

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



Joint sessions of the 33rd meeting of the Animals Committee and
the 27th meeting of the Plants Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 12 - 13 July 2024

Strategic matters

WORLD WILDLIFE TRADE REPORT

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat to facilitate the consultation mentioned in Decision 19.31.
2. At its 19th meeting (CoP19; Panama City, 2022), the Conference of the Parties adopted Decisions 19.30 and 19.31 on the *World Wildlife Trade Report* as follows:

Directed to the Secretariat

19.30 *The Secretariat shall:*

- a) *issue a Notification to the Parties providing the pilot World Wildlife Trade Report, seeking feedback and views on such a report and the potential utility and drawbacks of producing such a report periodically; and*
- b) *provide the responses received from the Notification to the Standing Committee and present findings and make recommendations for consideration by the Standing Committee.*

Directed to the Standing Committee, in consultation with the Animals and Plants Committees

19.31 *The Standing Committee shall review the responses to the Notification and the findings and recommendations of the Secretariat, consult with the Animals and Plants Committees as appropriate and make recommendations to the 20th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.*

3. Since these are the last meetings of the Animals and Plants Committees before the 20th meeting of the Conference of the Parties, the Secretariat is reporting progress made in implementation of Decision 19.30 to facilitate the consultation requested by the Conference of the Parties in Decision 19.31.

Implementation of Decision 19.30

4. The Secretariat published Notification to the Parties No. 2023/109 on 8 September 2023 to seek feedback and views of Parties on the pilot *World Wildlife Trade Report* (hereinafter referred to as “the Report”) and the potential utility and drawbacks of producing such a report on a regular basis. Notification to the Parties No. 2023/130 issued after the 77th meeting of the Standing Committee extended the deadline to submit responses from 30 November 2023 to 31 December 2023.
5. Responses were received from the following Parties: Argentina, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Canada, China, Colombia, the European Union (on behalf of its Member States), Indonesia, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, South Africa, the United States of America and Zambia. Comments were also received from the following organizations: the United Nations Environment Programme – World Conservation Monitoring Centre, Born Free, the International Fund for Animal Welfare, Species Survival Network, TRAFFIC, Wildlife Conservation Society, the World Wide Fund for Nature and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. In addition,

Animal Welfare Institute, Born Free Foundation, Center for Biological Diversity, David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation, Fondation Franz Weber, Pro Wildlife and the Species Survival Network submitted a joint statement.

6. Views were expressed by Parties and organizations with regard to the objective, substance, methodology, time frame and necessity/utility of the Report. They commented on both the potential utility and drawbacks of the Report as well as on the periodic preparation of such reports proposed in document [CoP19 Doc.12](#). The summary below synthesizes the views expressed in the responses by focusing first on potential utility and other positive considerations, secondly on drawbacks and other concerns, and finally on the various ways forward proposed in the responses.

