

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

Species specific matters

Marine turtles (Cheloniidae spp. and Dermochelyidae spp.)

CONSERVATION OF MARINE TURTLES

1. This document has been submitted by Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Peru and the United States of America.\*

Background

2. Marine turtles (Cheloniidae spp. and Dermochelyidae spp.) were first included in the CITES Appendices in 1975 out of concern that hundreds of thousands of marine turtles were being killed annually due to demand in international trade of marine turtle shells, meat, calipee and skin. By 1981, all seven marine turtle species in families Cheloniidae and Dermochelyidae were included in Appendix I: loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*), green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), Kemp's ridley turtle (*Lepidochelys kempii*), olive ridley turtle (*Lepidochelys olivacea*), flatback turtle (*Natator depressus*), and leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*).
3. In the years following the inclusion of all marine turtles in Appendix I, CITES Parties considered and rejected proposals to reopen the international trade. Some CITES Parties began to focus on marine turtle farms and ranches as a possible way to reopen commercial trade. After years of debate over this issue, CITES Parties adopted Resolution Conf. 9.20 on *Guidelines for Evaluating Marine Turtle Ranching Proposals Submitted Pursuant to Resolution Conf. 3.15* in 1994. The current version is Resolution Conf. 9.20 (Rev.) on *Guidelines for evaluating marine turtle ranching proposals submitted pursuant to Resolution Conf. 11.16 (Rev. CoP15)*. No proposals to transfer marine turtle populations have been submitted since CoP12.
4. Despite the prohibition on international trade for commercial purposes under CITES, marine turtle populations suffered declines as use, demand, and illegal trade continued in these species. The status of hawksbill turtles was of particular concern in the Caribbean region, and in 2009, in response to Decision 14.86, the CITES Secretariat commissioned the Secretariat of the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC) to convene a meeting to discuss the conservation, management and use of hawksbill turtles in the wider Caribbean.
5. The meeting, held in Puerto Morelos, Mexico, in September 2009, produced a list of 15 objectives, structured by five main threats, as a regional conservation program for the hawksbill turtle, including strategies and actions intended to enhance the viability of populations and minimize the effects of identified threats. The meeting results were summarized in document CoP15 Doc. 50.
6. In 2013, the IAC Secretariat was asked to update the information presented in CoP15 Document 50 and based on this information, the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties adopted Decision 16.127, encouraging implementation of the outstanding recommendations arising from the 2009 regional workshop.

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\* 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.

