

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



Twenty-seventh meeting of the Plants Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 8 – 13 July 2024

Regulation of trade

Identification of timber and other wood products

REPORT OF THE INTERSESSIONAL WORKING GROUP

1. This document has been submitted by Canada, as chair of the intersessional working group on *Identification of timber and other wood products*.*
2. At its 19th meeting (CoP19; Panama City, 2022), the Conference of the Parties adopted Decisions 19.145 to 19.148 on *Identification of timber and other wood products* as follows:

Directed to the Secretariat, in close consultation with the Plants Committee

19.145 *The Secretariat shall, in close consultation with the Plants Committee, and subject to external resources:*

- a) *review the utility and practicality of the online repository, and make recommendations on its development;*
- b) *based on the outcomes of the review, liaise with relevant organizations and experts in the development of a depository of timber and other wood products identification resources and a dedicated webpage, taking into account the progress and recommendations reported in document PC25 Doc. 19 and its addendum;*
- c) *in undertaking the above, consideration should be given to tailor the compilation of timber and other wood products identification resources for both frontline enforcement officers and to experts involved in identifying timber and other wood products for forensic or legal purposes; and*
- d) *report on progress or results of this work to the Plants Committee at its first regular meeting after CoP19 and seek its advice and input.*

Directed to Parties

19.146 *Parties are encouraged to collaborate with the Secretariat in sharing relevant information in support of the implementation of Decisions 19.145 and 19.147.*

* *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.*

Directed to the Plants Committee, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders

19.147 *The Plants Committee shall, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders and building on information on existing initiatives, and progress to date:*

- a) *develop a plan to prioritize the CITES-listed tree species to focus global efforts on developing and sharing identification reference databases and tools, including sampling campaigns for vouchered reference samples;*
- b) *prioritize the development of identification material for Dalbergia species, taking into consideration progress made in document PC25 Doc. 34 and document CoP19 Doc. 84.1, and giving attention to frontline identification materials to assist differentiating look-alike species that may not be of conservation concern, such as Dalbergia sissoo;*
- c) *develop a list of available techniques and tools, and evaluate their standards and usefulness to species-specific identification and enforcement for CITES-listed tree species and their look-alikes;*
- d) *determine gaps in current knowledge sources for CITES timber identification, on their availability and usefulness, and consider challenges and resourcing required to make these tools more widely available to CITES Parties;*
- e) *develop standardized information templates and other tools that could be used by Parties to facilitate sharing information on the content and status of wood sample collections, and exchange with research institutions, law enforcement agencies, and other authorities;*
- f) *determine methods to stimulate global, regional and national exchange of best practices in wood identification technologies between Parties, including lessons learned on how Parties have built their timber identification capacity and expertise;*
- g) *review the utility and practicality of the online repository and make recommendations on its development to inform implementation of Decision 19.145;*
- h) *consider the relevant outcomes of the online Task Force meeting on illegal trade in specimens of CITES-listed tree species presented in the Annex to the Addendum to document SC74 Doc. 33.2; and*
- i) *update the Standing Committee, as appropriate, on progress made, and report its findings and recommendations for consideration by the Conference of the Parties at its 20th meeting.*

Directed to the Standing Committee

19.148 *The Standing Committee shall consider any report by the Plants Committee relating to the implementation of Decision 19.147 and convey, as appropriate, any recommendations it may have to the Conference of the Parties.*

3. Progress in the implementation of Decisions 19.145 and 19.146 is reported by the Secretariat in document PC27 Doc. 18.1. The present report therefore focuses on progress in the implementation of Decision 19.147.
4. At its 26th meeting, the Plants Committee considered document [PC26 Doc. 20](#), and agreed, *inter alia*, on the establishment of an intersessional working group on timber identification with the mandate to discuss and agree on a way forward for the implementation of paragraphs a) to g) of Decision 19.147, including consideration of Annex 2 to document PC26 Doc. 20 and report back to the Plants Committee at its 27th meeting.
5. The membership of the working group was decided as follows:

Chair: Canada;

Members: alternate representative for Asia (Mr. Chong), representative for Central and South America and the Caribbean (Mr. Belteton Chacon), representative for North America (Mr. Boles);

Parties: Cameroon, Canada, Chile, China, Democratic Republic of the Congo, European Union, Germany, India, Indonesia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mali, Mexico, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, South Africa, Switzerland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America;

IGOs and NGOs: International Tropical Timber Organization, Association Technique Internationale des Bois Tropicaux, ForestBased Solutions, International Wood Products Association, Species Survival Network, TRAFFIC, World Resources Institute, World Wide Fund for Nature.

