

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



Nineteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties
Panama City (Panama), 14 – 25 November 2022

Strategic matters

IMPLICATIONS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC
ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.

Background

2. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted States around the world, including all CITES Parties. It significantly disrupted everyday life and with it, in all probability, the implementation of CITES for many Parties. The possible disruption to the implementation of the Convention from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic followed the disruption caused by the last-minute rescheduling and relocation of the 18th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP) and associated meetings of the Standing Committee (SC) in 2019 after the tragic events which occurred in Sri Lanka on 21 April 2019. On that occasion, the Secretariat observed that contingency plans for the Convention in the event of an emergency situation were not as well-developed as they could have been, and that Parties may need to consider the need for the Convention to be better prepared in the future for unplanned eventualities. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced this impression.
3. Measures taken by governments to halt the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic have had various impacts. These measures led to restrictions on the ability of employees to attend their place of work; restrictions on the numbers of people gathering together at meetings; and international travel restrictions, caused by lack of transportation possibilities, quarantine obligations or border controls.
4. The present document aims to summarize the actions of Parties and the Secretariat in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic; review the impacts of the pandemic on the ability of the Convention bodies to implement the Convention; and consider possible responses to such events in the future. The present document builds on two previous documents shared with the Standing Committee during the intersessional period. The first document was posted on the CITES website on 28 January 2021 as information document [SC2021 Doc. 1](#) and included information received in response to Notification to the Parties [No. 2021/013](#). The Secretariat received comments on the first document from three Parties and seven non-governmental organizations and these comments were considered in the preparation of the second document (see document [SC73 Doc. 15](#)) discussed by the Standing Committee at its 73rd meeting (SC73, online, May 2021).
5. This present document furthermore includes information gathered by the Secretariat based on three online surveys carried out to obtain information relating to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the work of the Management and Scientific Authorities and enforcement focal points; the experiences of the Committee members, Parties and other observers that participated in the first ever online meetings of the Standing Committee (SC), Animals Committee (AC) and Plants Committee (PC) in 2021; and the experiences of the Committee members, Parties and observers that attended the first face-to-face meeting of the Standing Committee in 2022 after the 2020/2021 COVID-19 pandemic period during which no face-to-face CITES meetings took place.

National CITES authorities

6. The Secretariat launched a survey in March 2021 to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the work of the Management and Scientific Authorities and enforcement focal points (Notification to the Parties [No. 2021/025](#)). The Secretariat received 109 responses from 52 Parties across all six regions (Africa: 12; Asia: 12; Central and South America and the Caribbean: 11; Europe: 12; North America: 3 and Oceania: 2). 61% of the responses received were from CITES Management Authorities, 22% from CITES Scientific Authorities, six percent (6%) from enforcement agencies, and the remainder from non-governmental organisation and other observers. It should be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic period covered by the survey most likely only covers the impact experiences in 2020 and up to April 2021 (the deadline for submission of the survey).
7. Respondents completed the questionnaire based on the main area of work impacted on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the respondents completed the questions associated with the impact of COVID-19 on their work environment with the majority indicating that they were moderately impacted in their work environment and worked from home for a period of 1 to 3 months. More than 80% of respondents that had to perform duties from home had access to some basic equipment (computer, internet connectivity) required to fulfil some of their duties and responsibilities and e-mail was the communication tool used most by respondents, followed by mobile phones and messaging services. Two-thirds of the respondents indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic did result in slower processing times and responses to enquiries.
8. The main responses on the following areas covered by the questionnaire include:

a) Coordination between national governmental authorities implementing and enforcing the Convention

Most of the respondents indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic made it somewhat more difficult to implement and enforce the Convention and that the pandemic had a moderate impact on the coordination between national governmental authorities implementing and enforcing the Convention. Reasons provided included resource constraints, challenges associated with effective communication and the impact on inspections due to movement restrictions associated with national lockdowns.

b) Issuance and verification of permits and certificates; making of legal acquisition findings and non-detriment findings; and inspection of consignments and other CITES documentation