7. At SC66 in 2016, information on the illegal take of and trade in marine turtles was provided in SC66 Inf. 7 (“A report on illegal take of and trade in marine turtles”). This document, which was prepared by the Secretariat of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Marine Turtles and their Habitats of the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia (IOSEA Marine Turtle MoU) and the Secretariat pro tempore of the IAC, showed that all species of marine turtles are at risk from the impacts of illegal take and trade. However, the extent of these activities was largely unknown and could not be quantified.
8. At CoP17, Decisions 17.222 and 17.223 were adopted, calling for the Secretariat to collaborate with the Secretariats of the IAC, Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) – in particular the IOSEA Marine Turtle MoU – and other relevant organizations and multilateral agreements to undertake a study on the legal and illegal international trade in marine turtles. These decisions also called for the Secretariat to encourage communication and coordination among CITES and other relevant agreements to ensure compatibility of activities, optimize resources and enhance synergies. CoP17 also adopted Resolution Conf. 17.4 on demand reduction strategies to combat illegal trade in CITES-listed species, which urges Parties where there is a significant market for illegally traded wildlife products to take actions toward reducing demand in illegal products of wild animals and plants.
9. Supported by funding from Australia, the European Union, and the United States of America, the CITES Secretariat contracted three non-governmental organizations (the World Wildlife Fund, Inc., the Marine Research Foundation and TRAFFIC) to undertake an in-situ assessment of the status, scope, and trends of the legal and illegal international trade in CITES-listed species of marine turtles in eight countries within three subregions. In addition to the in-situ country assessments, which took place during 2018, the study analyzed CITES trade data on marine turtles and previous findings from available literature.
10. An intersessional working group on marine turtles was established at SC69 to review a preliminary draft of the study on marine turtles and provide initial recommendations.
11. A final version of the study (“Status, scope and trends of the legal and illegal international trade in marine turtles, its conservation impacts, management options and mitigation priorities”) was published as CoP18 Inf. 18 and presented at the 18th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (CoP18). The study revealed that, despite regulatory frameworks that prohibit or restrict the exploitation of marine turtles, illegal take and trade in these species and their specimens continues to occur. The study also provided a comprehensive list of recommendations. Based on this study and preliminary recommendations, CoP18 adopted several decisions on marine turtles. Decisions 18.210 to 18.217 urged Parties to, among other activities, develop and/or update management and action plans for the conservation of marine turtles; improve monitoring, detection and law enforcement activities related to marine turtles; collect DNA samples of marine turtle specimens, including from seized specimens, to determine species involved and populations of origin in support of research, investigations and prosecutions; improve cooperation, collaboration and exchange of actionable intelligence regarding illegal take of and trade in marine turtles; and ascertain key trade routes, methods, volumes, and trade “hot spots.”
12. Pursuant to Decision 18.210 paragraph f), the Secretariat issued Notification 2020/035 to the Parties requesting information on the status of implementation of Decisions 18.211 to 18.214. At AC31, the Animals Committee reviewed the responses from Parties to the Notification, as well as recommendations from the marine turtle study (as directed in paragraph b) of Decision 18.210), and drafted revised recommendations for the Standing Committee to review.
13. At SC74, the Standing Committee recommended Parties include marine turtle confiscation and seizure data in their annual illegal trade report and recommended renewal of the CoP18 decisions on marine turtles. It also recommended the adoption of several draft decisions at the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES, including a decision calling on the Animals Committee to consider a new resolution on marine turtles.
14. The Secretariat also shared SC74 Inf. 27 (“The scale and importance of marine turtle bycatch relating to trade”). This study examined the impacts of marine turtle bycatch on a global scale with an aim of highlighting opportunities for collaboration between CITES, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and Regional Fishery Bodies (RFBs) to address the links between bycatch of marine turtles and international trade.

### Conclusion

15. The work undertaken by CITES to date demonstrates that the illegal harvest and trade continues to threaten marine turtles. It is imperative that CITES Parties prioritize addressing the trafficking of marine turtles to ensure the survival of these endangered and vulnerable highly migratory species. Collaboration between CITES, IAC, CMS, FAO, and RFBs is essential for effective conservation and management of these species.
16. To help ensure that the illegal trade in marine turtles is effectively addressed by CITES Parties and to promote collaboration between CITES and the relevant multilateral international and regional bodies, the United States of America believes it is timely for the Conference of the Parties to adopt a new resolution on the Conservation of marine turtles at CoP19.

### Recommendation

17. The Conference of the Parties is invited to consider this document and adopt the draft resolution in Annex 1 to the present document.

## DRAFT RESOLUTION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES

Resolution Conf. 19.X

Conservation of marine turtles

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RECOGNIZING that marine turtles face significant threats, including bycatch in commercial and recreational fisheries; loss and degradation of nesting and foraging habitats; climate change; entanglement in marine debris; vessel strikes; and illegal take and trade for their meat, shells, and eggs;

RECOGNIZING that the conservation and recovery of marine turtles require international cooperation to ensure the survival of these highly migratory species;

RECALLING that all species of marine turtles are included in CITES Appendix I, and as such, international trade for commercial purposes is strictly prohibited for these species;

RECALLING that these species are included in Appendices I and II of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) (except for *Natator depressus*, which is only in Appendix II), which requires CMS Parties to strictly protect these species by prohibiting take and controlling other factors that endanger them, and enhance their conservation status;

RECALLING that the Inter-American Convention (IAC) for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles promotes the protection, conservation, and recovery of populations of six marine turtle species (all except *N. depressus*) in the Western Hemisphere;