Summary of findings and recommendations

6. The members of the working group were asked to provide inputs in writing for the implementation of paragraphs a) to h) of Decision 19.147. Valuable insights and considerations were provided by Canada, Mexico, South Africa, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Island, and the United States of America. The International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) and the World Resources Institute (WRI) also provided their views and insights. The responses as received are available as Annexes to the present document, as follows:
 - a) Annex 1: A summary of the responses received where they relate to specific paragraphs of Decision 19.147, as compiled by Canada as chair of the intersessional working group. The second and third sheets titled "SA Table 1" and "SA Table 2" complement the summary of South Africa's response. Note that the response from the United States of America is not summarized in that table, but rather available in full in Annex 6.
 - b) Annexes 2 to 6: Parties responses as received from Canada, Mexico, South Africa, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Island and the United States of America, respectively.
 - c) Annexes 7 and 8: IGOs and NGOs responses as received, from ITTO and WRI, respectively. WRI's response is based on comments from World Forest ID, which are fully endorsed by WRI.
7. The mandate and tasks of the working group were quite extensive and timeframe too short to make the desired progress. Insufficient time was available to carefully consider the extensive input received as well as some significant documents noted by working group members, resulting from work done prior to the creation of this working group with valuable information and background. It was not possible to organize a discussion with all members of the working group.
8. A recommended approach would be to continue work on the issue, but to establish sub-groups to focus on specific aspects of the Terms of Reference, or to approach in a stepwise manner with a phased approach. Prioritization of the tasks to be tackled would help subdivide the tasks to allow work to be done in parallel. Care needs to be taken to avoid duplication of work arising from other tree-related Decisions or work arising from African tree species intersessional working group and neotropical tree species intersessional working group.

Reflection on progress in the implementation of Decision 19.147

9. It was noted that there are many interrelated Decisions (19.145 to 19.148) which should be considered in unison to address the issues presented by identification of timber and wood products. The Decisions are quite ambitious and should be moderated to activities or tasks which can be reasonably completed in intersessional periods. Smaller tangible targets should be set.
10. Prioritization of the development of identification tools for CITES-listed tree species will require an assessment of existing tools, consideration of taxon-specific trade levels at regional levels, and consideration of implementation aspects to ensure that the identification tools will have practical impacts in the settings they are required in.
11. There are varying needs with different levels of complexity:
 - a) Enforcement or border officials in the field require quick, easy, accessible tools, training, field guides, available experts, etc. to be effective in the field. Tools are required for quick identification, at least at genus level, to allow these officials to identify the timber in the field. It is important to keep in mind gaps (including cost) to ensure technological solutions are accessible by a wide range of Parties.

- b) A high degree of accuracy is needed when an absolute identification of the species as well as location of harvest is required, particularly if legal or enforcement actions are required.
12. There are synergies to be considered with other organizations or experts who are focused on identification of timber as well as other CITES working groups addressing tree species-related Decisions, and it is important to determine how to collaborate with these groups in order to maximize limited resources.
 13. Wood identification expertise is a scarce resource and needs to be developed. Those existing experts who are available to assist should be identified, with their area of expertise and their location. As well, collections of vouchered wood reference samples need to be expanded, not only considering the species of wood but the geographical origins.
 14. It would be valuable to assess existing models for international coordination, centralized repositories, standardized information templates, and other aspects of timber and other wood product identification.
 15. It is also to be noted that the Secretariat is in the process of initiating a related study using the terms of reference revised at PC26 which will need to be examined after PC27 in relation to implementation of Decision 19.146. As Decisions 19.145 to 19.147 are a suite of related decisions, information from the study would be important to consider in the context of Decision 19.147.
 16. As many valuable observations were made by the working group members and the body of work did not progress as far as hoped, consideration should be given to allow the working group to continue its efforts and make more substantial progress.

Recommendations

17. The Plants Committee is invited to:
 - a) consider the progress achieved by the intersessional working group of identification of timber and other wood products and the Annexes 1 to 8 of the present document;
 - b) consider the reflections on the status of the implementation of Decisions 19.145 to 19.147, and the pertinence for any new or revised mandates on this matter; and,
 - c) make recommendations for consideration of Standing Committee at SC78.