Respondents indicated that issuance and verification of permits were moderately impacted but 80% of the respondents indicated that the number of permits issued decreased. Most of the respondents indicated that legal acquisition findings were moderately impacted and that the making of non-detriment findings were either very or moderately impacted by COVID-19 measures. Restrictions relating to movement to carry out field work, access to information and challenges associated with consultation with relevant stakeholders contributed to these impacts. Only a few respondents indicated that the ability of enforcement agencies to inspect consignments and other CITES documentation were extremely impacted, while most of the respondents indicated it was moderately impacted. In terms of inspections, respondents indicated that in some instances verification had to be done through photos of the consignments and accompanying documentation because staff were not allowed to do inspections in person. Most of the respondents also indicated that imports, exports and re-exports decreased in 2020, according to data available to them. Reasons stated included closure of ports; the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; reduced transport; and delays in permitting. Future analysis of the international trade transactions during this period may be of interest to determine overall impact on levels of international trade.

c) Reporting obligations

None of the respondents indicated that the ability of the Management Authority to fulfil its Party's reporting obligations were extremely impacted. Two-thirds reported that the preparation of the annual trade report was negatively impacted, while more than half of the respondents indicated that the preparation of the annual illegal trade report was negatively impacted. All respondents indicated that the preparation of the implementation report was negatively impacted. Reduced resources, lockdown measures, delays in capturing information and challenges associated with the available bandwidth to transmit data were recorded as aspects associated with the COVID-19 pandemic that impacted the

ability of Management Authorities to fulfil reporting obligations. Respondents indicated that the Secretariat should expect delays in reporting and deadlines should be extended.

d) *Participation in face-to-face international meetings (any type of conference, seminar, workshops, etc.)*

More than half of the respondents' ability to participate in face-to-face international meetings was extremely impacted and more than 80% of respondents attended no face-to-face meetings in 2020. More than half of the respondents participated in between 1 - 6 online international meetings in 2020. 80% of respondents indicated that they had to defer some of their work because of their inability to participate in face-to-face workshops and other meetings, whether at national or international level. The respondents that indicated that they did not have to defer some of their work indicated that they used tools such as online meeting platforms, group chats and messaging systems. In response to a question relating to the actions the Secretariat can take to further progress the work assigned to CITES Committees in the absence of face-to-face meetings, respondents indicated that the facilitation of work through intersessional working groups and online meetings should be continued. The regional online information sharing sessions (regional preparatory meetings) prior to the Standing Committee meetings were specifically mentioned and considered valuable in preparing for the meetings. Proposals to further facilitate online meetings included establishing an agreed online platform with guidance on how to use it being made available on the CITES website for Parties; the provision of interpretation in all online meetings; and supporting Parties that do not have good internet connectivity.

e) *Participation in working groups and other consultations of the CITES Standing Committee, Animals and Plants Committees*

More than a two-thirds of the respondents indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their ability to participate in working groups and other consultations of the Standing Committee, Animals Committee and Plants Committee. Reasons cited include that the discussion time was limited due to intense schedules; lack of interpretation in online platforms; increased pressure due to reduced human resources and due to lockdowns and adjusted working hours. Thoughts shared by respondents relating to measures to be implemented to improve engagements included creating chat sites for chairs of intersessional working groups to engage members of the working group (rather than through long e-mails); and initiating the work of the intersessional working groups earlier with the Secretariat providing more assistance in managing the timelines.

f) *Preparation of proposals to amend Appendices I and II*

Most of the respondents indicated that the preparations of proposals to amend Appendices I and II were moderately impacted, and that the COVID-19 pandemic made it somewhat more difficult to prepare amendment proposals because of reduced resources, staff being on sick leave, limited engagements with experts and other stakeholders and impacts on coordination mechanisms. More than 50 proposals to amend the Appendices I and II were submitted for consideration by the 19th meeting of the Conference of Parties (CoP19) which is in line with the average number submitted over the last six meetings of the Conference of the Parties.

9. The World Trade Statistical Review 2021 (World Trade Organization, 2021) reported that the COVID-19 pandemic led to merchandise trade declining by 8 percent in 2020. The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on goods and services differed, with services declining by 30 per cent in the second quarter of 2020 compared with a fall of 23 percent for goods in the same period. The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on international trade in specimens of CITES-listed species will only be known when the annual reports for 2020 are submitted and based on the responses above, delays in the submission of annual reports should be anticipated. At the time of writing this document, 137 annual reports for 2020 were received, of which 32 were submitted in 2022 (number of reports for previous years: 2019 – 160; 2018 – 167 and 2017 – 168). The possible impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international trade transactions involving CITES-listed species in 2020 could be better understood if a comparative analysis is done to determine if there were any changes.

