



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



Online workshop on E-Permitting for CITES Parties in West Asia

25 November 2020



I. Introduction

The workshop was a follow-up to a previous meeting for selected Parties in the West Asian region, held in July 2020 (see the [CITES website](#) for the report) and responded to the specific need expressed at the meeting. It was co-organized by the CITES Secretariat and the United Nations Environment Programme – Regional Office for West Asia and attended by representatives from the following Parties: Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. The Chair of the Standing Committee (SC) Working Group on Electronic systems and information technologies (Switzerland) as well as representatives from United National Conference on Trade and Development and UN Economic Commission for Europe participated as resource persons, presented their relevant work complemented by presentations from Parties in the region. A short discussion followed the presentations. All presentations were shared with workshop participants. The list of participants and the agenda are included in annexes 1 and 2 to the present report.

In the context of the current pandemic, the CITES Secretariat has seen increasing interest expressed by the Parties in the implementation of the electronic permit system. In addition to being more secure, electronic or automated permitting systems allow for remote and paperless handling of permits, making the permit application and issuance more efficient. The purpose of the workshop was to discuss challenges and opportunities of e-permitting systems and exchange national experiences.

Participants expressed multiple expectations to the workshop:

- to obtain a good understanding of the e-permitting system
- to understand the benefits of its implementation
- to get feedback from countries in the region
- to know the challenges, costs of development, best practices and case studies, as well as the errors to be avoided during its deployment.

II. Presentations

Switzerland

Mr. Matthias Lörtscher (Switzerland), Chair of the SC Working Group on Electronic systems and information technologies, recalled that the Working Group continues to cooperate with relevant partners to further develop joint projects to facilitate Parties' access to electronic permitting services and their alignment with international trade standards and norms. The Working Group also works with relevant partners on Electronic Permit Information eXchange (EPIX) to facilitate the expeditious electronic exchange or verification of CITES-permit data among Management Authorities. He then presented the e-permitting system in place in Switzerland which had reduced the administrative resources and time required to issue standard permits, provided up-to-date trade information, improved risk-based trade controls and made trade more secure and less prone to falsification.

eCITES

Ms. Haruko Okusu (Chief, Outreach and Projects, CITES Secretariat) presented the role of an electronic permit system in the context of an interconnected world to regulate legal international trade in CITES species in a fluid and transparent manner, allowing law enforcement agencies to focus on illegal trade.

There may be multiple challenges at the national level in adopting such a system (e.g. different sectors and ministries involved in licensing, regulatory changes, cost recovery issues when licensing volumes are low); the Covid-19 situation has however led to a growing interest in the digitalization of permits.

The electronic permit system can be developed through the implementation of a 4-step project:

1. ePermit: automating the process from application to issuance of permits
2. eControl: integrating border agencies
3. eReporting: generating CITES annual reports based on the permits issued and used
4. eExchange: exchanging information between the authorities of different countries.

The benefits of such a system are multiple: faster permit issuance and approval, reduced opportunities for fraud, quality data collection, and an integrated cross-border process by facilitating the scheduling of inspections.

Bahrain

Mr Ali Mansoor (CITES MA) said that their CITES e-permitting system, which is in place since October 2020, allows permit application to be made online on the website of the Supreme Council for Environment of the Kingdom of Bahrain. Guidelines are provided for each section of the permit to be completed, and the name of the species is directly linked to the CITES database, thus avoiding any mistakes in the scientific name of the species. Once approved, the permit is emailed to the applicant for self-printing. In addition, the system includes a reporting application that allows the generation of accurate data on permits issued and annual reports in accordance with CITES requirements. Overall, this new system saves time and effort in the issuance of permits and annual reports.