RECALLING the Indian Ocean–South-East Asian (IOSEA) Marine Turtle Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is a non-binding intergovernmental agreement that aims to protect, conserve, and recover sea turtles and their habitats in the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia;

CONCERNED that the illegal take and trade of marine turtles is contributing to their decline and poses a significant threat to their survival;

WELCOMING studies commissioned by CITES, IAC, and IOSEA Marine Turtle MoU to help determine the extent of illegal take and trade in marine turtles and provide recommendations on needed actions;

WELCOMING projects aimed at uncovering illegal trade routes from source through to end user, and factors driving marine turtle use, supply, and demand, which can be used to inform policies aimed at marine turtle conservation;

FURTHER WELCOMING initiatives to help combat the illegal trade in marine turtles, such as the Asia Pacific Marine Turtle Genetic Working Group that is bringing together researchers from over 12 nations in order to transfer genetic techniques, technologies, and to build greater capacity for marine turtle genetic studies in the Asia-Pacific region;

### THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION

1. RECOMMENDS Parties collaborate and assist in building financial and technical capacity in developing countries to implement and enforce national regulations and international obligations that apply to protect marine turtles, including protection from unsustainable use and illegal trade;
2. RECOMMENDS Parties affected by illegal trade in marine turtles provide capacity-building interventions, scale up efforts to address illegal harvest and other illegal activities at key locations in domestic markets associated with illegal trade, and take action to decrease consumer demand for marine turtle parts and products;
3. RECOMMENDS Parties improve monitoring, detection, and law enforcement activities at all transaction points (e.g., markets, online, ports) to help combat the illegal take and trade of marine turtles and enhance

cooperation and collaboration in the control of trade in marine turtles amongst wildlife-law enforcement agencies at national and international levels, including in the exchange of actionable intelligence regarding the illegal take and trade of marine turtles;

4. URGES Parties whose national legislation is not sufficient to control the unsustainable harvest of and trade in marine turtles, to enact legislation to protect and manage these species appropriately;
5. RECOMMENDS Parties submit comprehensive and accurate information on illegal trade in marine turtles in their annual illegal trade reports to the Secretariat;
6. ENCOURAGES the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC) to, as appropriate, use data on illegal trade in marine turtles submitted to the Secretariat in Parties' annual illegal trade reports in its activities;
7. RECOMMENDS Parties collect samples from seized marine turtles for DNA analysis to determine species involved and populations of origin, and as appropriate provide these to forensic and research institutions capable of reliably determining the origin of the samples in support of research, investigations, and prosecutions;
8. RECOMMENDS Parties coordinate efforts at the regional level to identify and address illegal trade, use, and other threats, including fisheries bycatch and habitat loss and degradation;
9. RECOMMENDS Parties address marine turtle bycatch in fisheries by fully implementing measures to reduce sea turtle bycatch and bycatch mortality based on the best scientific data available; increasing observer coverage in fisheries where bycatch of marine turtles is an issue; and effectively addressing Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing that is a threat to marine turtles;
10. ENCOURAGES Parties to share bycatch mitigation strategies, such as exclusion devices and safe handling practices, that have proven effective at reducing bycatch or bycatch mortality;
11. DIRECTS the Secretariat to maintain close collaboration with Regional Fisheries Bodies, CMS, IAC, and the IOSEA Marine Turtle MoU on the management and conservation of marine turtles to ensure the compatibility of activities, optimization of resources, promotion of research to address information gaps, and enhancement of synergies;
12. DIRECTS the Animals Committee to make recommendations, if necessary, to ensure the conservation of marine turtles;
13. DIRECTS the Standing Committee to provide guidance on compliance with, and enforcement of, the marine turtle listings in Appendix I, including but not limited to, use of forensic sampling of seized specimens and exchange of information on the illegal trade in marine turtles; and
14. DIRECTS the Animals Committee and Standing Committees to report progress on the conservation of marine turtles at meetings of the Conference of the Parties, as appropriate.

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.

Secretariat:

The authors anticipate that the implementation of the proposed Resolution Conf. 19.XX *Conservation of marine turtles* contained in the present document can be accommodated within the work of existing Secretariat staff.