

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

QUEEN CONCH (*STROMBUS GIGAS*)

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.
2. At its 18th meeting (CoP18, Geneva, 2019), the Conference of the Parties adopted Decisions 18.275 to 18.280 on *Queen conch* (*Strombus gigas*), as follows:

Directed to Parties

18.275 *The range States of Strombus gigas are encouraged to:*

- a) *collaborate to implement the Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan, and develop national Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plans, as appropriate;*
- b) *continue to collect data on weight of S. gigas by processing grade in order to update and improve the regional conversion factors, and establish or update national conversion factors, taking into account the spatial variability and characteristics of the species;*
- c) *collaborate in developing and implementing joint research programmes at the sub- regional or regional level to support the making of non-detriment findings that take into account all fishing mortality, promote relevant research and capacity-building activities through regional fisheries management entities and mobilize financial resources for data collection;*
- d) *promote and collaborate in developing and implementing public education and awareness programmes regarding the conservation and sustainable use of S. gigas;*
- e) *continue to collaborate in exploring ways to enhance the traceability of specimens of S. gigas in international trade, including, but not limited to, catch certificates, labelling systems and the application of genetic techniques, and consider sharing relevant experiences with the Secretariat, Parties and the Standing Committee, as appropriate, in the context of discussions on traceability systems for trade in CITES-listed species;*
- f) *collaborate on combatting illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing activity;*
- g) *make available to the Standing Committee, through the Secretariat, information concerning illegal trade in queen conch, including surveillance and enforcement activities, as appropriate; and*
- h) *provide information to the Secretariat on the implementation of paragraphs a) to f) of this Decision to allow it to report at the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties, in accordance with Decision 18.280, as appropriate.*

Directed to the Animals Committee

18.276 *If requested by range States of S. gigas or the working group on queen conch composed of the Caribbean Fishery Management Council (CFMC), the Central American Fisheries and Aquaculture Organization (OSPESCA), the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC), the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) and CITES, the Animals Committee shall provide advice regarding the making of non-detriment findings for trade, and on any other technical matters.*

Directed to the Standing Committee

18.277 *On the basis of reporting by the Secretariat in compliance with Decision 18.275, paragraphs e) and g), the Standing Committee shall review traceability, especially for meat, and enforcement issues concerning international trade in queen conch and make recommendations as appropriate.*

Directed to the Secretariat

18.278 *The Secretariat shall continue to collaborate with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM/CITES working group on queen conch, WECAFC and other relevant international organizations, and, subject to external funding:*

- a) *provide assistance to range States of S. gigas in order to enhance the capacity of their CITES Management and Scientific Authorities, fisheries authorities and other stakeholders to implement the Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan and national management plans and make scientifically robust non-detriment findings; and*
- b) *provide assistance to range States of S. gigas on relevant enforcement issues and report new developments in this regard to the Standing Committee, as appropriate.*

18.279 *The Secretariat shall monitor the development of traceability systems for queen conch and report relevant developments to the Standing Committee, as appropriate.*

18.280 *The Secretariat shall collate the information provided in accordance with Decision 18.275, paragraph h), and report on the progress in the implementation of these Decisions at the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.*

Implementation of Decision 18.275

3. The Secretariat took the opportunity provided by meetings of the CFMC¹/OSPESCA²/WECAFC³/CRFM⁴/CITES Working Group on Queen Conch (QCWG) to collect information on the implementation of Decision 18.275 to allow it to report under paragraph g) of the same Decision. These meetings were attended by member countries that engage in the harvest and management of, and/or trade in, queen conch, including from national institutions, entities and authorities responsible for the implementation of policy, legal and operational aspects of fisheries management and/or implementation of CITES. This avoids the need to reach out separately to Parties to seek the same information required under the CITES Decision.
4. The fourth meeting of the QCWG was held in San Juan, Puerto Rico from 16 to 17 December 2019. The following countries and regional partner organizations participated: Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Haiti, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the United States of America, WECAFC, CRFM, CFMC, the International Regional Organization for Animal Health (OIRSA), and OSPESCA. The CITES Secretariat participated remotely. The report from the meeting can be accessed [here](#).

