

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

Seventy-eighth meeting of the Standing Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 3-8 February 2025

Species conservation and trade

Fauna

Saiga antelopes (*Saiga* spp.)

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1. This document has been submitted by Kazakhstan.*

CITES and CMS frameworks for Saiga

2. *S. tatarica* and *S. borealis* are included in Appendix II of CITES and Appendix II of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS). At CoP18, Parties agreed to establish a zero export quota for wild specimens of both species of saiga traded for commercial purposes. The species is also the subject of *CMS Saiga MOU* - international instrument for saiga conservation signed by 5 States and 9 Cooperating Organizations. *The CITES-CMS Joint Work Programme* identifies Saiga as one of their target species for joint actions and focuses on supporting the implementation of the *CMS Medium Term International Work Programme (MTWIP) for the Saiga Antelope*, that was developed in support of the Saiga MoU. MTWIP long-term vision is to restore saiga populations to the point that sustainable use can again be considered.

Preconditions for Sustainable use of Saiga

3. The report "*Sustainable Use of Saiga Antelopes: Perspectives and Prospects*¹", prepared on behalf of CMS, defines the pre-conditions which need to be fulfilled to ensure sustainable use in practice that includes robust stockpile management and product traceability. CITES document AC32 Doc. 35² acknowledged that unmonitored stockpiles of saiga products remain one of the conservation challenges to saiga.

CITES Decisions on saiga (CoP 19, SC77)

4. In order to support MTWIP implementation CITES CoP19 adopted Decision 19.213 directed to range States of the saiga antelope and important consumer and trading countries of saiga parts and derivatives to implement MTWIP; decisions directed to saiga range States to establish internal market controls for saiga parts, including registration of stockpiles. CoP19 also adopted decisions directed to the CITES Secretariat (19.214 b) to review processes and practices related to stockpiles of saiga specimens; and provide assistance to Parties in ensuring effective stockpile management in support of MTWIP implementation³. SC77 agreed a draft decision suggested by Kazakhstan to revise and renew Decision 19.213, paragraph b)

* *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.*

¹ <https://www.cms.int/saiga/en/publication/sustainable-use-saiga-antelopes-perspectives-and-prospects>

² <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/documents/E-AC32-35.pdf>

³ <https://cites.org/eng/dec/index.php/44341>

(on internal market controls for saiga parts, including registration of stockpiles) and expanded to include consumer and trading States⁴.

Kazakhstan has studied international standards for storage and stockpile management, including Best Practices and Gold Standards for the Management of Ivory (and other wildlife products). These international practices have been adopted and improved (in line with national legislation and the capacity of the responsible authorities) and are now being used for saiga horn.

Kazakhstan, for its part, has shown full transparency in declaring its national saiga horn stocks, and calls on other countries to be transparent on this issue as well. And requests the CITES Standing Committee to monitor the implementation CITES CoP19 adopted decisions (19.213) by the both range states and consuming countries in the future.

5. As part of CMS COP14, a session on the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) projects related to saiga antelopes was held on February 12, 2024. The session focused on issues concerning the management of saiga horn stockpile management through the establishment of a system for marking specimens, registering producers and exporters to prevent illegal trade. To this end, measures to support countries in developing a unified system for tracking specimens were discussed, drawing on an analysis of best global practices and fostering collaboration and partnership within the USFWS projects. As a result of the consultations, Kazakhstan developed measures to implement a saiga horn stockpile management system utilizing identification tools. These tools incorporate a unique marking code consisting of a combination of symbols structured into four data groups that comply with international standards for inventory and barcoding, specifically GS1 DataMatrix. This barcode is issued by a single national operator in Kazakhstan, which has expertise in administering systems for marking and tracing goods. This will enable the efficient implementation of control over the trade in saiga specimens.
6. Recognizing that up-to-date information on existing saiga stockpiles is critical for any future sustainable use of saiga and to mitigate risks of illegal saiga horns entering trade, Kazakhstan assessed its stockpile that accounts for 42 161 specimens. These horns are of legal origin and were obtained as a result of population management of the Betpak-Dala and Ural saiga populations during the autumn-winter period of 2023–2024. Kazakhstan encourages other Range States and trading countries with stockpiles to report volume of stockpiles to the CITES Secretariat.

Revision of CMS MTWIP

7. The CMS MTWIP is currently under review and will be adopted at the Fifth Meeting of the Signatories to the CMS Saiga Memorandum of Understanding (*Saiga MoS 5*) in March 2025. This will require aligning CITES decisions on saiga with the revised MTWIP.

