

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



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

Species conservation and trade

Aquatic species

QUEEN CONCH (*STROMBUS GIGAS*)

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.
2. At its 19th meeting (CoP19; Panama City, 2022), the Conference of the Parties adopted Decisions 19.233 to 19.236 on *Queen conch* (*Strombus gigas*) as follows:

***Directed to Range States of Strombus gigas***

**19.233** *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) *share information concerning illegal trade in queen conch, including surveillance and enforcement activities, as appropriate; and*
- i) *provide progress reports on activities a) to h) to the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CFRM/CITES working group on queen conch.*

### **Directed to the Secretariat**

**19.234** *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, 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;*
- 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.*
- c) *monitor the development of traceability systems for queen conch and report relevant developments to the Standing Committee, as appropriate; and*
- d) *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.*

### **Directed to the Animals Committee**

**19.235** *The Animals Committee shall consider any reports from the Secretariat under Decision 19.234, 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.*

### **Directed to the Standing Committee**

**19.236** *The Standing Committee shall consider any reports from the Secretariat under Decision 19.234, 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.*

### **Implementation of Decision 19.233 and 19.234**

3. The Secretariat took the opportunity provided by meetings of the CFMC<sup>1</sup> /OSPESCA<sup>2</sup> /WECAFC<sup>3</sup> /CRFM<sup>4</sup> / CITES Working Group on Queen Conch (QCWG) to collect information on the implementation of Decision 19.233 to allow it to report under paragraph d) of Decision 19.234.
4. As noted in document [CoP19 Doc. 77](#), 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 had been limited progress in terms of its implementation.
5. 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. The report of the meeting was not available for consideration at CoP19, but it can now be accessed [here](#).
6. The sixth meeting of the QCWG was held in San Juan, Puerto Rico on 16 March 2023. Several range States and regional partner organizations participated including Bahamas, Belize, Jamaica, Panama, the European Union, France (on behalf of Guadeloupe and Martinique), Honduras, Nicaragua, Saint Lucia, the United

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<sup>1</sup> *Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism*

<sup>2</sup> *Central American Fisheries and Aquaculture Organization*

<sup>3</sup> *Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission*

<sup>4</sup> *Caribbean Fishery Management Council*

States of America, WECAFC, CRFM, CFMC and OSPESCA. The CITES Secretariat participated in the meeting remotely.

7. The meeting's objectives were to:
  - a) update the status of implementation of the *Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan* and adopt a timeline for implementation of any outstanding elements;
  - b) update the status on the implementation of QCWG recommendations, Recommendation WECAFC/17/2019/12 on *Improved Compliance with Trade Measures for Queen Conch*, Recommendation WECAFC/XVII/2019/13 on *Queen Conch Conversion Factor* adopted at WECAFC17 and WECAFC/XVIII/2022/3 on *Increased efforts in the implementation of the Regional Queen Conch Fishery Management and Conservation Plan in the WECAFC region*;
  - c) receive updates on CITES Decisions and country reporting to WECAFC;
  - d) review of Workplan Activities (2022-2024) and identify priority activities;
  - e) receive updates on the queen conch pilot study in Jamaica for advancing data collection efforts for sustainable queen conch fisheries; and
  - f) develop recommendations for consideration and possible adoption during WECAFC 19.
8. The report from the meeting is not yet available but will be made available as an information document, should it become available. However, a brief summary of the discussions is provided in paragraphs 9 and 10 below.
9. The Secretariat provided an update on:
  - a) the new Decisions adopted at CoP19 on queen conch, highlighting the increased importance of the QCWG in relation to the implementation of those Decisions;
  - b) ongoing CITES activities on queen conch, including the development of Non-Detriment Finding (NDF) guidance and the Blue BiTrade Project on queen conch in collaboration with UNCTAD<sup>5</sup> and OECS<sup>6</sup>; and
  - c) upcoming CITES meetings that are of relevance for the QCWG, where discussions on queen conch will take place.

