

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



Thirty-second meeting of the Animals Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 19-23 June 2023

Regulation of trade

Trade in stony corals (Scleractinia spp.)

REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE ANIMALS COMMITTEE

1. This document has been prepared by the Chair of the Animals Committee*.
2. At its 19th meeting (CoP19, Panama City, 2022), the Conference of the Parties adopted Decisions 19.177 and 19.178 on *Trade in stony corals (Scleractinia spp.)* as follows:

Directed to the Animals Committee

19.177 *The Animals Committee shall:*

- a) *taking into account document CoP19 Doc. 46 and its Annex, provide advice on possible amendments to Resolution Conf 11.10 (Rev. CoP15) on Trade in stony corals, in consultation with coral reef nations and coral reef experts, and report with recommendations to the Standing Committee;*
- b) *make recommendations, as necessary, to revise the Guidelines for the preparation and submission of CITES annual reports and Guidelines for the preparation and submission of the CITES annual illegal trade report, to ensure that they provide sufficient clarity on the use of appropriate terms and units for trade in stony corals; and*
- c) *in consultation with coral reef nations and coral reef experts, provide advice on the conversion factors used to analyse trade in corals for the CITES Review of Significant Trade process and report to the 20th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.*

Directed to the Standing Committee

19.178 *The Standing Committee shall:*

- a) *review any proposed amendments to Resolution Conf. 11.10 (Rev. CoP15) on Trade in stony corals from the Animals Committee; and*
- b) *review any recommendations from the Animals Committee with regard to Decision 19.177, paragraph b), and make its own recommendations, as appropriate.*

* *The geographical designations employed in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the CITES Secretariat (or the United Nations Environment Programme) concerning the legal status of any country, territory, or area, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The responsibility for the contents of the document rests exclusively with its author.*

Background

3. Document [CoP19 Doc. 46](#), which was submitted to CoP19 by the European Union and its Member States, presented several issues in relation to trade in stony corals, including “confusion in relation to what ‘coral rock’ means, what forms of coral rock are subject to the provisions of the Convention and how coral rock should be reported in trade”.
4. The document proposed that the *Guidelines for the preparation and submission of CITES annual reports* may need to be amended to provide additional clarification that coral rock (live rock) should not be reported as LIV, and that all live rock and substrate should be reported as COR to allow for more effective analysis of levels and patterns of trade. Furthermore, the document highlighted some coral identification challenges and the need for additional guidance materials. Finally, Annex 1 to the document proposed amendments to Resolution Conf. 11.10 (Rev. CoP15) on *Trade in stony corals* to address the issues raised and is included as an Annex to this document for ease of reference.
5. In order to implement Decision 19.177, there is a requirement for the Animals Committee to consult with coral reef nations and coral reef experts. In this regard, the Animals Committee may wish to consider requesting the Secretariat to issue a notification to the Parties on its behalf, inviting coral reef nations and coral experts, to provide comments on the following:
 - a) possible amendments to Resolution Conf 11.10 (Rev. CoP15) on *Trade in stony corals*;
 - b) possible revisions to the *Guidelines for the preparation and submission of CITES annual reports* and *Guidelines for the preparation and submission of the CITES annual illegal trade report*;
 - c) the conversion factors used to analyse trade in corals for the CITES Review of Significant Trade process; and
 - d) any other issues that the Committee considers to be relevance that may arise during its deliberations at this meeting.

Recommendations

6. The Animals Committee is invited to:
 - a) draft a notification to the Parties, seeking advice from coral reef nations and coral experts, in the implementation of Decision 19.177 and request the Secretariat to publish the Notification on behalf of the Committee; and
 - b) establish an intersessional working group with a mandate to:
 - i) consider the responses to the Notification to the Parties referred in paragraph a) above;
 - ii) make recommendations on trade in stony corals, including possible amendments to Resolution Conf 11.10 (Rev. CoP15), and the *Guidelines for the preparation and submission of CITES annual reports* and *annual illegal trade reports*;
 - iii) provide advice on conversion factors used to analyze trade in corals for the CITES Review of Significant Trade process; and
 - iv) present its findings to the 33rd meeting of the Animals Committee.

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO
RESOLUTION CONF. 11.10 (REV. COP15) ON *TRADE IN STONY CORALS*

Conf. 11.10

Trade in stony corals

(Rev. CoP15)

AWARE that stony corals (in the orders Scleractinia, as well as non-scleractinian corals within the genera *Distichopora, Heliopora, Millepora, Stylaster* and *Tubipora*, ~~Helioporacea, Milleporina, Scleractinia, Stolonifera, and Stylasterina~~) are in international trade as intact specimens for aquaria and as curios;

RECOGNIZING that coral rock, fragments, sand and other coral products are also traded;

NOTING the unique nature of corals, namely that their skeletons are persistent, that they may become mineralized in time and that they are the foundation of reefs, and that, following erosion, fragments of coral may form part of mineral and sedimentary deposits;

NOTING also that coral rock may act as an important substrate for the attachment of live corals and that the removal of rock may have a detrimental impact on reef ecosystems;

AWARE, however, that coral rock can ~~not only~~ be readily identified ~~other than~~ to the order Scleractinia, or in the case of non-scleractinian corals, to the genus level (*Distichopora, Heliopora, Millepora, Stylaster* or *Tubipora*), and that accordingly non-detriment findings under Article IV, paragraph 2 (a), of the Convention cannot be readily applied;

NOTING however, that for practical purposes of implementing the Convention, all coral rock can be reported in trade as "Scleractinia spp." irrespective of whether the coral rock contains Scleractinian corals, non-scleractinian corals, or a mixed composition, for ease of identification and reporting.