Saiga population recovery in Kazakhstan

8. In 2023 the IUCN Red List status of saiga antelope (*Saiga tatarica*) has improved from Critically Endangered to Near Threatened.
9. Based on aerial surveys of saiga in Kazakhstan in April 2024, the population sizes of the main saiga populations in Kazakhstan were estimated as follows: the Ustyurt population — 63,600 (annual growth of 60.2%), the Ural population — 1,620,000 (43.4%), and the Betpak-Dala population — 1,150,000 (54.3%). The total saiga population in the country is 2,833,600 individuals (48.0%). These figures are derived through extrapolation and primarily reflect the trend in population change — a growth of more than 40% — and an approximate count, as the surveys are conducted regularly using the same well-established methodology. The data was obtained in April 2024, before calving, which occurred in May. Therefore, by the end of 2024, the saiga population in Kazakhstan may exceed 4 million individuals, having recovered from the historical low of 21,000 individuals recorded in 2003.

Measures implemented in Kazakhstan to address illegal trade in saiga

10. In Kazakhstan, the state wildlife protection is managed by the State Enterprise "Okhotzooptom" with the primary goal of protecting saiga antelopes, carried out on a continuous basis by a team of 240 rangers. Additionally, wildlife protection efforts involve: regional rangers of the Forestry and Wildlife Committee of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan, with 142 employees; the

⁴ <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/documents/E-SC77-Sum-09.pdf>

Administrative Police Committee of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Environmental Police), with 286 officers; the reserve and protected area management services, with 341 rangers; and the gamekeeper services of hunting areas, with 2,890 gamekeepers.

11. To preserve the habitat and reduce disturbances in the saiga's range, a network of specially protected areas has been established, covering a total area of 5,826,091.20 hectares.
12. The saiga is a game species in Kazakhstan; however, until 2024, a moratorium on its use was in place. To date, no decision has been made regarding the establishing of hunting quotas for saiga. The amount of claim for each illegally taken saiga has been increased, now amounting to \$3,500 for one male saiga and \$2,500 for one female or calf.
13. Amendments have been made to the Criminal Code. In particular, Article 337 "Illegal Hunting" has been amended to tighten sanctions, with criminal offenses now classified as crimes, and a new Section 6 has been added (pertaining to criminal groups or causing particularly large damage) with a penalty of up to 10 years of imprisonment. Additionally, a new Section 1-1 has been introduced in Article 339 "Illegal Handling of Rare and Endangered Species of Animals and Plants," which provides punishment for the illegal hunting, acquisition, storage, sale, import, export, shipment, transportation, of saiga, its parts, or derivatives, including saiga horns. The penalty includes imprisonment for a term of 3 to 12 years, along with property confiscation.
14. In relation to stockpile, 42,161 saiga horns are marked, each assigned an individual number and stored at the State Enterprise 'Okhotzooptom' of the Forestry and Wildlife Committee of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Initially, each saiga horn was labelled with an individual barcode, printed using a thermal transfer printer on a label (paper) that is resistant to external factors. However, over time, the information began to fade. To ensure proper accounting, additional sealing devices made of polymers were installed. The design of these devices protects against unauthorized removal (the seal can only be removed by cutting), and they are highly resistant to sudden temperature changes, maintaining their properties in the range of -40 to +60°C. The device consists of a plate with a petal-shaped number, a locking mechanism. Upon the authorization of controlled legal international trade in species, in accordance with the CITES provisions, this internal management system will be supplemented with identification tools that contain a unique marking code, consisting of a combination of symbols, including 4 data groups, which comply with international standards in the field of inventory management and barcode encoding (GS1 DataMatrix). This barcode will be issued by a single national operator with experience in administering marking and traceability systems, which will allow for the effective implementation of control over the trade of specimens. With a sufficiently large number of digits, billions of possible codes will exist. From these codes, a random sample is automatically selected in accordance with the hunting quota and the expected collection of horns resulting from natural mortality. Thus, the codes on thermal transfer labels are random and have a large number of potential variations, making counterfeiting of the labels impossible, as no counterfeiter will be able to predict which codes will become available. All codes designated for use will be printed on marking tapes. These codes can be read by scanners used by environmental protection, law enforcement, and customs officials and checked for legality by scanning the Data Matrix code using the free mobile application Naqty onim. The marking data will be issued to involved parties to ensure control at all stages.
15. In relation to illegal trade in saiga, since 2021, 20,912 saiga horns have been seized from illegal trade in Kazakhstan. The dynamics of detected violations show an increase in the seizure of saiga specimens from illegal trade. In 2021, 3,509 horns were seized, in 2022 – 6,539 horns, and in 2023 – 10,223 horns. This increase is linked to the significantly growing saiga population, natural male saiga mortality, and the illegal collection of horns from fallen animals by local communities.

