

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



Seventy-Seventh meeting of the Standing Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 6-10 November 2023

Regional Matters

Report of regional representatives

OCEANIA

This document has been submitted by New Zealand as regional representative.

Introduction

- Regional representative: New Zealand
- Alternative representative: Australia
- Number of Parties in the region: 9 (Australia, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Palau, New Zealand, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu)
- Number of Parties providing Information In this report: two

This report covers key activities of the parties within the Oceania region in the period between SC74 and SC77. The report has been compiled using contributions received from Australia, New Zealand and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP).

SPREP has been active in supporting smaller Oceania Parties to fulfil their CITES obligations, and their assistance is very welcome. SPREP have provided assistance to one state, which may be interested in joining the CITES family, to undertake a review of their CITES management practices and determine the advantages and disadvantages of joining CITES.

Overview of Major Developments

Australia

Australia is on track to develop non-detriment findings for 34 CITES-listed species of sharks and rays caught in Australian fisheries and for which ongoing export approvals are required. As part of this work, Australia contracted globally leading shark scientists Prof Colin Simpfendorfer and Dr Cassandra Rigby to provide independent expert advice to inform Australia's NDFs. The independent advice draws on the best available science from peer-reviewed journals, the Status of Australian Fish Stocks reports (published by the Fisheries Research & Development Corporation) and Shark Report Card.

The outcomes of the advice for all species found that while current levels of harvest are sustainable, and therefore support a positive NDF, actions can be taken to improve sustainability if harvest levels increase in future. For a small number of shark and ray species 'Positive (conditional)' NDFs were recommended, meaning additional species-specific recommendations should be considered to further support the positive NDF. The CITES Scientific Authority (the department) is considering these and recommendations will be incorporated as part of the ongoing export assessment and approval process under the federal Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. The information available on the CITES Authorities' website (<https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/marine/fisheries/wto-proposal-shark-ray-species>) and may be useful for other Parties who also harvest these shark and ray species.

Australia is undertaking a review into its national Code of Practice on the Humane Treatment of Wild and Farmed Crocodiles. The review will provide for advancements in crocodile farming knowledge and developments in industry processes. An expert advisory panel has been established to guide the review. The review will ensure the Australian commercial crocodile farming industry continues to implement world-class management and welfare standards. The commercial crocodile farming industry is an asset to the Australian economy. Products derived from saltwater (*Crocodylus porosus*) and freshwater crocodiles (*C. johnsoni*), such as belly skin, are valuable commodities in the international high fashion and luxury goods market. In 2014, the industry was valued at over \$100 million.

New Zealand

New Zealand amended the Schedules to the Trade in Endangered Species Act through an Order on Council to reflect the decisions made at COP19 amending the CITES appendices. As part of this process we prepared and disseminated information to industry and stakeholder groups about the changes to the Schedules, when they came into effect, and what that means for the permitting process. We worked closely with the Ministry for Primary Industries and Customs agencies in this work.

New Zealand ran a number of CITES outreach campaigns, namely:

- Messaging around the import of CITES-listed species, namely visuals and verbal announcements, on cruise ships arriving into and departing from New Zealand
- Three-week outreach campaign on screens at departures at Auckland International Airport in July 2023 to coincide with school winter holidays in NZ. The likely audience for the campaign was significant:
 - o Number of booked departing international passengers across the 3 weeks was 242,474 (19,798 were going to Polynesia; 19,802 were going to Micronesia; and 111,350 were going to Australia)
 - o Booked number of plays (times that a screen shows our ad) was 326,634 (across 11 screens)

We are exploring further opportunities for CITES outreach in the Pacific from destinations where holiday makers returning home bring items containing CITES-listed species without a CITES permit.

We are also planning an outreach campaign on 'travelling with taonga' (Māori treasures) for mid-November 2023 onwards to raise awareness in New Zealand around the requirements for travelling overseas with taonga containing CITES-listed species.