Potential utility and other positive considerations

7. In support of the periodic preparation of the Report, Parties and organizations highlight the importance of having well-structured information on the routes, scale and patterns of international trade in CITES-listed species, the values, conservation impacts and socio-economic benefits of such trade like no other reports do. They welcome the fact that the Report presents such information in a very accessible way which is particularly helpful for a wider audience. The considerations vary considerably, from recognizing the potential value of the Report to fully supporting the regular preparation of such reports, i.e., between two meetings of the Conference of the Parties.
 - a) Brazil considers the periodic publication of the Report to be pertinent and appropriate, noting that the information on trade in wood products is particularly valuable as it shows a global perspective of such trade, drawing parallels with the context within Brazil. They believe that reports of this nature are fundamental for identifying the main taxonomic groups traded, their origin (either wild-harvested or captive-bred/artificially propagated), as well as pointing out positive and negative impacts of the trade on the conservation of species listed in CITES.
 - b) Canada sees value in the Report as a communication tool and, with some reservations, notes that producing the Report for each CoP may be a good tool to summarize the impacts of listing species at previous CoPs, the results on activities relating to capacity-building and conservation success stories and livelihood case studies summaries of the implementation reports submitted by Parties.
 - c) China believes that the Report holds significant importance and should be regularly produced and recommends that efforts be made to enhance its usefulness.
 - d) Colombia welcomes the Report and shares some concrete suggestions for improving future reports which are included in the section below.
 - e) The European Union and its Member States consider the Report a useful addition to the available resources on international wildlife trade, particularly as it presents such information in an accessible way. This makes it a useful tool to communicate to the wider public how international wildlife trade works, what its estimated monetary value is, and how better regulation of trade can under certain circumstances produce positive conservation and livelihood outcomes. In their view, the Report highlights the importance of CITES and enhances its visibility.
 - f) Indonesia welcomes and supports the pilot Report and the suggestion of periodic publication of such reports aiming to provide a comprehensive overview of wildlife trade from various perspectives including the routes, scale and patterns of international trade in CITES-listed species, the values, conservation impacts and socio-economic benefits of such trade, as well as the interrelationships between legal and illegal trade. Indonesia believes that such a report will be an important tool for CITES Parties in pursuing a balance between conservation and sustainable use which is especially important for Indonesia since several of its species are among the top 5 most traded species globally.
 - g) Mexico believes that the content of the Report is adequate and shares some specific suggestions for improvement, including two alternative scenarios for consideration, included below.
 - h) New Zealand (on behalf of the Oceanian region) considers that there is potential value in the Report.
 - i) South Africa considers that the pilot Report contains a wealth of valuable information that is important for assessing the current status of international wildlife trade. The infographics and figures are well presented, easy to interpret, and are in themselves a rich resource illustrating global trade in CITES

species. South Africa is of the opinion that the periodic production of such a report would allow CITES Parties, stakeholders, non-governmental organizations, and the general public to keep track of global trends in wildlife trade. It is especially useful to monitor the species that dominate overall trade and wild-sourced trade, regional trade patterns, and trade in species/genera recently included in the Appendices.

- j) The United States of America agrees that it is important to understand the patterns and trends in CITES-listed species, and in particular the conservation impacts of such trade, and is open to further discussion on which sections and topics in the pilot Report may be appropriate to consider for future reports or alternative solutions to providing useful information for the use of Parties. The United States also notes the financial value of trade in CITES-listed species is important from various perspectives, including at national level CITES implementation and the creation of development projects.
- k) Zambia notes that the Report has attempted to provide a comprehensive overview of international trade in CITES-listed species and believes that the Report has clearly defined the routes, scale and patterns of international trade in CITES-listed species together with values, conservation impacts and socio-economic benefits of such trade as well as linkages between legal and illegal trade. Zambia adds that legal trade in CITES-listed species provides a significant contribution to the local communities that are mainly found in the remote parts of the country. Zambia believes that the periodic production of the report will ensure that there is adequate data to inform Parties to the Convention on the realistic status of trade in CITES-listed species which will be beneficial to decision makers.
- l) The United Nations Environment Programme – World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) sees value in a regular assessment of the status of the implementation of the Convention, building on the pilot Report, adding that future editions of the Report could act as a mechanism to compile and assess the *CITES Strategic Vision* indicators to track progress towards the CITES goals. It may also be an avenue for compiling and communicating wildlife trade-related information that could be used in the context of monitoring progress towards the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. UNEP-WCMC sees many benefits for the Convention to have this type of regular stock-take to ensure that there is an improved monitoring mechanism to assess whether CITES is achieving its objectives and to identify where the gaps are in order to ensure that the trade is legal and sustainable.
- m) The International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) recognizes the value of such Report and notes that the pilot Report attempts to address some of the limitations that came to light in many of the studies that ITTO has carried out in reviewing the trade in CITES-listed timber species. This concerns particularly the lack of reporting on the value of shipments in CITES annual reports, and the inconsistency in the use of units such as “pieces” and “carvings” that makes the aggregation of quantity information based on these reports difficult or impossible.
- n) TRAFFIC is of the opinion that an in-depth analysis of global legal trade in CITES-listed species, an exploration of the socio-economic value and associated conservation benefits of such trade, as well as information to improve the understanding of the links between legal and illegal wildlife trade, is invaluable. TRAFFIC believes that a regularly available report of this nature would enhance knowledge of trade in CITES-listed species and would support Parties’ decision-making processes, thus resulting in better informed national and international wildlife trade policies. TRAFFIC encourages Parties to provide feedback that would ensure that a robust, inclusive, balanced and evidence-based approach is taken in the development of the Report and that the output meets the expectations and needs of the Parties.
- o) The World Wide Fund for Nature considers the pilot Report an excellent and highly accessible overview of global trade in CITES-listed species and hopes that funds will be available to expand on this work.