Addressing human-saiga coexistence in Kazakhstan

16. In response to the request of the Government of Kazakhstan, in 2023 the CMS Secretariat organized multi-stakeholder consultations to address the rising Saiga numbers in Kazakhstan and to produce a strategy for the national authorities to conserve and sustainably manage Saiga populations, considering the needs of local communities. The strategy developed with international experts includes actions related the CITES mandate and decisions: establishment of a stockpile management system with the support from the CITES Secretariat, design and implementation of efficient market and trade control systems.
17. The strategy provided the foundation for conducting scientific research on the sustainable use of saiga. Through state funding of scientific organizations for the period of 2024–2026, work is planned on developing a system for the sustainable use of the Betpakdalinsk and Ustyurt saiga populations.

18. In order to take urgent measures to reduce competition between saigas and local communities, a decision was made in 2023 to regulate the saiga population on an experimental basis by the specialized state organization "Okhotszooptom," in accordance with recommendations from international experts outlined in the report on the sustainable use of saigas. From October 6 to December 10, 2023, and January 10 to February 10, 2024, a total of 43,503 saigas were removed from the wild. 19 meat processing plants were involved in processing saiga carcasses for further sale to local communities. During this period, the necessary skills for the removal of animals were gained, forming the basis for the harvesting in the future. Local veterinary services have developed a system for sanitary and veterinary monitoring of saigas and their habitat in Kazakhstan, as well as quality control during the processing and sale of saiga meat.
19. The regulation of saiga populations and their continued steady growth highlighted the need for adjustments to the strategy, which were presented to international experts with the participation of the CMS Secretariat at a meeting on September 9, 2024, in Almaty. As a result of the discussions, a draft of further steps for the implementation of the Saiga Conservation and Management Strategy in Kazakhstan was adopted.

Need for long-term recommendations for saiga conservation and trade under CITES

20. Population statuses of saiga differ across range states, underscoring the need for collaborative consultations to establish an approach that sets long-term priorities, safeguards, and conditions for saiga conservation and trade. Coordinating efforts under the CITES mandate will be crucial to effectively support the implementation of the CMS MWTIP for the saiga antelope and synergy between CITES and CMS.

Recommendations

21 .Considering the above, the Standing Committee is invited to:

- a) review the information in this document;
- b) encourage range States of the saiga antelope (*Saiga* spp.) and important consumer and trading countries of saiga parts and derivatives annually report to the CITES Secretariat the level/volume of stocks of saiga specimens and their sources in the format and within the deadline prescribed by the CITES Secretariat;
- c) in line with activity B15 of the CMS-CITES Joint Work Programme 2021-2025⁵, which establishes that the Secretariats of both Conventions should "Collaborate on the implementation of the Medium-Term International Work Programme under the Saiga MOU and its revisions":
 - i) recommend that the CITES Secretariat prepares a draft of revised decisions 19.213, 19.217 in alignment with recommendations of SC77, SC78 and CMS MTWIP (2026-2030) to be adopted in 2025, for consideration and adoption by CoP20;
 - ii) recommend that the CITES Secretariat provides support in the revision of the Medium-Term International Work Programme under the CMS Saiga MoU to establish specific priorities and activities within the CITES mandate;
- d) establish an intersessional working group on saiga, with a following mandate:
 - i) review CITES decisions and their implementation, outcomes of the fifth meeting of CMS Saiga MOU signatories, the revised MTWIP, along with data on conservation of and legal and illegal trade in saiga across range states and trading countries. This is with the intention to guide long term vision for some range states in conservation and sustainable use of Saiga for the benefit of conservation and local communities. Working group mandate should consider precautionary safeguards, including market controls, stockpile management, legislation, law enforcement to be in place, and develop long-term recommendations that guide Parties and support a collaborative approach to Saiga conservation and trade, potentially including a resolution on Saiga and report it to CoP20 and the 79th meeting of the Standing Committee;

⁵ https://www.cms.int/sites/default/files/document/cms_stc52_outcome-4 cms-cites-joint-work-programme_e.pdf

- ii) request the CITES Secretariat to issue a Notification to invite Parties and observers to express an interest in participating in the Standing Committee's intersessional working group on saiga and provide relevant information and data to be reviewed by the working group;
- e) request the CITES Secretariat to assess existing stockpile management for saiga in saiga Range, trading and consumer countries with a reference to the Guidance Document on Ensuring Effective Stockpile Management, provide assistance in ensuring effective stockpile management and monitoring, including the development of inventories and strengthening stockpile security;
- f) encourage range States of the saiga antelope (*Saiga* spp.) and important consumer and trading countries of saiga parts and derivatives report the saiga parts and derivatives seizures in the annual illegal trade reports to the CITES Secretariat; and
- g) request the CITES Secretariat to prepare reports for each CoP based on reports by Parties, CITES trade database and outcomes of CMS Saiga MOU meetings and formulate draft decisions within CITES mandate.