Sea, to a level anywhere near what was achieved in the past, appears unattainable for the present. It was noted in the Antalya workshop that the current domination of aquaculture in caviar supply may soon make it difficult for caviar from wild sturgeon

populations to find a place in the international market. This reduces the incentives for conservation of wild stocks. Crime, corruption and a lack of political will have perhaps created bigger obstacles to sturgeon recovery than any physical obstructions which prevent fish accessing their traditional spawning grounds.

10. The Committee is invited to note the contents of this report.