Governing bodies and scientific advisory committees of CITES

10. Despite the pandemic having a significant impact on the face-to-face meetings of the Standing Committee (SC), Animals Committee (AC) and Plants Committee (PC) and their intersessional work, the Committees managed to implement some of the Decisions directed to them through:

- a) intersessional decision-making procedures provided for in the Rules of Procedures of the committees (lengthy processes taking 70 days for the SC and 65 days for the AC and PC),
- b) the establishment of intersessional working groups (SC: 17 working groups; AC and PC: 6 each) that addressed prioritized and complex matters through electronic means; and
- c) online intersessional meetings.

Intersessional work and online meetings

11. Concerning decision-making in relation to the convening of intersessional meetings of the committees, Article XII of the Convention charges the Secretariat to arrange for and service meetings of the Parties and to perform any other function as may be entrusted to it by the Parties. In doing so, the Secretariat must follow the United Nations' rules and regulations. In the face of unexpected events, the Secretariat sought the advice of the Standing Committee as the latter is charged in paragraph 2 of Annex 1 to Resolution Conf. 18.2, *inter alia*, with providing operational direction to the Secretariat concerning the implementation of the Convention between meetings of the CoP; coordination and advice as required to the other committees; and such interim activities on behalf of the CoP as may be necessary, including advising on emerging operational issues identified by Parties or the Secretariat until direction on the matter is provided by the CoP. Throughout 2020 and 2021, the Secretariat thus provided advice to and sought guidance from the Standing Committee in relation to its meetings and those of the Animals and Plants Committees.
12. Following extensive deliberations between the Chairs and members of the Standing, Animals and Plants Committees and the Secretariat, it was confirmed that the face-to-face 73rd meeting of the Standing Committee (SC73), the 31st meeting (AC31) of the Animals Committee and the 25th meeting (PC25) of the Plants Committee would not take place as originally scheduled (see Notification to the Parties No. 2020/045 of 29 May 2020).
13. Led by their Chairs, the Standing Committee, Animals Committee and Plants Committees developed actions to advance their work intersessionally. To support the Standing Committee in advancing its work, the Secretariat prepared [22 documents](#) during the intersessional period to provide updates on progress made on specific matters. Several intersessional working groups were established by the committees and their mandates and membership published on the CITES website and shared with Parties through Notifications (AC Notification [No. 2020/057](#) of 22 September 2020; PC Notification [No. 2020/056](#) of 21 September 2020; SC Notification [No. 2020/081](#) of 22 December 2020 and Notification [No. 2021/031](#) of 8 April 2021). As indicated above, the Committees also made intersessional decisions to address several matters (see the reports of the Chairs of the Committees in documents CoP19 Doc. 9.1.1; CoP19 Doc. 9.2.1 and CoP19 Doc. 9.3.1).
14. After further deliberations between the Chairs and members of the Standing, Animals and Plants Committees and the Secretariat, it was decided to hold online meetings in 2021. SC73 took place from 5 to 7 May 2021; AC31 took place from 31 May to 22 June 2021, with a break to allow working groups to carry out work through online means; and PC25 took place from 2 to 24 June 2021 also with a break to allow working groups to carry out work through online means. These were the first online Committee meetings of the Convention. In addition to training sessions on the use of online meeting platforms, the Secretariat prepared *Guidance on the application of the Rules of Procedures of the Committees* (see information documents [SC73 Inf. 1](#) and [AC31/PC25 Inf. 1](#)).
15. At SC73, Parties expressed their views on online and hybrid meetings and although a preference for face-to-face meetings was expressed, it was acknowledged that online meetings were an option as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (see summary record [SC73 SR](#)). The importance of transparency and equal access for Parties and observers to CITES meetings was raised and therefore the organization of hybrid meetings was not favoured. Some Parties indicated that hybrid meetings should be held only in exceptional circumstances and that exceptional circumstances should be clearly defined.
16. Aside from fair and equitable access, the timing of online meetings with global participation is challenging. Realistically, the sessions of such meetings can only last two to three hours and even then, participants in some regions would be required to join at very early or late hours.
17. After the online meetings, the Secretariat carried out a survey to obtain feedback on the organization of these online meetings. The survey was completed by 170 respondents covering all six regions. The majority of respondents indicated that they were somewhat or very satisfied with the overall proceedings of the online