Activities of the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP)

SPREP has undertaken a range of activities under the Pacific European Union Marine Partnership Programme (PEUMP) funded by the European Union and the Government of Sweden. SPREP is the executing agency for Key Result area 5 of the By-catch and Integrated Ecosystem Management (BIEM) Initiative. Activities 5.4 to 5.8 of the BIEM Initiative are focused on reducing the by-catch of threatened, endangered and protected marine species in oceanic and coastal fisheries, promoting the conservation of marine species by coastal communities and supporting Pacific countries achieve their obligations in relation to CITES, with a focus on the development of Non-Detriment Findings. The following is a summary of progress on these activities over the last year:

- Five virtual workshops on marine turtle genetics were successfully delivered from April to August 2022.
- Pacific Regional Turtle Risk Assessment being undertaken and will produce models on the risks of extinction to Pacific turtles. Nearly complete.
- Turtle use surveys to collate information relating to legal and illegal community use and harvesting of marine turtles for customary and food security purposes. Ongoing (Fiji, PNG and Tonga). Report for Tonga being prepared for publication.
- National review of state of marine turtle management and conservation in Vanuatu completed and being prepared for publication.
- Port Based outreach with fishers in Fiji and Vanuatu on appropriate use of mitigation measures for species of special interest including sharks and rays and turtles. Provision of turtle mitigation kits to Fiji flagged vessels. Ongoing.
- NPOA for turtles supporting development in Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Tonga; NPOA sharks PNG, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu
- Bycatch of threatened sharks including CITES listed in Kikori river Delta, PNG assessed. Report available on SPREP web site. <https://www.sprep.org/news/a-new-fishery-threatens-papua-new-guineas-shark-and-dolphin-species>

- Turtle community management plans being developed for Vanuatu for two turtle nesting sites on Malekula Island.
- Regional marine turtle workshops held in July 2022 to discuss CITES related turtle issues including proposed turtle resolution.
- NDFs for Tonga for sharks, coral and giant clams, Vanuatu for mako and thresher sharks.
- NDF for giant clams being developed with Fiji.
- NDF for giant clam stockpiles being developed with Solomon Islands.
- Review of Crocodile Trade Act PNG, ongoing.
- Saltwater crocodile management plan for Solomon Islands being developed and training workshops undertaken in October 2022

Activities of the Regional Representative

At the 19th meeting of the Conference of Parties to CITES (CoP19, November 2022) New Zealand was re-elected to be the regional representative for the Oceania region. In its role as representative New Zealand has maintained close contact with the nine countries in the Oceania region.

Regional communication has included disseminating advice on priority CITES implementation matters as a number of Oceania parties do not have consistently reliable internet connection. Priority information for the region has included advice on the COP19 amendments to the CITES Appendices and when they come into effect, matters concerning implementation of CITES marine species (stony corals, turtles, sharks and rays), capacity building opportunities including the UNIA master's course; and implementation requirements such as annual reporting.

The New Zealand government has provided financial support to assist a number of Oceania Parties develop suitable domestic legislation to support CITES. The CITES Secretariat has provided assistance in developing and/or reviewing the draft legislation. In 2023 a contract was issued for the development of legislation in Palau and a number of multiagency workshops were held during its development. The workshops demonstrated the ability for in country work to increase awareness of and capacity for CITES implementation. A contractor in Papua New Guinea is currently reviewing their CITES implementation legislation with a view to enabling e-permitting, charging fees, and increasing penalties.

As regional representative we maintain regular communication with SPREP.

Issues in the region

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 the Parties and non-Parties in Oceania. CITES is often a small component of the responsibilities of government officials. Often just one or two people deal with all of the Multilateral Environmental Agreements, and staff turnover rates are often high in the small public services of island nations. 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.

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 marine species such as sharks and rays, and many species of sea cucumber. Marine resources also 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.

There has been considerable interest in the region in the implementation of the listing of commercially important shark and sea cucumbers, especially the challenges of providing NDFs for migratory sharks or shared stocks, where little data exists because historically shark catches and exports have generally not been recorded to species level.