

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Division of Scientific Authority
Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
(CITES)
Record of Advice on Export Permit Application

Application number: 45611d Date DSA: 6/21/2019
DMA Contact: Robert Williams
Applicant: [REDACTED]
Specimens and species: One live, wild-caught oceanic manta rays (*Manta birostris*)
Source of Specimens: Wild harvest
Recipient: [REDACTED]
Type of permit: Appendix II export

ADVICE

After examining the above permit application, we find that the proposed export will
not be detrimental to the survival of the species,

Background

The genus *Manta* was listed in CITES Appendix II (CoP16 Prop. 46) on June 12, 2013 with an effective implementation date of September 14, 2014 (UNEP 2019). Trade in this genus is primarily for the gill plates which are sold for use in traditional Chinese medicine but there is also some live trade for use in the aquarium industry and artisanal use as food. While Manta ray species are commercially targeted, this species also occurs as bycatch in net fisheries. Like *Mobula* rays, which are also targeted and caught as bycatch, Manta species are also known for large feeding and reproductive aggregations where they can easily be harvested in groups. The *Manta* spp. listing includes one other recognized species, the reef manta (*Manta alfredi*) and a putative species *Manta c.f. birostris*. Prior to the listing in CITES, harvest for the international trade in the species gill plates was largely unregulated. A single, mature *Manta birostris* can yield up to seven kilos of dried gills and this commodity retails for as much as \$680 (US) per kilo in China (CoP16 Prop. 46).

Manta birostris is a species with a highly fragmented population structure made up of numerous small subpopulations containing fewer than 1,000 individuals each. These subpopulations occur circumglobally in tropical, subtropical and temperate waters and the species is believed to

potentially be highly migratory, although data indicates there appears to be little genetic transfer between geographic regions (Marshall et al. 2018). The putative species, *Manta c.f. birostris*, is believed to be a regional endemic which is found throughout the Gulf of Mexico, the Caribbean and the East Coast of the United States. While few of the subpopulations have been studied, it is believed that the species' global population is declining with harvest pressure being the main factor in this decline. Directed and bycatch harvest is especially devastating to this species due to its biological characteristics which include the production of a single pup each year and its tendency to aggregate for feeding and reproduction and during visits to "cleaning stations" where individuals are cleaned of parasites by groups of small cleaner wrasse species. Species specific information is limited but it is believed that the species is relatively long-lived with females maturing at between eight and 10 years of age and living to approximately 40 years. In the initial 2011 assessment, and in the revised 2018 IUCN Red List Assessment, this species was evaluated as Vulnerable (Marshall et al. 2018; CoP16 Prop. 46).

In Florida, wild-caught marine life is regulated by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, Florida Division of Marine Fisheries Management as authorized in Chapter 68B-42 of the Florida Administrative Code (<https://www.flrules.org/gateway/ChapterHome.asp?Chapter=68B-42>). These codes outline regulations which must be followed in order to legally harvest marine life in Florida waters. Under Florida regulations, *Manta birostris* is included in the Florida Marine Prohibited Species Policy (FWC Rule 68B-8.009, F.A.C) that prohibits harvest without a special, state issued permit. These codes also indicate that those who commercially harvest marine species in Florida waters are required to possess a Commercial Saltwater Products License (SPL) with the Restricted Species (RS) and Marine Life Dive Permit (MLD) endorsements. Wholesalers and retailers are required to obtain separate Saltwater Products Licenses.

Basis for advice

1) The applicant, [REDACTED], requests authorization to export one live, wild-caught oceanic manta rays (*Manta birostris*), to [REDACTED]. This specimen will be put on public exhibit in the facilities' aquarium.

2) [REDACTED] is a Federally Licensed Wildlife Importer/Exporter and is properly licensed in Florida with a valid SPL including the RS and MLD endorsements. They also hold current Florida Saltwater Products Wholesale and Retail licenses. In addition, they maintain a current Florida Saltwater Products Vessel Decal for each of their three harvesting vessels. The applicant therefor holds all permits required by the Florida Division of Marine Fisheries Management to harvest various marine life in Florida waters. The applicant has also obtained a special species-specific permit which allows them to legally harvest the Manta ray referenced in this permit.

3) The specimen to be exported is native to United States waters in the Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean; in Florida the species can be found in all its coastal waters. The specimen will be collected from the wild, in the area of Panama City (Gulf coast), under Florida permitting

and licensing authority, only after this export permit has been issued. The specimen will be harvested by rod and reel fishing and is expected to have a wingspan of 7 to 10 feet in width when harvested. To ensure that the specimen is acclimated to captivity, once collected, the specimens will be maintained at the [REDACTED] for up to eight weeks prior to shipment.

Based upon the information provided in this application, we find that the harvest and export of one specimen of oceanic manta ray (*Manta birostris*) will **not be detrimental** to the survival of the species.

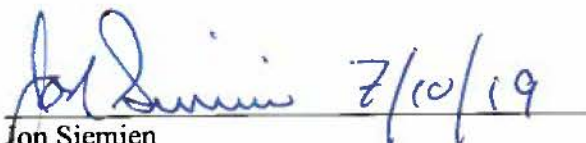
References


CoP16 Prop. 46. 2013. Proposal to include the genus *Manta* (including *Manta birostris*, *Manta alfredi* and any other possible species of *Manta*) in Appendix II of CITES. Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)-Sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties. 32 pp. Online at: <https://www.cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/cop/16/prop/E-CoP16-Prop-46.pdf>. [Accessed 9 July 2019].

FWC Rule 68B-8.009, F.A.C. September, 2009.
(http://myfwc.com/media/290191/SAL_MarineProhibitedSpeciesPolicy.pdf).

Marshall, A., Bennett, M.B., Kodja, G., Hinojosa-Alvarez, S., Galvan-Magana, F., Harding, M., Stevens, G. & Kashiwagi, T. 2018. *Mobula birostris* (amended version of 2011 assessment). *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* 2018: e.T198921A126669349.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2018-1.RLTS.T198921A126669349.en>. Downloaded on 09 July 2019.

UNEP. 2019 The Species+ Website. Nairobi, Kenya. Compiled by UNEP-WCMC, Cambridge, UK. Species+ Database for: *Manta birostris*. On the World Wide Web at: (https://www.speciesplus.net/%23/taxon_concepts/11277/references)


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