

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



Thirty-third meeting of the Animals Committee  
Geneva (Switzerland), 12 – 19 July 2024

Regional Reports

OCEANIA

1. This document has been submitted by the regional representative for Oceania (Dr Hugh Robertson, New Zealand)\*.

General Information

2. There are currently nine Parties in the Oceania region: Australia, Fiji, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu.

Although the states do not show up on the CITES world map, the Oceania region still has a large number (8) and hence proportion (c.50%) of states that are not members of CITES: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Tokelau, and Tuvalu. The Cook Islands and Niue self-govern in free association with New Zealand, and Tokelau is a self-administering dependency of New Zealand. While New Zealand has some role in the foreign affairs for these countries this does not render them a party to CITES under New Zealand law. In contrast, the French overseas territories of French Polynesia, New Caledonia, and Wallis and Futuna, and the Australian, United States and United Kingdom territories in the region (i.e., Norfolk Island, American Samoa, Pitcairn Island) do come under the CITES umbrella through membership of their parent states.

The Secretariat for the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) has been active in supporting smaller Parties and non-Parties in the Oceania region to fulfil their CITES obligations, and their assistance is very welcome. SPREP and I have been providing assistance to one state, which is considering the pros and cons of joining the CITES family.

3. It is with great sadness that I note the passing of Mr. Poasi Ngaluafe, Deputy CEO and Head of Fisheries Science and Extension Division of the Tongan Ministry of Fisheries, a division of the CITES Scientific Authority of Tonga. Poasi was instrumental in supporting Tonga to join the convention family, and then he took an active role in Oceania regional meetings, and especially in implementing the marine aspects of the convention.
4. Sarah McIntrye, the alternate Representative for Oceania resigned from her role when she shifted from New Zealand to the United Kingdom. As described in Notification 2024/037, Mr Andrew Murrell, Director of Wildlife Trade Assessments in the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, of Australia, has kindly stepped up to replace Sarah as alternate Representative for Oceania through to the next Conference of the Parties. I wish Sarah well in her new endeavours, and welcome Andrew as my new alternate.

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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.*

## **Relevant CITES implementation issues in the region.**

5. Oceania covers a vast area of mostly tropical regions dominated by the marine environment. Trade risks to wild fauna and flora must be seen in the context of a range of environmental threats, including invasive species, global climate change, habitat loss, and domestic over-exploitation. Coral bleaching has had a dramatic effect on the reefs in some parts of the region (e.g. in Australia and Fiji) and there are concerns about the rapid depletion of stocks of some marine species such as some pelagic sharks and rays, and many species of sea cucumber. Marine resources form a key part of the local culture and the local economy, therefore trade issues concerning them are of critical and growing interest to the countries of the region. The relationship between trade and other pressures needs to be kept in mind but CITES has an important role in ensuring the sustainable use and protection of species in the marine environment of the region.
6. For many countries in Oceania, a large portion of the population relies on marine resources for their livelihoods, either through artisanal fisheries or through ecotourism. In some countries, international tourism makes up >50% of the total GDP. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was particularly severe to the economies and people in the Oceania region even though strong border restrictions resulted in relatively few deaths in most countries. The lack of tourist dollars in the island economies resulted in increased pressure on natural resources for food, especially in the marine environment. International tourism has resumed throughout the region, but it may take a long time to return to pre-Covid levels because of the perceived risks associated with international travel and many hospitality staff left their country for employment elsewhere or re-trained into other careers. The consequent loss of national and personal incomes from tourism will undoubtedly lead to greater pressures on natural resources for both sustenance and for international trade.
7. There has been considerable interest in the region in the implementation of the listing of the large number of Carcharhinidae sharks, though only a few species could be considered to be commercially important in the region. Providing NDFs for migratory sharks or shared stocks, and especially for introductions from the high seas (Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction) is proving to be a challenge, especially where little data exists. Australia has completed multi-species NDFs, and these data are available for neighbouring Parties to use when formulating their own NDFs. SPREP and its consultants, the Secretariat for the Pacific Community (SPC) and staff and associates of James Cook University, Queensland, have been particularly active in supporting the development of NDFs for marine species in the region.
8. Because the region has a very small human population in relation to area administered, and small sizes of government departments, capacity remains a critical issue for almost all Parties and non-Parties in Oceania. CITES is normally but a small part of the wide range of environmental and conservation responsibilities of a small number of government officials. Often just one or two people deal with **ALL** of the Multilateral Environmental Agreements. Some Parties have very low levels of trade in CITES-listed species and so attending to CITES requests for information is a low priority, and electronic communications to registered MAs and SAs is sometimes technically difficult, if not impossible. I especially want to acknowledge the increasing role that SPREP and SPC have played in assisting Scientific Authorities with CITES implementation in the region. Their environmental networks through the Pacific are very well established and their staff have assisted greatly with the implementation of CITES regionally.
9. The New Zealand government has continued to provide financial and other support to assist a number of Oceania Parties to develop suitable domestic legislation to support CITES and the CITES Secretariat has provided assistance in developing and/or reviewing draft legislation.