meetings (Figure 1). While most respondents indicated that they were somewhat or very satisfied with the decision-making process during online meetings of the Standing Committee and the Animals Committee, the majority was neutral relating to decision making processes during the online Plants Committee meeting (Figure 1). Concerns raised by respondents relating to online proceedings included internet connectivity limitations and time limitations that did not allow for adequate discussion on difficult and sensitive matters. Compared to face-to-face meetings, the respondents felt that an online meeting was somewhat worse than a face-to-face meeting in terms of allowing contribution to debates. Respondents found the livestreaming of the meetings very useful and thought that future CITES meetings (whether face-to-face or online) should be livestreamed.

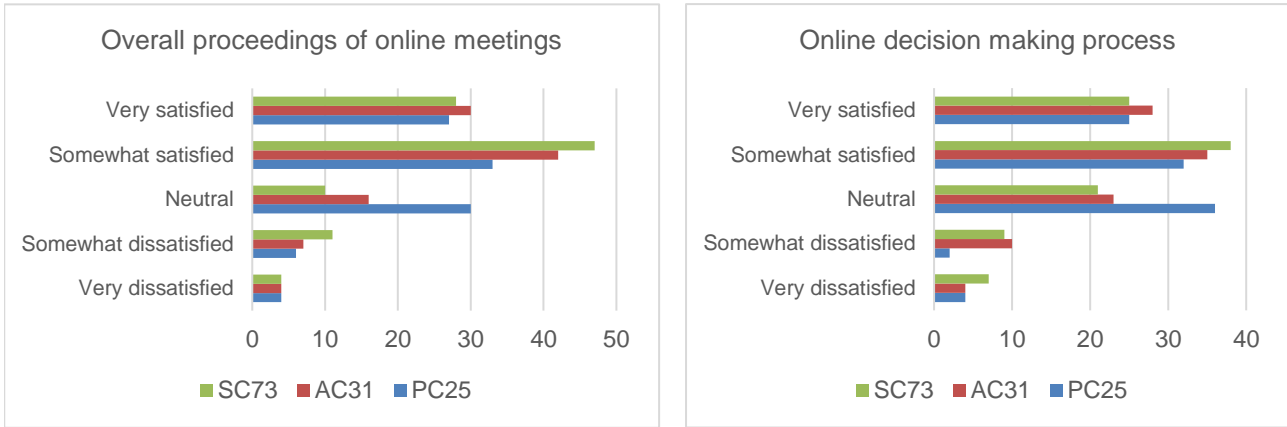


Figure 1: Responses to survey questions relating to overall proceedings and decision-making during the online meetings (SC73, AC31, PC25)

18. Survey respondents were somewhat or very satisfied with all elements associated with the logistical arrangements of the online meetings, including registration; training prior to the meeting; technical support and interpretation. The respondents were also of the view that three-hour online sessions were the right amount of time for a session of an online meeting, but that the SC73 meeting should have run over a greater number of days to cover the agenda. With regards to the AC/PC online meetings, the two-week break was considered enough for organizing, holding and concluding the work of the working groups.

19. The Secretariat reviewed the participation of Parties at regular meetings of the SC, AC and PC in the two intersessional periods between CoP16 and CoP17 and CoP17 and CoP18 and the participation in the online SC, AC and PC meetings in the intersessional period between CoP18 and CoP19. During that period, 73 Parties (40%) did not attend any of the regular meetings of SC, AC or PC. This may be due to a lack of interest or relevance but is also likely to be related to the cost of attending meetings in locations where the travel costs are significant, and the cost of living is high. On the other hand, at SC73, a total of 15 Parties that had not attended any SC, AC or PC meetings since CoP16 were able to join: five Parties from Africa (Eritrea, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania and Seychelles), four Parties from Asia (Jordan, Myanmar, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen), two Parties from Central and South America and the Caribbean (Dominican Republic and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), one Party from Europe (Armenia), and three Parties from Oceania (Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Tonga). At AC31 and PC25, three Parties that had not attended any SC, AC or PC meetings since CoP16 were able to join (Côte d'Ivoire, Montenegro and Togo). As the overall participation numbers since 2014 show (see Figure 2 below), while there has been a steady increase in participation over the years, that number rose sharply when participants were able to join online in 2021.

