

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

TORTOISES AND FRESHWATER TURTLES (TESTUDINES SPP.)

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.
2. At its 18th meeting (CoP18, Geneva, 2019), the Conference of the Parties adopted Decisions 18.286 to 18.291 on *Tortoises and freshwater turtles (Testudines spp.)*, as follows:

Directed to Madagascar

18.286 *Madagascar should:*

- a) *review its implementation of Resolution Conf. 11.9 (Rev. CoP18) on Conservation of and trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles; and*
- b) *report to the 73rd meeting of the Standing Committee on its implementation of Resolution Conf. 11.9 (Rev. CoP18), including in its report, information on any seizures, arrests, prosecutions and convictions secured as a result of activities implemented to address illegal trade in tortoises from Madagascar.*

Directed to the Standing Committee

18.287 *The Standing Committee shall review the report from Madagascar in accordance with Decision 18.286, and any recommendations from the Secretariat, and consider if any further measures need to be implemented by Madagascar to address illegal trade in tortoises as it affects the Party.*

Directed to the Secretariat

18.288 *The Secretariat shall, subject to available funding, contract consultants to develop, in collaboration with relevant Parties, experts and the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC), a guide on categories of turtle parts and derivatives in trade, for national agencies responsible for wildlife law enforcement, to raise their awareness of the trade in these types of specimens, to enable initial recognition of such specimens, and to provide guidance on further identification resources and expertise that can be consulted.*

18.289 *The Secretariat shall, to build upon the outcomes of the CITES Tortoise and Freshwater Turtles Task Force and support the initiation of targeted investigations and enforcement action, work with INTERPOL to put in place arrangements for the convening of an INTERPOL Regional Investigative and Analytical Case Management (RIACM) meeting.*

18.290 *The Secretariat shall report at the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties on the implementation of Decisions 18.288 and 18.289.*

Directed to the Animals Committee

18.291 *The Animals Committee shall review the guide on categories of turtle parts and derivatives in trade, developed in accordance with Decision 18.288 and make recommendations for consideration by the Secretariat.*

Implementation of Decisions 18.286 and 18.287

3. At its 73rd meeting (SC73, online, May 2021), the Standing Committee considered documents [SC73 Doc. 24.1](#) and [SC73 Doc.24.2](#) on *Tortoises and freshwater turtles (Testudines spp.)* prepared by the Secretariat and Madagascar respectively. Based on its deliberations, the Committee agreed a number of recommendations to Madagascar. The Committee encouraged Madagascar to scale up efforts to gather information and intelligence concerning the criminal networks operating within and from the country; to actively pursue the continued implementation of the different aspects of Resolution Conf. 11.9 (Rev. CoP18), including through the active implementation of its *Regional strategy to combat trafficking in radiated tortoises*; and to revise and update its existing endemic tortoise and freshwater turtle species identification materials and posters. The Committee further encouraged Parties, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations implementing programmes in Madagascar or planning to do so, to take into consideration in their work programmes and activities, as appropriate, the recommendations of the Standing Committee, the provisions of Resolution Conf. 11.9 (Rev. CoP18) and Madagascar's regional strategy. The Committee further requested the Secretariat to continue to monitor illegal trade in tortoise and freshwater turtle species as it affects Madagascar, and the measures being implemented to address it, and to again report to the 74th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC74, Lyon, March 2022) on the matter. The Committee also invited Madagascar to provide a further report to SC74.
4. At SC74, the Standing Committee considered documents [SC74 Doc 80.1](#) and [SC74 Doc 80.2](#) prepared by the Secretariat and Madagascar respectively. The Committee:
 - a) welcomed the work undertaken and initiatives ongoing in Madagascar to respond to and address wildlife crime, including illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles;
 - b) noted the ongoing nature of poaching and trafficking in tortoises and freshwater turtles affecting Madagascar, and encouraged its national authorities to:
 - i) further scale up efforts to address illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles, in particular by scaling up efforts to gather information and intelligence concerning the criminal networks operating within and from the country, and by engaging representatives from the Anti-Corruption Centres of the Ministry of Justice in such efforts, to pursue investigations targeting those individuals managing and organizing the illegal activities;
 - ii) pursue activities to facilitate information and intelligence exchange with Parties that seize and confiscate tortoises and freshwater turtles originating from Madagascar, with the aim of initiating investigations to bring to justice the criminals involved across the illegal trade chain;
 - iii) consider reviewing and amending Madagascar's legislation taking into consideration paragraphs 15 e), f) and g) of Resolution Conf. 11.3 (Rev. CoP18) on *Compliance and enforcement*, and associated recommendations resulting from the implementation of the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC) *Wildlife and Forest Crime Analytic Toolkit* in the country; and
 - iv) continue its efforts to inform and sensitize the public about endemic tortoise and freshwater turtle species of Madagascar and the importance of their conservation and protection, and undertake further awareness-raising activities targeting relevant national law enforcement agencies, to sensitize them about illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles and the importance of scaling-up law enforcement efforts to address this illegal trade.
 - c) requested the Secretariat to continue to monitor illegal trade in tortoise and freshwater turtle species as it affects Madagascar, and the measures being implemented to address it, and to bring any matters of concern that may arise to the attention of the Standing Committee.
 - d) agreed that Decisions 18.286 and 18.287 have been implemented.