¹ Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism

² Central American Fisheries and Aquaculture Organization

³ Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission

⁴ Caribbean Fishery Management Council

5. The meeting adopted the following five recommendations on:
 - a) *Data Collection/Transparency* – Recommend that when countries conduct studies, the data be stored in hard and digital copies to have a good record of the work and guide any standardizations.
 - b) *Diver safety* – Recommend a regional study be conducted in select countries with regard to the status of diving techniques in the WECAFC region; this would capture the efforts that have been made and actions that have been taken on occupational safety in the region.
 - c) *Domestic consumption* – Recommend member countries document the level of domestic consumption of queen conch and support a study on this topic.
 - d) *Queen Conch Stock Assessment Manual* – Recommend that CFMC support an update and expansion of the methods presented in the queen conch stock assessment manual published by CFMC in 2008, particularly looking at sampling designs that include representation of their entire population and establishment of sustainability criteria when defining production and export quotas (e.g., adult density, 8 percent or less of exploitable standing biomass, etc.), provide a digital version of the manual, and provide training in English, Spanish, and French on use of the manual to be posted online in order to reduce the costs of broad participation of key fisheries officers across the Caribbean.
 - e) *CITES Resolution on queen conch* – Recommend WECAFC and CITES work collaboratively on a draft CITES resolution that could be considered at the next meeting of the CITES Animals Committee and next meeting of WECAFC.
6. Additionally, the Scientific, Statistical and Technical Advisory Group of the Queen Conch Working Group (QCWG/SSTAG) offered several priority recommendations that were endorsed by the group:
 - a) WECAFC needs to increase efforts that would result in better country queen conch (QC) landings reports using the new Conversion Factor (CF) (dirty weight) by processing grades. They are invited to preferably use their own CF or the average reported here in the absence of a national CF. Countries still missing CF need to collect appropriate data for CF estimation and submit data to QC/SSTAG for statistical evaluation and CF estimation following common methods. Landings reports should include estimations of local consumption.
 - b) A proposal to determine the genomic connectivity across the Caribbean using the Single-Nucleotide Polymorphism (SNP) technique will be developed, capitalizing on the significant support already received from the University of Rhode Island. Results from this work are expected to provide information useful to counteract illegal fishing. A pilot from countries exporting queen conch and sharing common grounds (Colombia, Jamaica, Honduras, Belize and Nicaragua) was recommended. Information will be also useful for understanding small-scale population structure needed for management.
 - c) Two subgroups will continue addressing recommendations needed for simplifying the process of generating non-detriment findings (NDFs), integrating the 2012 Queen Conch Working Group recommendations. One will work on the update of the NDF flow chart, while the other group will develop and assess the merits of potential scientific criteria that could be used, with respect to developing simplified NDFs.
 - d) Queen Conch socioeconomic and reproductive aspects are among the priority research areas recommended to be developed in the short term.
7. Presentations were given by Parties present, including Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama and the United States of America. Each presentation provided an update on the status of implementation of the *Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan* (nationally and regionally); highlighted any accomplishments and challenges and how to address them; indicated any specific needs and concerns; and outlined the status of non-detriment findings. In addition, there were focused discussions on CITES, conversion factors, new research on queen conch, highlighting new and emerging threats, and the problem of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU).
8. In document [SC74 Doc. 79](#), the Secretariat reported that the fifth meeting of the QCWG was held in San Juan, Puerto Rico from 13 to 14 December 2021. Due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, the Secretariat participated remotely. It was hoped that the report would be available in sufficient time to allow the Secretariat

to report on progress in the implementation of Decision 18.275 paragraphs a) to f) at the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties, in compliance with Decision 18.280. However, at the time of writing (June 2022), the report of the meeting remains unavailable. Should the final report of the meeting become available in the meantime, it will be provided as an information document at this meeting. The sixth meeting is provisionally scheduled to take place in early 2023.

9. Based on the presentations, the Secretariat concluded that Parties had faced several challenges in recent years, in part due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, there had been little progress made by Parties since the previous meeting. It would appear that much work remains to be done to fully implement the CoP18 Decisions on queen conch.

Implementation of Decision 18.275, paragraph g) and Decision 18.278 b)