United Arab Emirates

Ms. Alya Harib Mubarak (CITES MA) indicated that the CITES e-permitting system in place in the country is divided into the following four categories: import/Exports, Falcons, Ownership and Other services. Application for permits can be made online on the Ministry of Climate Change and Environment website. Tutorials are provided for each category of permit to be completed, and the system is also equipped with a live chat allowing applicants to be assisted during the process. The UAE has integrated the Ministry of Finance into the process (allowing applicants to pay online) as well as the Federal Authority for Identity and Citizenship. Recently, a hub for digital certificates and permits (with QR Code) was launched, with a plan to extend this process to CITES permits and certificates by the end of the year.

eCITES BaseSolution

Mr. John David (UNCTAD) indicated that the eCITES BaseSolution developed by the CITES Secretariat and UNCTAD, is a cloud-based release of the eCITES system which provides electronic permit processing functionality to Parties, integrated with ASYCUDA or as a stand-alone. The eCITES BaseSolution can be deployed in three different ways:

1. National implementation: the national eCITES system is installed in the beneficiary country, and UNCTAD provides trainings for technical assistance for implementation. The operation and the functional administration and maintenance of the system are the responsibility of the national authorities;

2. Regional implementation: the national eCITES system is installed in one of the countries of the region. The responsibility of the functional/technical administration and maintenance of the national eCITES system are the responsibility of the CITES regional organization or ASYCUDA Regional support center;
3. Hosted solution: the national eCITES system is hosted by UNCTAD in the framework of a technical assistant agreement and the operation and the functional administration of the national eCITES system are the responsibility of the national CITES MA/SA.

Sri Lanka launched the eCITES system in February 2020 using the third of these options.

UNCTAD provides a default standard eCITES system considered necessary for all Management Authorities, which can be adapted via an "augmented solution" for the specific needs of a Management Authority in a particular country.

Electronic Permit Information Exchange (EPIX)

Mr. Markus Pikart (Co-Chair of the EPIX Task Force (UNECE)) indicated that the EPIX is a mechanism to facilitate the rapid electronic exchange or verification of CITES-Permit data among Management Authorities in near-real time through a secure website. The EPIX allows Management Authorities to submit online queries on permits issued by either their own or other Management Authorities and provide near-real time access to permit information to CITES Enforcement Authorities to enable them to verify permit details, therefore aiding the identification and prevention of fraudulent use of permits. UNECE and ESCAP have set up a Task Force for electronic CITES permit exchanges through which the Parties meet once a month to plan and coordinate EPIX pilots, and share experiences or issues encountered. West Asian Parties are invited to join this group if they are interested.

III. Discussion - Q & A

During the discussions, questions from participants focused on the security of permits in case of self-printing, the possibility of using HS codes to facilitate communication between the Management Authorities and the Customs Officers on the scientific names of species, and the possibilities of support from the CITES Secretariat.

IV. Evaluation questionnaire

The evaluation questionnaire sent to participants after the workshop revealed the importance of holding such discussions so that authorities in the same region can learn from each other's experience and coordinate to harmonize their permitting system. While most of the participants' expectations were met in addition to various aspects of the workshop (pace and content), some pointed out the lack of time to develop certain aspects of the electronic system during the discussions. On the other hand, the main challenges identified by the participants concern the design of the database files and the links between the different electrical systems that can be implemented by other partners at the national level. Some participants also expressed concerns about the next steps for the implementation of an electronic system in their countries. The United Nations Environment Programme - Regional Office for West Asia and the CITES Secretariat will make every effort to address the concerns of Parties in this particular context of health crisis and thereafter.

V. Additional assistance upon request

The CITES Secretariat supports the efforts of Parties in adopting eCITES procedures and exchanges, ensuring that permits comply with various data standards, key layout specifications and coding conventions. The Secretariat also provides direct advisory support to interested Parties, and may explore cost-effective solutions (ASYCUDA eCITES BaseSolution) and pilot projects on cross-border exchange of electronic CITES permits.

For more information and queries, Parties are invited to contact the CITES Secretariat.

VI. Materials

- CITES Website - eCITES (<https://cites.org/eng/prog/eCITES>)
- ASYCUDA eCITES BaseSolution (<https://ecites.asycuda.org/>)
- IPPC ePhyto (<https://www.ephytoexchange.org/>)
- Electronic signature in CITES permits and certificates: [SC70 Doc. 39 Annex 1](#) and [Decision CoP 18.125 e.](#)

