

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

Seahorses (*Hippocampus* spp.)

NEXT STEPS TOWARD SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF
APPENDIX-II LISTING OF SEAHORSES

1. This document has been submitted by the Maldives, Monaco, Nigeria, Peru, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Togo, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.*
2. Seahorses (species in the genus *Hippocampus*) were among the first marine fishes added to CITES Appendix II (at CoP12, Santiago, Chile, November 2002) and the proposal for this inclusion was put forward by the United States. They were the first fully marine fish species to be taken through the Review of Significant Trade (RST, in three rounds; Res. Conf. 12.8 (Rev. CoP18)). They were also the first marine fish species for which RST recommendations were generated, and the first for which a trade suspension was imposed. They were also the first marine fishes put through Res. Conf. 17.7 (Rev. CoP18) “Review of trade in animal specimens reported as produced in captivity.”
3. CoP18 Doc. 72, submitted by Maldives, Monaco, Sri Lanka and the United States of America, summarized the history of the inclusion of seahorses in Appendix II of CITES, explored progress in implementation, discussed capacity building and noted the trends in international trade since the inclusion of these species in CITES. It also proposed Decisions to help CITES address existing concerns with implementation. CoP18 Doc. 72 noted that while a lot has been done to implement the inclusion of seahorses in Appendix II of CITES, continued large volumes of illegal international trade remained of concern, as did a lack of monitoring of wild populations by Parties to allow robust science-based NDFs.
4. At its 18th meeting (CoP18, Geneva, 2019), CITES Parties noted difficulties implementing the Appendix II CITES listing for seahorses. These included challenges with making non-detriment findings, monitoring trade, and enforcing established trade controls, inter alia. Therefore, the Conference of the Parties adopted a set of Decisions at CoP18 that would help them move toward effective implementation of the Convention for international trade in seahorses (Decisions 18.228-18.233).
5. Decision 18.229(c)(i) directed the Secretariat to “commission a study on trade in *Hippocampus* spp., including applicable regulations, to understand shifts in international trade patterns since the inclusion of seahorses in Appendix II and the Review of Significant Trade of *Hippocampus* spp., as well as the implementation challenges and possible solutions.” Project Seahorse, based at the University of British Columbia (UBC) and Zoological Society of London (ZSL), independently secured funding from the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to undertake studies of the live and dried seahorse trade. Thanks to funding provided to CITES by the Principality of Monaco and NOAA, the Secretariat was able to contribute summaries of the two studies to SC74.

* *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.*

6. The Project Seahorse study on temporal changes in the international trade in live seahorses explored the implementation of the CITES Appendix II listing and the RST. The full report is available as Foster et al 2021 and is summarised as SC74 Doc 70.1. Globally, reported exports of seahorses from key trading Parties declined notably in the first years after the CITES listing, and declined further after the RST process, to just 7% of historic levels. These changes were due to a decline in wild sourcing after the inclusion of seahorses in CITES Appendix II, and then by a decrease in the number of captive born seahorses (from wild-sourced parents) following the RST process. Almost all live seahorses in international trade are now captive bred.
7. The CITES listing for seahorses appears to have reduced pressure of international trade in live animals on some wild populations that are involved in live trade. In contrast, the international trade in dried seahorses continues to pose a significant threat to these species after the CITES listing, involving large volumes of smuggled seahorses.
8. The Project Seahorse study on the dried trade in seahorses analysed implementation of the CITES Appendix II listing in (i) six jurisdictions that have long been net exporters of seahorses but have declared national bans or suspensions for such exports and (ii) four jurisdictions that have long been key importers for dried seahorses. A summary of the study on CITES implementation for dried seahorses, commissioned by the Secretariat, is available as SC74 Doc 70.1. The international trade in dried seahorses continues to pose a significant threat to these species.
9. As of November 2018, exports had been banned or suspended from Party/species combinations that together comprised 98% of declared legal wild seahorse exports across all species in the CITES database from 2004-2011 (Foster & Vincent 2021). However, although jurisdictions have declared such bans/suspensions, many have not actively enforced those bans and suspensions.
10. Respondents across jurisdictions in the study understood that restrictions on trade alone would not achieve sustainable seahorse populations, even if fully implemented. Measures to reduce fishing pressure must also be implemented. Most seahorses are caught in nonselective fishing gear, particularly bottom trawls. In addition, it may be difficult to regulate seahorse trade because dried seahorses are small and easy to hide, seahorses are often exported in mixed shipments with other species, fishers land seahorses caught in other countries' waters, and seahorses in trade may take circuitous routes (e.g. West Africa to Peru to Hong Kong SAR to Vietnam).
11. Most jurisdictions in the Project Seahorse study indicated a lack of national conservation assessments for seahorses, and lack of implementation of national protective measures for seahorses. Only Thailand reported tracking seahorse population trends over time.