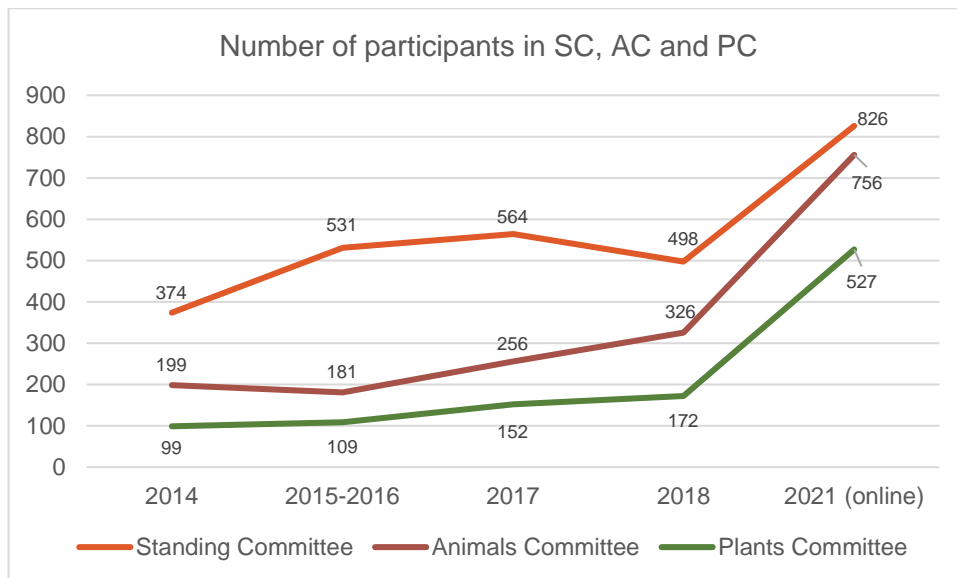


Figure 2: Number of participants in SC, AC and PC since 2014.

Face-to-face meeting: SC74

20. In December 2021, the Secretariat presented to the Standing Committee an informal briefing ([aide-memoire](#)), including a risk assessment, to inform a decision on whether to hold the 74th meeting of the Committee in Lyon thanks to a generous offer by France. The Standing Committee agreed to meet face-to-face to finalize its work and prepare recommendations for consideration by the 19th meeting of the Conference of Parties. A re-assessment of the risks was undertaken by the Secretariat in consultation with the SC Chair early in February 2022 and the meeting took place from 7 to 11 March 2022 (SC74, Lyon, France).
21. The Secretariat conducted another survey after SC74 and although the venue was not considered ideal mainly due to the limited space available, respondents were very satisfied with the other logistical arrangements including the livestreaming of the meeting. Due to the continued concerns associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, the host country, France, and the Secretariat prepared a COVID-19 prevention policy which was explained in a guidance document. Most of the respondents (89%) indicated that they did familiarize themselves with the guidance document. With regards to suggestions for improving the handling of COVID-19 risks at CITES meetings, the main aspects raised by respondents was the maintenance of social distancing. The wearing of masks in the meeting venue was required during SC74 and respondents recommended that this should be a requirement for future meetings as well. The Secretariat noted these suggestions and will take it into consideration in preparations for CoP19.