The development of rigorous NDFs (or equivalent documentations for those countries outside of CITES) remains a major stumbling block in the region, where resource data are often sparse, and this needs to be a focus for future training assistance to the region. The region appears keen to implement electronic permitting to overcome some of the permitting and reporting load borne by a few CITES staff. Papua New Guinea and Australia are leading the way in the region.

## **Capacity-building activities and awareness campaigns**

10. No specific region-wide capacity-building activities have been undertaken since AC32; however, many Scientific Authority staff from diverse Parties in the region have attended the many technical workshops held since AC32, often with generous financial support for travel and in-country expenses. These workshops have proven to be great learning opportunities for SA staff who are often a 'one-man-band' in their home country.
11. Delegates from Australia, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu attended the NDF workshop in Nairobi in December 2023, and many others from the Oceania region, including SPREP, Universities and NGOs, were involved

in online technical expert groups that prepared the draft material for the workshops. Doing NDFs remains a major stumbling block for many Parties in Oceania. My advice has been that in situations where there is a lack of robust data, but where traditional/ indigenous knowledge from community leaders indicates that the species involved is not known to be of immediate conservation concern, rather than simply banning the export of the species until such time as the data are available, it is best to do an initial NDF that is conservative but has conditions requiring the gathering and sharing of information that will help to refine the NDFs in future. The aim is to get to a point where the trade is sustainable so that communities can derive a consistent source of income from them rather than go through boom periods followed by periods with no trade whatsoever as stocks recover – this is neither good for the species nor the communities that rely on the species for income.

12. Delegates from New Zealand and the Solomon Islands participated in person at the Songbirds Workshop held in Bangkok in December 2023. Although few songbirds are actively traded from the region, and holding of caged songbirds is not a common practice in the region, there are species in the region that would be highly sought after if not already afforded some protection by CITES
13. Delegates from Australia and New Zealand attended the workshop considering the application of Resolution 9.24 and its Annexes and Footnote 2 for proposing and considering amendments to Appendices I and II for commercially exploited sharks and other aquatic species.
14. Delegates from Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea attended the workshop on NDFs from ABNJ (Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction) held in Geneva in April 2024. The Oceania region has large areas of ABNJ and some limited experience in conducting NDFs for shared stocks of sharks which cross multiple EEZs and ABNJ in their annual migration routes. The key message is that these stocks need to be considered at a regional level with input from both national and regional fisheries bodies.
15. Australia hosted the workshop on Marine Ornamental Fishes in Brisbane in May 2024. Delegates from three other Oceania Parties, and one French Territory in the region attended in person or on line.
16. As the largest Parties in the region, both Australia and New Zealand are still looking for effective ways to support requests for assistance from our Pacific colleagues. We appreciate the increasing input from colleagues in the SPREP and SPC who were particularly active in supporting delegates from small island nations in the lead-up to and at CoP19. I would also like to express sincere thanks to staff of the CITES Secretariat for all of the assistance they have provided to the workshop organisers during the past 14 years that I have been Oceania representative on the AC, because their in-person input and expertise has been invaluable in this distant and far-flung region.
17. On a personal note, with the advent of Teams/Zoom meetings as a common mechanism to share knowledge and hold discussions, the Parties in Oceania often seem to be at a disadvantage because the CITES Secretariat and the majority of participants are in time zones opposite those of our region. Some CITES Secretariat and NDF workshop expert group chairs have recognised this inequity and I am grateful that they have made special efforts to cater for the needs of our region. Oceania participants travel long distances at high costs to attend in-person meetings of the scientific committees and workshops, and so I am again grateful for the sponsored delegates programmes to allow good levels of participation from the region. The appearance of CITES Secretariat staff in our region has increased in recent times, and they are always warmly welcomed.
18. This is likely to be my last report as the Animals Committee representative for Oceania, and so I would like to thank the CITES Secretariat, fellow Scientific Authority members from New Zealand and the region as a whole, and the Department of Conservation for their great support over the years.

#### **Agenda items of particular interest in the Oceania region**

19. The following items are of particular interest to the nine Parties of Oceania:
  - NDFs
  - NDFS in ABNJ
  - Materials for the identification of specimens of CITES-listed species
  - Trade in stony corals

- Aquatic species listed in the Appendices
- Songbird trade
- Sharks & rays
- Marine ornamental fishes