Next Steps

12. The two studies, on live and dried trade, confirm that while CITES Appendix II provisions are largely being met for the trade in live seahorses, action is needed to ensure the large volume of ongoing dried seahorse trade is both legal and sustainable.
13. As summarised by the Secretariat in SC74 Doc 70.1, to meet their obligations under the Convention Parties can “a) increase their efforts to address illegal trade or b) they can lift their national suspensions and work to ensure that the seahorses being traded are sourced sustainably and apply the CITES Appendix II listing following a precautionary approach.”
14. The SC agreed, at its 74th meeting in March 2022, to propose to CoP 19 that it renew some of the CoP18 Decisions on seahorses that have not been completed due to pandemic delays (SC74 Doc 70.2). These include (a) organizing an expert workshop to discuss the implementation and enforcement of CITES for trade in *Hippocampus* spp. and (b) directing the AC and SC to do three things: (i) review the information in the reports to SC74, (ii) review the outcome of the expert workshop, and (iii) develop recommendations to the Parties, the Secretariat, and relevant stakeholders, as appropriate, to ensure sustainable and legal trade in seahorses.
15. In addition to carrying over Decisions from CoP18 to help ensure the completion of work that the CoP has agreed to, additional Decisions are needed at CoP19 to maintain momentum through the next intersessional period on seahorse conservation efforts, building on the work that has been done since CoP18. Two key actions will support CITES and its Parties to take the necessary next steps toward successful implementation of Appendix II for seahorses. First, Parties with ongoing illegal and/or unsustainable trade in dried seahorses should develop national or regional plans of action to ensure any future trade complies with CITES provisions

(see SC74 Doc. 70.1 Annex 2). Second, the SC should address the large volumes of illegal trade in dried seahorses.

16. To improve the conservation prospects for seahorses, the Conference of the Parties is invited to note this document and adopt the following additional, new draft decisions:

Directed to the Secretariat

19.AA The Secretariat shall:

- a) subject to external funding, collaborate with Parties and species experts to prepare a report on the global illegal trade in seahorses, for consideration by the Standing Committee. The report should include an analysis of extracted data from the CITES illegal trade database, consultations with regional enforcement networks as applicable, analysis of illegal trade routes, modus operandi and seizures, and information contained in the studies prepared in response to Decision 18.229 c(i); and
- b) report on implementation of paragraph a) of the current Decision 19.AA to the Standing Committee at its 77th and 78th meeting.

Directed to the Parties

19.BB To effectively implement the inclusion of seahorses in Appendix II of CITES, source, transit, and consumer Parties for which there is evidence of illegal and/or unsustainable international trade in dried seahorses are encouraged to:

- a) collaborate with key stakeholders and species experts to develop national or regional plans of action to improve CITES implementation for seahorses and should include the following, inter alia:
 - i) encouraging collaboration and communication between key stakeholders at a national and regional level, including Environment, Fisheries and Enforcement agencies, with respect to CITES implementation and data gathering for the international trade in seahorses;
 - ii) improving monitoring, detection and law enforcement activities related to seahorses in coastal areas and at transaction points (e.g. in the marketplace, online, in maritime areas, and at air- and seaports);
 - iii) submitting comprehensive and accurate information on illegal international trade in seahorses in their annual illegal trade reports to the Secretariat, as required in compliance with Resolution Conf. 11.17 (Rev. CoP18) on National reports, and in support of Decision 19.AA a);
 - iv) addressing the main drivers of illegal and unsustainable trade by effectively regulating and constraining the operations of non-selective fishing gears, such as bottom trawls and gillnets, to reduce their impacts on seahorses, and combating illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing of seahorses by developing best practices for sustainable harvest; and
- b) share progress in developing and implementing, these national or regional plans of action with the Secretariat for its report to the 33rd meeting of the Animals Committee.

Directed to the Animals Committee

19.CC The Animals Committee shall:

- a) in consultation with species experts, analyse and review the results of any activities under Decisions 19.BB and other relevant available information;
- b) in consultation with species experts, develop recommendations to the Parties, the Secretariat, and relevant stakeholders, as appropriate, to ensure sustainable and legal international trade in seahorses; and
- c) consider recommending seahorses as a case study to the 2nd international expert workshop on non-detriment findings.

Directed to Parties, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations

19.DD Parties, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations are encouraged to provide financial and technical assistance to Parties to implement Decision 19.BB and any further recommendations made by the Standing Committee.

Directed to the Standing Committee

19.EE The Standing Committee shall:

- a) in consultation with species experts, analyse and review the results of any activities under Decisions 19.AA and 19.BB, and the report of the Animals Committee produced in support of Decision 19.CC;
- b) in consultation with species experts, develop recommendations to the Parties and the Secretariat, as appropriate, to strengthen CITES implementation and enforcement for international trade in seahorses; and
- c) report on the implementation of Decisions 19.AA to 19.EE to the Conference of the Parties at its 20th meeting.

COMMENTS OF THE SECRETARIAT

- A. The Secretariat does not recommend the adoption of the draft decisions presented in this document and provides its reasons below. This document is closely linked to document CoP19 Doc. 69.1, which has been submitted to the present meeting by the Standing Committee and reports on the implementation of Decisions 18.228 to 18.233 on *Seahorses* (*Hippocampus spp.*).
- B. The Secretariat notes that the proposal in document CoP19 Doc. 69.2 appears to pre-empt the outcome of the expert workshop that is proposed in paragraph a) of draft decision 19.AA in document CoP19 Doc. 69.1. The objective of the workshop is to discuss the implementation and enforcement of CITES for trade in *Hippocampus spp.*, including the recommendations and outcomes from the Review of Significant Trade process, and propose practical steps to address implementation and enforcement challenges. Document CoP19 Doc. 69.2 also uses the results of the studies produced under Decision 19.229 paragraph c) i) to come to conclusions before the Animals Committee and Standing Committee have had an opportunity to review them.
- C. Should the Parties decide to adopt the draft decisions presented in this document, the Secretariat is of the view that the two sets of decisions in documents CoP19 69.1 and 69.2 would need to be streamlined. For example, the expert workshop proposed in document CoP19 Doc. 69.1 would no longer be necessary.

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.

For the seahorses decisions directed to the Secretariat (19.AA), external funds will be needed to produce the report on illegal trade in seahorses. The cost of the previous seahorse report was estimated at USD\$ 100,000.00. The United States estimates the cost for preparation of the report called for in Decision 19.AA and associated activities to be similar and we will seek extrabudgetary voluntary funds and partners to help offset these costs.

For the seahorse decisions directed to the Parties (19 BB.), we do not estimate additional costs to Parties as these activities are part of a Party's responsibilities for effective implementation of the Convention, including making required findings, and addressing illegal trade.

For the seahorse decisions directed to the Animals Committee (19.CC) and the Standing Committee(19.EE.), the tasks will likely require intersessional work by the Committees and time during their meetings. However, we believe that the work can be accommodated within the regular work program of the Committee and without additional funding.

If budget estimates are to be based on the Secretariat comments' scenario, the Secretariat is of the view that there would not be any cost or workload implications.