5. As requested by the Committee, the Secretariat will continue to monitor this illegal trade and bring matters of concern that may arise to the attention of the Standing Committee. In accordance with the recommendations agreed by the Standing Committee, it is proposed that Decisions 18.286 and 18.287 be deleted as they have been implemented.

Implementation of Decisions 18.288 and 18.291

6. Thanks to generous funding from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland as part of its contribution to the Strategic Programme of ICCWC, the Secretariat produced the guide anticipated by Decision 18.288. The guide was reviewed by the Animals Committee at its 31st meeting (AC31, online, June 2021), as required by Decision 18.291. The guide was well received, and the Animals Committee requested the Secretariat to finalize the guide taking into consideration comments made during discussions at the meeting.
7. The guide was subsequently finalized, and the [Identification Guide to Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles: Parts, Products and Derivatives in Trade](#) is available to Parties for use on the CITES Secretariat [Identification materials](#) webpage, as well as in the [CITES Virtual College](#) (in English only). The guide was also made available on [ENVIRONET](#) by the World Customs Organization (WCO), and the Secretariat brought it to the attention of all [wildlife enforcement network \(WEN\) focal points](#).
8. Thanks to generous funding from the United States of America, the guide is currently being translated into French and, if funding remains, into other languages such as Hindi, Malay and Mandarin is also envisaged. Further, the Secretariat was grateful to receive an in kind offer to translate the guide into Spanish. The Secretariat will make the translated versions available to Parties as soon as they are ready,
9. The Secretariat commends the CITES Scientific Authority of Korea for [translating the guide into Korean](#). Parties affected by illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles are also encouraged to translate the guide into their national languages where needed.
10. Taking into consideration the above and the comments from the discussions at AC31, the Secretariat prepared draft decisions [19.AA, paragraphs b) and c) and 19BB, paragraph b)] for consideration by the Conference of the Parties (see Annex 1 to the present document).
11. The Secretariat considers that Decisions 18.288 and 18.291 have been implemented and may be deleted.

Implementation of Decision 18.289

12. In June 2021, INTERPOL convened a RIACM¹ as anticipated by Decision 18.289, targeting turtle and tortoise trafficking in Southeast Asia. INTERPOL conducts annual reviews of the identified turtle trafficking networks, presently focusing its activities on specific targets in two South and two Southeast Asian countries. Funding secured through the European Union contribution towards the ICCWC Strategic Programme will enable the convening of a further RIACM, tentatively planned to take place in September 2022, and which will also include a focus on marine turtles taking into consideration Decision 18.215 on *Marine turtles (Cheloniidae spp. and Dermochelyidae spp.)*. In addition, INTERPOL is planning to follow up with Madagascar to support collecting intelligence on relevant cases and to enhance collaboration with the country. INTERPOL plans to organize a mission to Madagascar in late 2022 or early 2023. To further support the implementation of Decision 18.289, in March 2021, the Secretariat participated in an online meeting on *Information Exchange and International Cooperation* convened by INTERPOL, at which it shared information specific to illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles with the Parties present.
13. The Secretariat notes that illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles continues to be a matter of concern. The significance and scale of this illegal trade is demonstrated by numerous seizures that occurred since CoP18. These included for example the seizure of more than [15,000 turtles](#) by authorities in Mexico; the seizure of [185 tortoises](#) by authorities in Ecuador; and the seizure of [1,364 tortoises](#) by authorities in India.
14. The value of national operations specifically targeting illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles is evident from the commendable results achieved in operations such as those initiated by the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau of India. Operation Turtshield conducted in India from 1 December 2019 to 31 January 2020