Drawbacks and other concerns

- 8. Funding needs, reporting burden, lack of value added, the difficulty and sensitivity of collecting price data are among the key shared concerns of the respondents. Some Parties perceive that the Report is biased on the positive impact of legal trade in CITES species and that the intent of the Report goes beyond the mandate of the Convention. Such considerations have led to some Parties to reject the proposal of periodic production of such a report.
 - a) Argentina considers that it is not clear how the Report will contribute to ensuring that species listed in CITES will receive CITES protection, in a similar way that processes such as non-detriment findings, legal acquisition findings or the Review of Significant Trade do. The preparation of the Report will entail

a significant amount of work that will be difficult to carry out due to the collection of the data and its variability and low reliability. Due to the volume of work, the funds required, plus the difficulty of collecting reliable and sensitivity of the data, Argentina does not support the proposal to regularly publish the report.

- b) Burkina Faso expresses concerns over the significant financial and human resources to be mobilized for this purpose, which it believes could instead be used to support the work already underway to implement the Convention. More generally, Burkina Faso is of the view that the Report goes beyond the mandate of the Convention which is not intended to demonstrate the benefits that trade can bring, but rather to protect such species from over-exploitation. It therefore concludes that a periodic report is not necessary.
- c) Canada calls for consideration of the factors of cost, capacity, value added, and resources needed from Parties versus the use of the Report as a tool to influence national and international policy. Canada warns that the dependence of the preparation of such a Report on extrabudgetary funding makes the latter very concerning as CITES is already very polarized. It is therefore very important that the Report remains neutral and not vulnerable to influence by special interest groups.
- d) The European Union and its Member States consider that the added value of the Report in terms of contributing to the CITES decision-making process or everyday management operations is unclear. Given the limited resources and capacities of the CITES Secretariat, concerns are raised as to additional workload needed to produce such a report that might come at the expense of responding to other, more urgent, needs. The European Union also observes that the Report lacks balance in terms of providing the overview of positive and negative impacts of the trade on wild populations and ecosystems and especially to society and economy. With regards to the price data, on one hand, the European Union believes that the inclusion of price data as a requested data field within CITES annual reports would significantly increase the reporting burden for CITES authorities and might require adaptation of permit issuing process and potentially also additional legal basis as Management Authorities do not necessarily have access to such information currently. On the other hand, the European Union notes that due to frequent and substantial variation in prices, the price data has to be seen as a momentary glimpse of the situation and can only be used as a very rough estimate of the value. The European Union also warns that providing the highest estimated unit price might have some negative consequences on the species.
- e) Kenya does not support the periodic production of the Report due to its concern over cost implications and the belief that resources should be deployed to other priority areas for the implementation of the Convention including compliance assistance for Parties. Kenya also considers the proposal to include price data in annual or implementation reports of the Parties not practical as the monetary value and price data are often considered sensitive and may be difficult for authorities to collect or estimate.
- f) Due to its concern over the lack of reliable and quality information, at the current stage, Mexico sees no benefits of producing the Report periodically. It further explains in detail the risks of generating a report with the objectives proposed and with the incomplete and biased information that is currently available.
- g) New Zealand echoes the concern that the collection of price data often involves commercially sensitive information and for some Parties would require legislative reform to demand this information. This could be a significant problem in some countries and the proposed process could be an unnecessary additional reporting burden in some countries. Any decision concerning these value data must therefore be non-binding.
- h) The United States of America expresses concerns over the added burden to Parties and the Secretariat in contributing to and evaluating such a report periodically, the uncertainty of the utility of regularly producing such a report especially how it will advance the purposes of the Convention, cost implications, and the availability and quality of data in order to draw meaningful conclusions. It therefore urges caution in suggesting any continuation of this effort. In addition, the United States has the following specific considerations:
 - i) The fundamental step to understand patterns and trends of the trade should be to improve the quality of the CITES trade data which can only be achieved by improving the capacity of Parties to effectively manage and report such data.