Back-up reservations

22. In case of unforeseen events affecting meetings of the CoP, the Secretariat has always held a backup reservation at the CICG (Centre International de Conférences Geneva) in Switzerland. However, cancelling these reservations too close to the actual meeting dates results in very significant penalty charges and so they are normally cancelled well ahead of the date of the planned CoP, leaving the risk of unexpected events occurring after cancellation, but before the date of the meeting. The CICG introduced new requirements relating to reservations, increasing the risks associated with incurring high cancellation costs (18 months before the event: 10% of hire charge; 12 months before the event: 25%; 6 months before the event: 50%, and less than 3 months prior to the event: 100% of hire charge). Provision for cancellation due to force majeure that includes situations where the Swiss Confederation requires lockdowns as during the COVID-19 pandemic was however included.
23. Enquiries made during 2020 have revealed that standard United Nations Special Events insurance and Malicious Acts insurance which apply to events held by the Secretariat are too limited in scope to be useful in the sorts of circumstances that occurred in relation to the planned CoP18 in Sri Lanka and the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the significant cost associated with the cancellation of reservations and the challenges in securing insurance to assist in covering cancellation costs, the Secretariat is of the view that online meetings should be considered as the most feasible and cost-effective means to discuss urgent matters to be addressed by committees and the Conference of Parties if face-to-face meetings are not possible.

Volume of work directed to committees

24. The volume of instructions given to the committees at CoPs should however also be taken into consideration since this has increased substantially (see Table 1 below). The role and significance of committee meetings has thus increased accordingly, resulting in significant impacts if face-to-face meetings cannot be held. Resolution Conf. 18.1 affirms that no more than two regular meetings of each of the three committees should be convened between regular meetings of the CoP. However, it is a challenge to implement the instructions even in the absence of extraordinary events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1: Decisions directed to the SC and scientific committees since 2010

Decisions directed to	CoP15 (2010)	CoP16 (2013)	CoP17 (2016)	CoP18 (2019)
Animals Committee	15	19	31	40
Plants Committee	20	12	26	27
Standing Committee	30	49	79	86
Secretariat	57	60	129	122
Parties and others	36	56	87	95
Total¹	126	196	352	357

25. The increase in workload for the committees has reinforced the need for them to begin work as soon as possible after the closing of a meeting of the CoP. The Standing Committee holds a short formal meeting at the close of each meeting of the CoP. Originally, this was merely to elect its officers, but more recently it has been used to embark on some planning of its intersessional activities, even if it is difficult to know the full extent of these immediately after CoP. As provided for in their Rules of procedure, the AC and PC Members (or their Alternates) present gather after each CoP to elect their Chair and Vice-Chair. They have also used these occasions to informally start their intersessional work planning. However, these can be handicapped by the fact that not all of the individual experts who are members of the committees attend meetings of the CoP.
26. Online meetings may offer one way to get better engagement in the work of the Convention from a wider range of Parties. Conducting some of the committees' intersessional business online in future would also contribute to the Convention's efforts to reduce its carbon footprint.

CITES Secretariat

27. As employees of the United Nations, the staff of the Secretariat have been following guidance issued by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) and regulations established by the federal and local authorities of the host country, Switzerland. Secretariat staff have been primarily working from home from March 2020 to April 2022, with some periods in between (June – October 2020) when staff were allowed to return to the office based on strict safety protocols in line with the requirements of the United Nations and Swiss authorities and subject to limitations on the number of persons in the building where the Secretariat's offices are situated. Internal communications were maintained through email, Microsoft Teams, Signal and other secure means. The Secretariat's general telephone number and email address (info@cites.org) continued to function as normal and all staff were able to assist Parties through their direct office telephone number and email addresses as usual.
28. In terms of meeting organization, the Secretariat exchanged experiences with UNEP Senior Management and UNEP-administered Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs); fellow members of the Liaison Group of the Biodiversity-Related Conventions and of InforMEA; with the International Annual Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications (IAMLADP) and the UN Governing Bodies

¹ The total number of Decisions adopted at each meeting of the Conference of the Parties is lower than the sum of the Decisions directed to the AC, PC, SC, Secretariat and Parties and others because some Decisions are directed to two entities at the same time, for instance to the Animals and Plants Committees.

Secretariats forums. In particular, this exchange of information and experiences enabled the Secretariat to have a better understanding of the possibilities and constraints of using online and hybrid meetings, including legal and procedural aspects.