¹ A RIACM is a meeting convened by INTERPOL to support investigations and operational analytical work, in particular to follow-up on transnational investigations linking organized criminal networks through information exchange and the development of operational plans to target these networks.

resulted in the arrest of 45 offenders, as well as the seizure of more than 4,600 in tortoises and freshwater turtles. This was followed by Operation Turtshield -II implemented from 1 December 2020 to 28 February 2021, which resulted in the arrest of 59 offenders, as well as the seizure of more than 11,700 tortoises and freshwater turtles. Parties affected by this illegal trade are encouraged to initiate similar operations at national level.

15. In addition, participation in international events convened to facilitate collaboration, such as the Wildlife Inter-Regional Enforcement (WIRE)² meetings convened by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), as well as global operations such as those initiated by INTERPOL and the World Customs Organization, is equally important. [Operation Thunder 2020](#) resulted in the seizure of approximately 1,400 turtles and tortoises and 6,000 turtle or tortoise eggs; and [Operation Thunder 2021](#) resulted in the seizure of approximately 531 turtles and tortoises.
16. The Secretariat considers Decision 18.289 to have been implemented and may be deleted. Considering the ongoing nature of illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles, the Secretariat proposes new draft decisions 19.AA paragraph a) and 19.BB paragraph a), as presented in Annex 1 to the present document, for consideration by the Conference of the Parties.

Recommendations:

17. The Conference of the Parties is invited to:
 - a) adopt the draft decisions contained in Annex 1 to the present document;
 - b) delete Decisions 18.286 to 18.291 on *Tortoises and freshwater turtles (Testudines spp.)* as they have been implemented

² A WIRE meeting is a meeting convened by UNODC designed in response to the need for intensified cooperation in the investigation of transnational criminal networks. It offers a specialized platform to convene one category of officials at a time, with a view to build bridges among like-minded professionals from different countries.

DRAFT DECISIONS ON *TORTOISES AND FRESHWATER TURTLES (TESTUDINES SPP.)*

Directed to Parties

19.AA Parties affected by illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles are encouraged to:

- a) initiate national level law enforcement operations specifically targeting illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles, and to participate in global operations such as those initiated by INTERPOL and the World Customs Organization, identifying tortoises and freshwater turtles as a priority species for these operations;
- b) draw the [*Identification guide to tortoises and freshwater turtles: Parts, products and derivatives in trade*](#) to the attention of their national agencies responsible for wildlife law enforcement and promote its use; and
- c) translate the guide into their national languages where needed and inform the Secretariat about the availability of such translated versions.

Directed to the Secretariat

19.BB Subject to available funding, the Secretariat shall:

- a) engage with its partners in the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime to implement activities specifically targeting illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles, which could include providing preparatory support to Parties for global law enforcement operations targeting wildlife crime, convening a further INTERPOL Regional Investigative and Analytical Case Management meeting, as well as a United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Wildlife Inter-Regional Enforcement (WIRE) meeting.
- b) develop a CITES App version of the *Identification guide to tortoises and freshwater turtles: Parts, products and derivatives in trade*, to be made available for use by Parties; and
- c) report at the 20th meeting of the Conference of the Parties on the implementation of Decision 19.BB and any information received from Parties in accordance with Decision 19.AA.

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.

Draft decision 19.AA

Draft decision 19. AA does not have any budgetary and workload implications for the Secretariat or the permanent committees.

Draft decision 19.BB

Implementation of draft decision 19.BB, paragraphs a) and b) would be subject to the provision of external funds. It is estimated that USD 120,000 would be needed to implement activities specifically targeting illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles as anticipated by Decision 19.BB, paragraph a). The development of an App as anticipated by Decision 19.BB, paragraph b), is expected to amount to USD 85,000. Organizing this work and supervision of the work would require some time from the Secretariat but should be a core part of the Secretariat's work and accommodated within its regular work programme.