- ii) The conservation impacts of legal trade in CITES-listed species are already considered in ongoing work such as non-detriment findings (NDF) and development of NDF guidance, the Periodic Review of the Appendices, the Review of Significant Trade in specimens of Appendix-II species, etc.
- iii) The data and methodologies used in the chapter on the financial value of the trade in CITES-listed species are significantly flawed and therefore do not lend to drawing any meaningful and objective conclusions regarding the issue.
- iv) The examination of the impact of CITES trade on socio-economic effects extends beyond the conservation aim of CITES.

Without more discussion of the issues and questions raised above, the United States finds the drawbacks of the pilot Report outweigh the potential utility overall and is unable at this time to support producing such a report periodically.

- i) Born Free is of the view that the Report is biased towards trade and goes beyond CITES' mandate. It points out that the impacts of trade on conservation and socio-economic aspects are difficult to assess, highly variable and subject to multiple factors. In addition, the Report's preparation between each CoP would be expensive and divert limited funding from core work.
- j) The International Fund for Animal Welfare advises against dedicating CITES resources to producing this Report, given how stretched they already are. The overemphasis on the monetary value of products in trade in the Report does not address the primary concerns or scope of CITES. It considers that the Report fails to address the need to consider the impact of species loss and over-exploitation on indigenous peoples and local communities' livelihoods and culture.
- k) The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) expresses concerns over funding needs and reporting burden. It also questions the usefulness of collecting price data.
- l) The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and the Associations of Midwest, Northeast, West, and Southeast Fish and Wildlife Agencies, representing the 50 US state fish and wildlife agencies, believe that it would be difficult to allow Parties and observers to have a comprehensive review of the Report before it is published, and consider that the costs associated with the preparation of such reports are better spent on ensuring effective implementation of CITES' ongoing work.
- m) The joint response from Animal Welfare Institute, Born Free Foundation, Center for Biological Diversity, David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation, Fondation Franz Weber, Pro Wildlife and the Species Survival Network argues against the periodic preparation of the Report. The organizations are of the opinion that the Report does not respond to needs identified by the treaty or collectively by CITES Parties and adds more work to CITES' already overburdened mandate.

Possible ways forward

- 9. There appears to be no consensus on whether the Report should be prepared and, if so, on whether it should be prepared a regular basis. The following considerations on the way forward are offered by some of the respondents under the assumption that the preparation of such reports is an option.

a) Timeframe and regularity

Canada believes that, given the exceptional reporting burden of Parties related to specific ongoing CITES initiatives, producing such a report during each CoP cycle may be an unsustainable burden on the Parties and the Secretariat.

As an alternative, the European Union and its Member States consider that it could be useful to compile such a report every five to ten years, depending on the availability of funding and the workload of the Secretariat, under the condition that no additional reporting requirements be imposed on Parties.