Recent trade data on queen conch between 2016-2021 was also presented, highlighting discrepancies between export and import data for several countries.
10. The meeting adopted two recommendations<sup>7</sup>:
  - a) **Qualitative progress of the Regional Queen Conch Fisheries and Conservation Management Plan** – updating the qualitative values collected in 2019–2020 with additional communication among all countries in the wider Caribbean participating in the queen conch fishery and using the information presented at the 2021 Working Group meeting; and
  - b) **Counteracting IUU Fishing/Genetic Study** – the QCWG Scientific, Statistical and Technical Advisory Sub-group (SSTAG) should liaise with the Regional Working Group on IUU Fishing to further strengthen activities counteracting IUU fishing and pursue the implementation of the queen conch genetic proposal (see paragraphs 17 and 18).
11. The Scientific, Statistical and Technical Advisory Sub-group (SSTAG) of the QCWG met on 12 and 13 April 2023. The Secretariat participated remotely. Thanks to funding from the United States of America (NOAA), the members of the SSTAG will continue to work with the Secretariat on the development of simplified

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<sup>5</sup> United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

<sup>6</sup> Organization of Eastern Caribbean States

<sup>7</sup> Exact text to be confirmed when the final report is published

guidance for making NDFs. One subgroup of experts will work 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. The Secretariat will provide an oral update on any progress at this meeting.

#### Update on Blue BioTrade Project on queen conch

12. At CoP19, the Secretariat reported in document CoP19 Doc. 77 that it had been working in partnership with UNCTAD and 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 Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.
13. 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.
14. Phase 1 of project ended in January 2023, resulting in several publications that can be accessed [here](#), including the following:
  - a) a stakeholder mapping of the queen conch value chains of Grenada, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines;
  - b) individual country case studies for the three participating countries;
  - c) a summary of the three case study recommendations; and
  - d) a regional plan of action for queen conch in the Eastern Caribbean.
15. Phase 2 of the project is now underway and will be implemented until mid-2026. Subject to available funding, this phase may implement priority areas of the UNCTAD-OECS-CITES Regional Action Plan on queen conch, include further stock assessments for other participating States and may also develop Blue BioTrade action plans for the value chains of other non-CITES species.
16. During Phase 1 of the project, the Secretariat was able to provide targeted assistance to Grenada to help it overcome current trade suspensions based on a lack of annual reporting and the Review of Significant Trade (RST) process for queen conch. In the context of the latter, the Blue BioTrade project funded a queen conch stock assessment for Grenada. This stock assessment included a training workshop for Grenadian fisheries authority staff (as well as those from Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent & the Grenadines) and a field survey that involved the local fishers. This stock assessment should contribute to the production of an NDF in connection with the RST suspension for queen conch from Grenada.

#### Queen conch genetics project

17. Concerning paragraph b) of Decision 19.234, the Secretariat would like to draw the Animal Committee’s attention to a project involving the University of Rhode Island and the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI) that will look at genetic variation as a way to identify IUU with steps geared towards:
  - a) identifying genetic discontinuities across populations/stocks in different islands or nations;
  - b) finding the molecular markers that allow distinction of the different populations/stocks; and
  - c) developing a molecular assay that uses the molecular markers to identify product caught by IUU fishing.

18. The objective of this work will be to use the new genetic approaches [RadSeq] to understand and quantify genetic variation across the Caribbean using samples collected by collaborating nations/islands. It will identify and clarify the geographic and genetic limits of the various stocks distributed across the Caribbean. Genetic markers associated with differences among the different stocks will then be selected and validated and a protocol designed to identify and trace illegal queen conch. Activities a) and b) will be addressed through a pilot project, that is partly funded by the Netherlands through the CITES Secretariat. Progress updates will be provided to the Animals and Standing Committees as they become available.

#### Recommendations

19. The Animals Committee is invited to note this document and any oral updates provided by the Secretariat.