Annex 1 – List of Participants

Organization / Country	Name	Title
Bahrain	Ali Mansoor Abbas	Representative of CITES Management Authority
Iraq	Samer Adnan	National focal point for CITES
Jordan	Abdel Razzaq Al-Hmoud	Director of Wildlife Enforcement Division and Head of CITES Management
Kuwait	Sharifa Al-Salem	Head of Wildlife Monitoring section
	Makiya Mohammad Albaghli	Environment Public Authority
	Alanoud Mohammad Almesbah	Environment Public Authority
	Bedoor Mohammad Alqanoor	Environment Public Authority
	Sarah Ali Almutairi	Environment Public Authority
Lebanon	Georges Phrem (absent for logistical reasons)	Ministry of Agriculture
Oman	Saleh Al Saadi	Director of Biodiversity and CITES Management Authority
	Salim Sameer Bait Bilal	Head of Biodiversity Development Section
	Zahra Salim AL habsi	Nature Reserves Specialist
Qatar	Taleb Khalid R. Al-Hajri	Director of Protection and Wildlife Department Head of CITES Management Authority
	Ali Saleh Al Marri	Enforcement Focal Point, Ministry of Municipality and Environment
	Nasser M Al Mansoori	Scientific Authority, Ministry of Municipality and Environment
Saudi Arabia	Abdullah Ahmed Alhakami	Head of CITES Management Authority
	Zaid Saad Alnofaiey	V. Head of CITES Management Authority
	Sultan Abdullah Alsulaimi	Member of CITES Management Authority
	Saleh Ibrahim Alhomidan	Member of CITES Management Authority
	Fuzaan Mohammed Qaisy	Member of CITES Management Authority
Syria	Eng. Belal Hayek	Director of Biodiversity, Land and National Reserve, and Head of CITES Authority
	Eng. Omayma Rihan	National Focal Point CITES
United Arab Emirates	Muna Omran Al Shamsi	Acting Director, Biodiversity Department, Ministry of Climate Change and Environment
	Ahmed Mashli	Ministry of Climate Change and Environment
	Sumaia Abdulrahim Al Rais	Ministry of Climate Change and Environment

Organization / Country	Name	Title
	Alya Harib Mubarak	Ministry of Climate Change and Environment
	Shaikha Ali Al Dhaheri	Ministry of Climate Change and Environment
Yemen	Omer A . Baeshen	Director, CITES Unit
Switzerland (WG Chair)	Matthias Loertscher	Head, Species Protection and Third Country Imports Department, Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office
UNCTAD	Renaud Massenet	Senior Coordination Officer
UNCTAD	Constantin Ciuta	Representative UNCTAD
UNCTAD	John David	Representative UNCTAD
UNECE	Markus Pikart	Economics Affairs Officer
CITES Secretariat, Geneva	Haruko Okusu	Chief, Knowledge Management and Outreach Service
CITES Secretariat, Geneva	Sofie H. Flensburg	Legal Adviser
CITES Secretariat	Elodie Moulin	Legal Officer (Consultant)
UNEP, West Asia	Etaf Chehade	Programme Management Officer, Healthy and Productive Ecosystems Subprogramme
UNEP, West Asia	Awatif Abdulla	Programme Management Assistant

Annex 2 – Agenda of the workshop

AGENDA

1. Opening remarks by CITES Secretariat and UNEP
 - Sofie H. Flensburg - Legal Advisor, CITES Secretariat
 - Etaf Chehade – Programme Management Officer, Healthy & Productive Ecosystems Sub-programme, UNEP West Asia
2. Opening statement by the Chair of the Standing Committee Working Group on Electronic systems and information technologies
 - Mathias Loertscher - Head, Species Protection and Third Country Imports Department, Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office
3. Introduction of the participants (expectations and challenges)
4. Introduction to eCITES by the CITES Secretariat
 - Haruko Okusu - Chief of Knowledge Management and Outreach Service, CITES Secretariat
5. Presentation by two Parties in the region already implementing e-permitting (Bahrain – UAE)
6. Presentation of eCITES Base Solution by UNCTAD
 - Constantin Ciuta – Customs Advisor, UNCTAD
 - John David – Information System Officer, UNCTAD
7. Introduction to Electronic Permit Information Exchange (EPIX) by the co-Chair of the EPIX Task Force (UNECE)
 - Markus Pikart, Economic Affairs Officer, UNECE
8. Discussion - Q & A