Colombia suggests that the time frame covered by such reports should be consistent for all analysis in the report, e.g., for both the overview of CITES trade and the estimation of the financial value of CITES exports, in an effort to ensure comparative and meaningful analysis of the topics discussed.

b) *Author*

New Zealand, on behalf of the Oceanian region, suggests that it might be more appropriate for the report to be prepared by a university or institute.

The Wildlife Conservation Society suggests that CITES Parties may wish to mobilize the considerable scientific and technical expertise within civil society to produce a regular report on the state of CITES-listed species and their conservation, use and trade.

c) *Methodology*

Colombia stresses the need to define the general methodology to estimate export values, as well as values for plants and animals. It further proposes that guidelines be developed under the Convention for the periodic preparation of future reports. To achieve the objective of the Report and to demonstrate the benefits of trade on the conservation of species, Colombia believes that it is necessary to ensure consistency in the information from statistics and that the information on the conservation of species must be provided by the Parties.

d) *Content*

Having expressed its concerns on the challenges of producing such a report on a regular basis, Canada states that, as an alternative consideration, a report for each CoP could summarize the impacts of listing species at previous CoPs, the results on activities relating to capacity-building and conservation success stories and livelihood case studies summaries of the implementation reports submitted by Parties. Otherwise, if the truly valuable elements of the report can be identified, they could be incorporated in other ways, for example in the CITES Wildlife Trade Review portal or a theme page on the CITES website.

Colombia discourages the use of "grey literature" in the Report since it can either overstate or underestimate trade or conservation impacts which may lead to erroneous conclusions. Instead, Colombia encourages the establishment of a mechanism to compile data from official sources or records from Parties.

Kenya highlights the importance of objective and meaningful reporting which should, among other things, include information on the potential of negative impacts from wildlife trade.

Mexico points out that information available at national level on the economic, social and ecological issues linked to the listing of species in CITES is limited and insufficient to feed the Report. It therefore proposes two alternative scenarios to modify the Report:

- i) Compile and thoroughly analyse case studies provided by Parties on international trade in CITES species in order to focus on the ecological, economic and social aspects of wildlife trade.
- ii) Use the results of the evaluations in the context of the *Strategic Vision* indicators that are to be agreed upon by the Parties in order to have solid data on the implementation of CITES.

With respect to regional trade patterns, South Africa recommends that the analysis determine whether the top exporting regions are trading mostly in non-indigenous species, and similarly, which regions are the major exporters of indigenous species. Given the importance of the conservation and socio-economic impacts of legal trade in CITES-listed species, South Africa believes that research and analyses on such impacts should be conducted on a regular basis as it provides an invaluable method of monitoring the impact of CITES so that CITES implementation can be adapted accordingly to enhance the positive impacts and minimize the negative impacts.

UNEP-WCMC proposes that, in future iterations of the Report, a chapter on the conservation status of CITES-listed species should be included. It also notes that future editions of the Report could act as a mechanism to compile and assess the *CITES Strategic Vision* indicators to track progress towards the CITES goals. It may also be an avenue for compiling and communicating wildlife trade-related information that could be used in the context of monitoring progress towards the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. The latter is echoed by Nigeria and the Wildlife Conservation Society.

e) *Scope*

In case that the Report is not deemed useful in its entirety, the United States considers that the summary statistics in the *CITES at a Glance* section are informative and might be produced periodically as a stand-alone product.

f) *Mechanism for further consideration*

Nigeria recommends the establishment of an intersessional working group to consider the value of the Report and whether it could be reframed to be more useful for Parties.

g) *Funding*

ITTO considers that some of the new funds recently pledged to a new phase of the CITES Tree Species Programme could be targeted at addressing some of these trade data issues for timber species. The source of funding is not discussed in other responses.

Recommendations

10. The Animals and Plants Committees are invited to review the responses to the Notification to the Parties summarized above and to provide scientific advice to the Standing Committee on the potential scientific utility and drawbacks of producing a World Wildlife Trade Report on international trade in animal and plant species that are included in the CITES Appendices.