NOTING that Article IV, paragraph 3, requires the monitoring of exports of specimens of each species in Appendix II, in order to assess whether the species is being maintained at a level consistent with its role in the ecosystem;

NOTING that assessments under Article IV, paragraph 3, of the impacts of harvesting corals on the ecosystems from which they are derived cannot be adequately made by monitoring exports alone;

ACCEPTING that coral fragments and coral sand cannot be readily recognized;

RECOGNIZING also that it is usually difficult to identify live or dead corals to the species level owing to the lack of a standard nomenclature and the lack of comprehensive and accessible identification guides for the non-specialist;

RECOGNIZING that stony corals that are fossilized are not subject to the provisions of the Convention;

NOTING that it has been difficult to apply and enforce the provisions of the Convention to trade in corals;

THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION

1. ADOPTS the working definitions of coral sand, coral fragments, coral rock, live coral and dead coral provided in the Annex to this Resolution;
2. RECOMMENDS that Parties give much greater emphasis to the implementation of Article IV, paragraph 3, when permitting the export of corals and that they adopt the principles and practice of an ecosystem

approach, rather than relying on the monitoring of exports alone; and

3. URGES:

- a) interested Parties and other bodies from range and consumer States to collaborate and provide support, coordinated by the Secretariat, to produce as a priority accessible and practical guides to recognizing corals and coral rock in trade and to make these widely available to Parties through appropriate media; and
- b) Parties to seek synergy with other multilateral environmental agreements and initiatives to work for the conservation and sustainable use of coral reef ecosystems.

Annex

Definitions

Coral sand – material consisting entirely or in part of finely crushed fragments of dead coral no larger than 2 mm in diameter and which may also contain, amongst other things, the remains of Foraminifera, mollusc and crustacean shell, and coralline algae. Not identifiable to the level of genus. In accordance with Resolution Conf. 9.6 (Rev. CoP16) on Trade in readily recognizable parts and derivatives, coral sand is not considered readily recognizable, and is therefore not covered by the provisions of the Convention.

Coral fragments (including gravel and rubble) – unconsolidated fragments of broken finger-like dead coral and other material between 2 and 30 mm measured in any direction, which is not identifiable to the level of genus. In accordance with Resolution Conf. 9.6 (Rev. CoP16) on Trade in readily recognizable parts and derivatives, coral fragments are not considered readily recognizable, and are therefore not covered by the provisions of the Convention.

Coral rock¹ (the collective term used for ~~also~~ live rock and substrate) – hard consolidated material, >3 cm in diameter, formed of fragments of mostly/partly unidentifiable specimens of dead coral and which may also contain cemented sand, coralline algae and other sedimentary rocks. The term 'coral rock' should not be used on permits; which should instead refer to 'live rock' or 'substrate'. Unlike fossil corals, 'coral rock' is harvested from living coral reef ecosystems, mostly from shallow reef flats near the shoreline at less than 1 m depth.

'Live rock' is the term given to large pieces of coral rock (usually > 1 kg each) to which are attached live specimens of invertebrate species and coralline algae not included in the CITES Appendices. Live rock should not be covered by CITES-listed coral species. Live rock is used as decoration and habitat in aquariums and is usually and which are transported in moist condition, in order to keep the attached organisms alive., but not in water, in crates. Live rock is subject to the provisions of the Convention.

'Substrate' is the term given to small pieces of coral rock (usually < 0.5 kg each), to which are attached invertebrates (of species not included in the CITES Appendices. Substrate is used as pedestal (base) for attached invertebrates, such as sea anemones or soft corals and is therefore and which are transported in water to keep these organisms alive, like live corals. Substrate should not be covered by CITES-listed live or dead coral. Coral rock is not identifiable to the level of genus but is recognizable to the level of order. The definition excludes specimens defined as dead coral. Whether substrate is subject to the provisions of the Convention depends on Parties interpretation of fossil coral; Parties that consider substrate to be fossilized coral do not consider it to be subject to the Convention's provisions.

Dead coral – pieces of coral that are dead when exported, but that may have been alive when collected, and in which the structure of corallites (the skeleton of the individual polyp) is still intact; specimens are therefore identifiable to the level of species or genus.

Live coral – pieces of live coral transported in water and that are identifiable to the level of species or genus.