Key lessons learned and next steps

National CITES authorities

29. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted some activities of the CITES Management and Scientific Authorities and enforcement focal points and the full impact on international trade transactions will only be known if a comparative analysis is done.
30. Internet connectivity remains a challenge for some Parties, and this limits the ability of the affected Parties to effectively participate in online meetings and discussions. If face-to-face meetings are not feasible, facilitation of work through intersessional working groups and online meetings should be used to move work forward, but support to enhance participation in these online meetings should be provided by the Secretariat as was done during the online meetings in 2021 (training sessions, regional preparatory meetings, support for the communication costs of committee members whilst participating in online meetings, where needed). Any online meetings need to be spread over several consecutive days and agendas would need to be restructured accordingly.

Governing bodies and scientific advisory committees of CITES

31. The need for better contingency measures to be put in place in case of eventualities, such as the restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic is clear. The structured risk assessment implemented intersessionally to inform decisions relating to face-to-face meetings was useful and formalizing the approach will assist in guiding processes in the future, when needed.
32. The Secretariat has developed the capacity to organize and facilitate online meetings that includes interpretation using various online platforms. The Secretariat successfully organized various online meetings during the intersessional period, including workshops for Parties in West Asia on the National Legislation Project and on e-permitting; meetings of the SC's intersessional advisory group on Malagasy palisanders and rosewoods (*Dalbergia* spp.) and ebonies (*Diospyros* spp.); the Task Force on illegal trade in specimens of CITES-listed tree species; an online meeting of range, transit and consumer States of totoaba; and MIKE Sub-regional Steering Committee meetings for west and eastern Africa. Chairs of intersessional working groups of the Standing Committee and the scientific committees also organized online sessions to discuss matters associated with their respective mandates. Online meetings therefore present a valuable tool that can assist in moving intersessional work forward. There may be a need to review the Rules of Procedures of the committees as well as the financial support provisions to ensure they adequately provide online and hybrid meetings. Draft decisions in this regard are proposed by the Secretariat.
33. In case of unforeseen events affecting meetings of the Committees, online meetings could be organized to address the urgent matters and decisions can be taken through the electronic procedures provided for in the Rules of Procedure of the Committees, even though it takes considerably longer. There is however a need to consider whether Rules of Procedures for online meetings should be agreed on. The key issues in paragraph 30, and the costs associated with online meetings should also be taken into consideration. Draft decisions directed to the Secretariat and the committees have been prepared by the Secretariat for consideration by CoP19 to further discuss these matters intersessionally.
34. Livestreaming of governing body meetings (CoP and SC) and scientific advisory body meetings (AC and PC) should be provided for and the necessary funds allocated in the Trust Fund to cover the costs. Hybrid meetings (combination of face-to-face and online participation) should be considered in exceptional circumstances and these circumstances should be clearly defined. The Secretariat is of the view that provision should be made for the participation of Parties affected by compliance procedures [see Resolution Conf. 14.3 (Rev. CoP18) on *CITES compliance procedures*] discussed at Standing Committee and Animals and Plants Committee meetings and who are not able to attend a face-to-face meeting and furthermore cannot be represented by the Permanent missions. The Secretariat therefore propose a draft decision directed to the Secretariat, the Standing Committee and the Animals and Plants Committees to discuss and agree on the interpretation of exceptional circumstances.

Recommendations

35. The Conference of Parties is invited to:

- a) review the allocation of funds in the Trust Fund to make provision for livestreaming of governing body and scientific advisory body meetings, tools for online and hybrid meetings, if required, and allow greater financial flexibility and contingency measures to cater for unplanned situations; and
- b) adopt the draft decisions contained in Annex 1 to the present document to:
 - i) develop guidance on a structured, risk-assessment approach for the Standing Committee to follow to determine the best course of action if intersessional work and meetings are affected by emerging operational issues, such as those experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and referred to in paragraph 2 g) of Annex 1 to Resolution Conf. 18.2;
 - ii) develop guidance on the exceptional circumstances under which Parties participation in a face-to-face meeting of the Standing Committee and the scientific advisory bodies will be facilitated through a hybrid meeting option;
 - iii) review the Rules of Procedures of the committees established by the CoP to consider whether adjustments are needed to permit and facilitate online and hybrid meetings and decision-making where these are required and agreed.