10. In document SC74 Doc. 79, the Secretariat presented its analysis of the level of illegal trade in queen conch as reported in the CITES illegal trade reports between 2016 and 2020, based on data extracted in December 2021. It indicated that the total number of seizures reported in 2016 was 412; 447 in 2017; 126 in 2018; 184 in 2019 and 82 in 2020. This is based on reports submitted by 31 Parties that had made seizures of queen conch. Where indicated, most shipments were by air or mail, with smaller numbers by boat. In many cases, the seizures were the result of joint operations with multiple agencies.
11. The Secretariat noted a large variation in the reporting units making it difficult to make direct comparisons and analyses. The majority of seizures are in shells and meat, with one seizure of 35 pearls in 2016. Smaller number of seizures have been recorded as body (BOD), carapace (CAP), derivative (DER), extract (EXT), jewellery (JWL), oil (OIL), scientific specimen (SPE) and trophy (TRO). In some cases, codes that are not found in the *Guidelines for the preparation and submission of the CITES annual illegal trade report* are used..
12. The Secretariat also reported that funding has been secured from the Netherlands to support the implementation of Decision 18.278 and assist range States of *S. gigas* on relevant enforcement issues. The Secretariat notes that, at the fifth meeting of the QCWG, a number of range States expressed an interest in taking part in a proposed study to look at genetic differentiation of queen conch across the region. Range States noted that this work could be important in their enforcement efforts and addressing illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. The Secretariat is investigating how the funds from the Netherlands could be used to initiate a first phase of this study in 2022 and contribute to the implementation of Decision 18.278 and will report orally at the present meeting on any developments in this regard.

Implementation of Decision 18.276

13. The implementation of Decision 18.276 was dependent on range States requesting advice from the Animals Committee on the making of NDFs for queen conch, research in support of sustainable fishing and trade and other technical matters.
14. At the 31st meeting of the Animals Committee (AC31, online, June 2021), the Committee considered document [AC31 Doc. 33](#) and its [addendum](#), in which the Secretariat reported that no request had been received from any range State of *S. gigas*. However, the Scientific, Statistical and Technical Advisory Subgroup (SSTAG) of the QCWG has been working on the development of simplified guidance for making NDFs. One subgroup of experts is working on producing a preliminary flow diagram to provide countries with simplified recommendations on how to make their NDFs, and another subgroup will work on defining sustainability indicators. This may incorporate additional quantitative indicators, and revisit or complement the ones already adopted at the second meeting of the QCWG. The Animals Committee may be invited to review this revised guidance in due course. The Secretariat notes that the guidance could serve as an important case study for the NDF technical workshop envisaged under Decision 18.132.

Implementation of Decision 18.277

15. Concerning Decision 18.275, the Secretariat reported to the Standing Committee in document SC74 Doc. 79 that queen conch range States had not provided information on traceability issues or enforcement directly to the Secretariat. However, they have provided updates on the implementation status of *The Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan* to the QCWG. The Secretariat has continued to collaborate closely with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) through this working group. There have been two meetings of this working group since CoP18.

16. Since the Secretariat had little to report in relation to compliance with Decision 18.275, paragraphs e) and g), the Standing Committee was not able to review traceability issues concerning queen conch, especially for meat. It was noted that, in due course, the outputs from the BlueBioTrade Project may provide some useful recommendations in this regard. Parties have provided some information on illegal trade in queen conch through their annual illegal trade reports, which is summarized in paragraphs 10 and 11.
17. The Committee noted the information contained in document SC74 Doc. 79; and reminded Parties that the *Guidelines for the preparation and submission of the CITES annual illegal trade report* in Annex 2 to Notification to the Parties No. 2021/044 indicate that shells should preferably be reported by number and that meat should be reported in kilograms. The Committee further directed the Secretariat to submit to CoP19 those elements of Decisions 18.275 to 18.280 on queen conch that have not yet been implemented.

Implementation of Decision 18.278

18. Concerning Decision 18.278, the Secretariat has continued to collaborate closely with the FAO and the QCWG and participated in its fourth meeting (December 2019) and fifth meeting (December 2021). In addition, the Secretariat also participated in the second meeting of the SSTAG held in November 2019.
19. In addition to the development of new guidance on the making of NDFs for trade in queen conch with the CITES Secretariat, the SSTAG is working on the following areas:
 - a) ways to improve the understanding of queen conch conversion factors for different processing levels (e.g. clean, semi-clean, clean/fillet) to determine the number of individual conches harvested;
 - b) ways to have comparable data on queen conch conversion factors between countries and databases, including the CITES trade database;
 - c) queen conch survey methodologies and protocols;
 - d) queen conch stock assessments;
 - e) identification of knowledge gaps;
 - f) socioeconomic aspects of queen conch fisheries; and
 - g) research priorities.

