

UK CITES Management Authority
Temple Quay House,
2, The Square, Temple Quay,
Bristol BS1 6EB

Telephone 0117 372 8685
Direct Line 0117 372 8685
Fax 0117 372 8373
Email cites.ukma@defra.gsi.gov.uk
Website www.defra.gov.uk



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To All CoP13 Delegates and Observers

The growing trade in tiger and other Asian big cat skins and the need for increased enforcement, cooperation and intelligence sharing between India, Nepal and China

In October 2003 the seizure in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) of a single consignment of 31 tiger skins, 581 leopard skins and 778 otter skins, revealed the shocking extent and scale of an illegal trade that has been escalating in the last five years.

The TAR seizure is the largest in a series of incidents that have occurred in India, Nepal and China in recent years. Between 1999 and the August 2004 confirmed reports put the number of seized skins at; 81 tiger skins and 1062 leopard skins. These are only the substantiated seizures and do not take into account unverified reports of skin seizures. Nonetheless, it reveals the frightening tip of the iceberg with the volume of skins actually in trade likely to be significantly higher.

Information gathered by enforcement officers indicates that there is a growing and sophisticated network of international criminals behind the trafficking of skins.

Whilst the Parties should be commended for the seizures that have been made, there is a need for more effective communication and cross-border enforcement to disrupt the growing networks of criminals who are behind the burgeoning skin trade.

The CITES Tiger Enforcement Task Force (TETF) currently provides a mechanism through which intelligence exchange and joint actions can be co-ordinated. However, as noted in CoP12 Doc.27 and reiterated in CoP13 Doc.23 the lines of communication between CITES Parties, the Secretariat and international law enforcement agencies could be improved. It is essential that information is passed between the relevant enforcement agencies in a timely manner and that clearly defined and stable routes of communication are opened between the authorities in India, Nepal and China.

In order to tackle the growing illegal trade in tiger and leopard skins between India, Nepal and China it is essential that these Parties appoint professional enforcement representatives for a special meeting of the TETF during which relevant intelligence can be exchanged and improved mechanisms for communication and cooperation developed.

In light of the above information the United Kingdom / European Union urges the 13th Conference of the Parties to CITES to adopt the following draft Decisions relating to Asian Big Cats.

Decision 13.xx

Directs the CITES Tiger Enforcement Task Force to concentrate its efforts on combating the international illegal trade in the skins of Asian Big Cat species, particularly the tiger and leopard. Particular attention should be given to the establishment of effective mechanisms and agreements for improved cross-border cooperation and the swift and accurate exchange of intelligence.

Directs the CITES Secretariat to coordinate the activities of the CITES Tiger Enforcement Task Force in this regard and report to the CITES Standing Committee on progress in relation to this matter, as per the current terms of reference for the Tiger Enforcement Task Force.

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