DRAFT DECISIONS ON *EMERGING OPERATIONAL MATTERS OF THE COMMITTEES*

Directed to the Secretariat

19.AA The Secretariat shall:

- a) prepare a document for consideration by the Standing Committee containing information relating to the risk-assessment approaches implemented by the Secretariat to determine the best course of action if intersessional work and meetings are affected by emerging operational issues, such as those experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and referred to in paragraph 2 g) of Annex 1 to Resolution Conf. 18.2;
- b) prepare a document for consideration by the Standing Committee, Animals Committee and Plants Committee reflecting the Secretariat's understanding of the exceptional circumstances under which a hybrid-option will be made available to Parties to facilitate participation in a face-to-face meeting of the Standing Committee, Animals Committee and Plants Committee; and
- c) based on the guidance provided to the committees relating to the use of the Rules of Procedures for the online meetings of the 73rd meeting of the Standing Committee, 31st meeting of the Animals Committee and 25th meeting of the Plants Committee, provide the Standing Committee, Animals Committee and Plants Committee with a document highlighting the provisions in the Rules of Procedure that may require further consideration for online and hybrid meetings.

Directed to the Animals and Plants Committees

19.BB The Animals and Plants Committees shall:

- a) taking into account the document prepared by the Secretariat under Decision 19.AA, paragraphs b) and c),
 - i) consider the exceptional circumstances under which a hybrid-option will be made available to Parties to facilitate participation in a face-to-face meeting of the Animals and Plants Committees; and
 - ii) consider whether adjustments to Rules of Procedures of the committees are required to facilitate online and hybrid meetings and decision-making where these are required and agreed; and
- b) propose amendments to Resolution Conf. 18.2 on *Establishment of committees* and their Rules of Procedure, as appropriate, to the 20th meeting of the Conference of Parties.

Directed to the Standing Committee

19.CC The Standing Committee shall:

- a) develop and adopt guidance on a structured, risk-assessment approach to be followed to determine the best course of action if intersessional work and meetings are affected by emerging operational issues, such as those experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic and referred to in paragraph 2 g) of Annex 1 to Resolution Conf. 18.2. In developing this guidance, the Standing Committee will consider the document developed by the Secretariat under Decision 19.AA.
- b) develop and adopt guidance on the exceptional circumstances under which a hybrid-option will be made available to Parties to facilitate participation in a face-to-face meeting of the Standing Committee. In developing this guidance, the Committee will consider the document prepared by the Secretariat under Decision 19.AA; and

- c) review the Rules of Procedures of the Standing Committee, taking into account the document developed by the Secretariat under Decision 19.AA, to consider whether adjustments are needed to permit and facilitate online and hybrid meetings and decision-making where these are required and agreed.

**TENTATIVE BUDGET AND SOURCE OF FUNDING
FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DRAFT RESOLUTIONS OR DECISIONS**

According to Resolution Conf. 4.6 (Rev. CoP18) on *Submission of draft resolutions, draft decisions and other documents for meetings of the Conference of the Parties*, the Conference of the Parties decided that any draft resolutions or decisions submitted for consideration at a meeting of the Conference of the Parties that have budgetary and workload implications for the Secretariat or permanent committees must contain or be accompanied by a budget for the work involved and an indication of the source of funding.

The Secretariat proposes the following tentative budget and source of funding relating to the recommendation in paragraph 35. a) (estimated cost associated with livestreaming and hybrid meeting options):

Recommendation	Activity	Indicative costs (USD)	Source of funding
35. a): review the allocation of funds in the Trust Fund to make provision for livestreaming of governing body and scientific advisory body meetings, tools for online and hybrid meetings, if required, and allow greater financial flexibility and contingency measures to cater for unplanned situations	Livestreaming of governing body and scientific advisory body meetings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 Animals Committee meetings • 2 Plants Committee meetings • 2 Standing Committee meetings 	USD12,000 per meeting (Total – USD72,000)	CITES Trust Fund
	Online and hybrid meetings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 Animals Committee meetings • 2 Plants Committee meetings • 2 Standing Committee meetings 	USD10,000 per meeting (excluding interpretation already provided for) (Total - 6 meetings: USD60,000)	CITES Trust Fund

The Secretariat considered that the implementation of the Decisions proposed in Annex 1 have implications for the work of the Secretariat and the permanent committees that can be absorbed in the existing allocated budgetary and human resources.