The final report of the second SSTAG meeting with recommendations from the SSTAG workshop can be found (in English only) in Annex 2 to document AC31 Doc. 33. The SSTAG was also considering the possible merits of developing a draft resolution on queen conch for consideration at the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

20. In line with the call in Decision 18.278 to collaborate with relevant international organizations, the Secretariat has also been working closely with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) on a project entitled *Seizing the trade and business potential of Blue BioTrade products for promoting sustainable livelihoods and conservation of marine biodiversity in selected Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Countries*. The beneficiary countries in the first phase are Grenada, Saint Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.
21. UNCTAD defines BioTrade as “the activities of collection/production, transformation and commercialization of goods and services derived from native biodiversity under criteria of environmental, social and economic sustainability.” The concept of “Blue BioTrade” focuses on marine-based products and services, and was launched by UNCTAD, the Andean Development Corporation and the International Ocean Institute at the United Nations Ocean Conference in 2017. The Blue BioTrade approach involves working across multiple levels of the value chain to develop sustainable livelihoods; adopt an ecosystem-based management approach; and foster swift adaptation to dynamic markets and changing ecological conditions. The overall objective of the project is to empower small-scale coastal producers from OECS member states to produce and trade queen conch products in domestic, regional and international markets under the Blue BioTrade environmental, social and economic sustainability criteria, including CITES provisions concerning international trade in the species.

22. As part of this project, a regional stakeholder webinar on Blue BioTrade & BioTrade principles and criteria including CITES requirements was held on 22-23 March 2021. Details of the stakeholder webinar can be found [here](#), including a presentation by the CITES Secretariat entitled “CITES regulations and decisions applicable to trade of queen conch: Non-detriment findings (NDFs) and effective license/permits system”.
23. At the 5th Growth and Resilience Dialogue co-hosted by the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank, OECS, the World Bank Group and the University of the West Indies on 14-15 April 2021, the Secretariat gave a presentation on “Queen conch as a CITES-listed species – the importance of Non-Detriment Findings and regulated trade in selected OECS countries” as part of a master class on “OECS/ECCU⁵ ocean, seas and marine eco-system – Turning challenges into opportunities”.
24. During Phase 1 of the Blue BioTrade project, three country case studies focusing on stakeholder-owned value chain assessments in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Grenada and Saint Lucia have been produced. Developed by UNCTAD in collaboration with CITES and the OECS, these reports have analysed and identified stakeholder capacity to identify sustainable and gender inclusive business opportunities and put forward recommendations on how to implement the Blue BioTrade Principles and Criteria in the queen conch value chain. The aim was to ensure that small-scale coastal producers within and outside beneficiary countries benefit from enhanced sustainable production and trade opportunities in the queen conch value chain.
25. The results of the case studies resulted in the development of a regional plan of action that applies [UNCTAD's seven BioTrade Principles](#) to the conservation of marine resources. It was adopted at a [regional workshop](#) organized on 26 and 27 May 2022 by UNCTAD, OECS and the CITES Secretariat. The workshop brought together fishers, conch processors and distributors, representatives of non-governmental organizations, government officials from departments of fisheries and policy advisors from the UN and OECS. The project's second phase will focus on implementing the regional plan in the three countries. CITES, UNCTAD, OECS and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines jointly hosted a side-event at the UN Oceans Conference, Lisbon, July 2022 in order to share experiences and best practice from the project with the global oceans' community.

Conclusions

26. The *Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan* has been endorsed by all range States, but as demonstrated by the outcomes of the 4th and 5th meetings of the QCWG, there has been limited progress in terms of its implementation. As a result, many of the activities outlined in Decisions 18.275 to 18.280 are either ongoing or remain to be implemented. The Secretariat is of the view that it is important for this work to continue and for the Conference of the Parties to monitor its progress. As explained at AC31, external funding from the Netherlands and the United States of America is available to support further work. Consequently, the Secretariat proposes a revised set of decisions that seek to avoid the need for range States to provide similar reports to CITES and the QCWG; focuses on those elements that are of greatest concern to CITES; and makes reporting lines clearer. The proposed revised draft decisions can be found in Annex 1 to the present document.
27. The Secretariat notes that the Terms of Reference of the Animals and Plants Committees in Annex 2 of Resolution Conf. 18.2 on *Establishment of committees* include the task of “assisting Parties in making non-detriment findings and supporting their Scientific Authorities in accordance with Resolution Conf. 16.7 (Rev. CoP17) on *Non-detriment findings*”. Consequently, it is the view of the Secretariat that it is not necessary to retain the text contained in Decision 18.276 in future draft decisions.
28. The Secretariat proposes to add an instruction for the Animals Committee and the Standing Committee to consider the reports of the meetings of the QCWG made available by the Secretariat and make recommendations based on their conclusions. These working group reports include many important conclusions and recommendations that would be useful in developing targeted actions by CITES.

Recommendations

29. The Conference of the Parties is invited to:
 - a) adopt the draft decisions in the Annex 1 to the present document; and
 - b) delete Decisions 18.275 to 18.280 as they have been replaced.

