

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

Fiftieth meeting of the Standing Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 15-19 March 2004

Interpretation and implementation of the Convention

ASIAN BIG CATS

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.
2. At its 12th meeting (Santiago, 2002), the Conference of the Parties (CoP12) adopted Decision 12.30:

Each range State Party should consider ways in which local communities might be encouraged to play a part in, and benefit from, the conservation of Asian big cats and their habitats, for example through eco-tourism. Each range State should prepare a report on its approach to this matter for the 49th meeting of the Standing Committee, so that concepts and initiatives can be shared among relevant Parties.

3. Before the 49th meeting of the Standing Committee (Geneva, April 2003), only China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar and the Republic of Korea had submitted reports. Thailand reported during the meeting. The Committee agreed that this subject should be placed on the agenda of its 50th meeting.
4. The Secretariat issued reminders to those range States that had not submitted reports and Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, India and Nepal have subsequently reported. Although the report from Afghanistan is very brief, the Secretariat wishes to record its appreciation for the document, which it believes to be the first occasion that this Party has ever submitted a report since it became a Party to the Convention in 1986.
5. The majority of reports received by the Secretariat stress the importance of addressing the issue of conflict between big cats and humans and livestock. This continues to be a major cause of the illegal killing of big cats. However, India and Nepal made special reference to the subject of eco-tourism. In both States, efforts are made to include local people in work related to tourism activities, such as guides, vehicle operators, and in restaurants, hotels and souvenir shops. In India, eco-tourism and the involvement of local communities is incorporated in its national wildlife plan and strategy. Nepal requires commercial activities related to tourism to return part of the revenue to local communities; something previously noted by the CITES Tiger Missions Technical Team as commendable. It appears that India and Nepal remain the best examples among Asian big cat range States of how local communities can play a part in, and benefit from, the conservation of Asian big cats. It is disappointing, therefore, that both countries remain troubled by poaching of these species.
6. Poaching of and illicit trade in Asian big cats remains a significant problem. Although, for example, there have been important seizures made whilst shipments were being smuggled out of India and into China, many of the final destinations and markets remain unknown. The Secretariat did, however, note the presence of clothing using big cat skins on sale in

the markets of Lhasa during its mission to China in relation to Tibetan antelope and this was addressed in its report to the Government of China.

7. The International Fur Trade Federation has recently confirmed to the Secretariat its commitment against the use of skins of big cat species listed in Appendix I of the Convention and offered to supply any information that its members may have regarding illicit trade.
8. The involvement of United Nations peacekeeping forces in the purchase of big cat skins as souvenirs or for decorative purposes, and their subsequent movement across borders in violation of the Convention, also remains of concern. This is particularly the case in relation to, for example, snow leopard skins acquired in Afghanistan. The Secretary-General of CITES has written to the head of peacekeeping missions at UN headquarters in New York, United States of America, and to the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Belgium, alerting them to such violations. In the case of NATO, this communication was made just after it assumed responsibility for operations in Afghanistan. A positive response was received from both organizations, indicating that peacekeeping troops will be reminded that they are not exempt from the provisions of the Convention.
9. The Secretariat's mission to China regarding Tibetan antelope, and the recommendations made in its subsequent report, should also benefit enforcement of the Convention in relation to Asian big cat species. Immediately prior to its mission to China, the Secretariat visited Bhutan, an important range State for a number of big cat species, and has subsequently supplied material that can be used by the authorities there in training their wildlife law enforcement personnel.
10. Lack of funding has prevented further meetings of the CITES Tiger Enforcement Task Force, which the 12th meeting of the Conference of the Parties agreed should expand its remit to include all Asian big cat species. However, it is hoped that a member or members of the Task Force will be able to participate in the planned expert group meeting that the Secretariat is to organize to discuss enforcement issues. The Secretariat will report on the expert group meeting at the 50th meeting of the Standing Committee.

11. At CoP12 the Conference also adopted Decision 12.31:

The Standing Committee shall continue to review the progress in range and consumer States that were earlier subject to CITES Technical and Political Tiger Missions to ensure that recommendations made by the Missions continue to be implemented.

12. The Secretariat is not aware of any major outstanding issues for the Committee to consider at its 50th meeting with regard to this Decision.
13. The Secretariat has, however, one remaining issue to address that was raised by the Tiger Mission Technical Team that visited Thailand. This relates to trade in specimens of Appendix-I species to zoos. Discussions on this subject have taken place between the Secretariat, the Chairman of the Animals Committee and the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums but these have yet to be completed. The Secretariat is also conscious that Cambodia, Mongolia, the Russian Federation, Sri Lanka, Uzbekistan and Viet Nam have yet to comply with Decision 12.30. Reminders were sent to these Parties in October 2003 and the relevant regional representatives to the Standing Committee were also contacted and asked to encourage the submission of reports. The Secretariat notes, however, that the Russian Federation had previously reported to the Standing Committee upon the subject of eco-tourism in relation to tiger conservation and the Committee may wish to regard this as

being sufficient. The Secretariat will, of course, report orally upon any further reports that are received after the time this document is prepared (December 2003).

14. At CoP12 the Conference adopted Decision 12.32:

The Standing Committee shall report at the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties upon the progress made by the range and consumer States of Asian big cat species. The report may contain recommendations regarding appropriate measures where no progress has been made.

Recommendation

15. The Secretariat proposes that the Standing Committee adopt the following recommendation:

The Secretariat should report to the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties on compliance with Decision 12.30, the issue relating to trade with zoos and on any other significant new information it receives.

16. The Secretariat believes that this document and the report referred to in the above recommendation should form the basis of the Standing Committee's report to the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties on the subject of Asian big cats. The Secretariat is not aware, at this time, of any Party that is failing to address the conservation of Asian big cats in such a manner as to require recommendations to be made by the Standing Committee.