⁵ *Eastern Caribbean Currency Union*

DRAFT REVISED DECISIONS ON QUEEN CONCH (STROMBUS GIGAS)

Proposed new text is underlined, proposed deletions are indicated in ~~strike through~~

18.27519.AA **Directed to the range States of Strombus gigas**

The range States of Strombus gigas are encouraged to:

- a) *collaborate to implement the Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan, and develop national Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plans, as appropriate;*
- b) *continue to collect data on weight of S. gigas by processing grade in order to update and improve the regional conversion factors, and establish or update national conversion factors, taking into account the spatial variability and characteristics of the species;*
- c) *collaborate in developing and implementing joint research programmes at the sub- regional or regional level to support the making of non-detriment findings that take into account all fishing mortality, promote relevant research and capacity-building activities through regional fisheries management entities and mobilize financial resources for data collection;*
- d) *promote and collaborate in developing and implementing public education and awareness programmes regarding the conservation and sustainable use of S. gigas;*
- e) *continue to collaborate in exploring ways to enhance the traceability of specimens of S. gigas in international trade, including, but not limited to, catch certificates, labelling systems and the application of genetic techniques, and consider sharing relevant experiences with the Secretariat, Parties and the Standing Committee, as appropriate, in the context of discussions on traceability systems for trade in CITES-listed species;*
- f) *collaborate on combatting illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing activity;*
- g) *share relevant experiences on traceability systems for specimens of Strombus gigas;*
- ~~h)g) — make available to the Standing Committee, through the Secretariat, share~~ *information concerning illegal trade in queen conch, including surveillance and enforcement activities, as appropriate; and*
- ~~h)i) provide information to the Secretariat on the implementation of paragraphs a) to f) of this Decision to allow it to report at the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties, in accordance with Decision 18.280, as appropriate~~ *progress reports on activities a) to h) to the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CFRM/CITES working group on queen conch.*

18.27819.BB **Directed to the Secretariat**

The Secretariat shall continue to collaborate with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CFRM/CITES working group on queen conch, WECAFC, UNCTAD, OECS and other relevant international organizations, and, subject to external funding:

- a) *provide assistance to range States of S. gigas in order to enhance the capacity of their CITES Management and Scientific Authorities, fisheries authorities and other stakeholders to implement the Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan and national management plans and make scientifically robust non-detriment findings; ~~and~~*

- b) ~~provide assistance to range States of *S. gigas* on relevant enforcement issues and report new developments in this regard to the Standing Committee, as appropriate.~~

~~18.279~~ Directed to the Secretariat

~~The Secretariat shall monitor the development of traceability systems for queen conch and report relevant developments to the Standing Committee, as appropriate; and~~

- c) ~~provide updates on relevant activities of the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM/CITES working group on queen conch to the Animals Committee and the Standing Committee, as appropriate;~~

~~18.280~~ Directed to the Secretariat

~~The Secretariat shall collate the information provided in accordance with Decision 18.275, paragraph h), and report on the progress in the implementation of these Decisions at the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.~~

18.27619.CC Directed to the Animals Committee

~~If requested by range States of *S. gigas* or the working group on queen conch composed of the Caribbean Fishery Management Council (CFMC), the Central American Fisheries and Aquaculture Organization (OSPESCA), the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC), the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) and CITES, the Animals Committee shall provide advice regarding the making of non-detriment findings for trade, and on any other technical matters. The Animals Committee shall consider any reports from the Secretariat under Decision 19.BB, paragraph c), and any other relevant available information and make recommendations for the conservation and management of queen conch for consideration by the Standing Committee, as appropriate.~~

18.27719.DD Directed to the Standing Committee

~~On the basis of reporting by the Secretariat in compliance with Decision 18.275, paragraphs e) and g), the Standing Committee shall review traceability, especially for meat, and enforcement issues concerning international trade in queen conch and make recommendations as appropriate. The Standing Committee shall consider any reports from the Secretariat under Decision 19.BB, paragraph c), and any recommendations coming from the Animals Committee and make its own recommendations to the Parties and to the Conference of the Parties to improve implementation of the Convention for queen conch, 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.

The Secretariat proposes the following tentative budget and source of funding.

Decision	Activity	Indicative costs (USD)	Source of funding
Decision 19.BB	Provide capacity-building assistance to range States of <i>S. gigas</i>	30,000 per range State requesting support	Extra-budgetary
Decision 19.BB	Ongoing collaboration with partners and range States	30,000	Extra-budgetary