

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

Strategic matters

Role of CITES in reducing risk of future zoonotic disease emergence  
associated with international wildlife trade

REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP

1. This document has been submitted by Israel and Singapore as co-Chairs of the Standing Committee's intersessional working group on the *Role of CITES in reducing risk of future zoonotic disease emergence associated with international wildlife trade*.\*
2. At its 19th meeting (CoP19; Panama, 2022), the Conference of Parties adopted [Decisions 19.15 to 19.19](#) on the Role of CITES in reducing risk of future zoonotic disease emergence associated with international wildlife trade. At its 76th meeting, the Standing Committee established an Intersessional Working Group ([SC76 SR](#)) with the following mandate:
  - a) review the report of the Secretariat, taking into account the recommendations of the Animals and Plants Committees;
  - b) taking into account the information provided by the Secretariat and the Animals and Plants Committees, consider the establishment of a CITES advisory body to provide guidance based on best available science to Parties, in their efforts to reduce the risk of zoonotic pathogen spill-over and transmission from wildlife trade and associated wildlife supply chains, including markets;
  - c) taking into account proposals in document CoP19 Doc. 23.2 and in consultation with the Animals and Plants Committees, consider the need for and development of a Resolution on actions CITES Parties and others could take to advance a 'One Health' approach as it pertains to international wildlife trade; and
  - d) provide its guidance to the Secretariat and its recommendations, which may include a new draft resolution, to the Standing Committee for consideration.
3. The membership of the Working Group ([E-2023-2025-SC-IWGs](#)) comprises:

Co-Chairs: Israel and Singapore

Parties: Argentina, Australia, Bahamas, Benin, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Botswana, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Canada, China, Columbia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Czech Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ecuador, European Union, Gambia (the), Ghana, Guinea, Honduras, Indonesia, Japan, Kenya, Liberia, Malaysia, Niger, Nigeria, Peru, Republic of Korea, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, Togo, Tonga, United Kingdom

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\* *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.*

of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, the United States of America, Zimbabwe

Observers: Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), World Conservation Monitoring Centre of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP-WCMC), World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH), International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Animal Welfare Institute (AWI), Association of Midwest Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Association of Northeast Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Association of Western Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), Born Free Foundation, Centre for Biological Diversity, China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation (CBCGDF), Community CAMPFIRE Association of Zimbabwe (CCAZ), Dallas Safari Club Foundation, David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation, Defenders of Wildlife, European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA), European Federation of Association for Hunting and Conservation (FACE), International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), International Fur Federation (IFF), IWMC-World Conservation Trust, Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), Pan African Sanctuary Alliance, Parrot Breeders Association of Southern Africa (PASA), ProWildlife, San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance, South African Taxidermy and Tannery Association, Sustainable Use Coalition, Southern Africa, TRAFFIC, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), World Resources Institute (WRI), World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Zoological Society of London

AC Members: Nomenclature specialist (Mr. van Dijk) and alternate representative for Asia (Mr. Diesmos)

PC Members: Representative for Asia (Ms. Zeng) and representative for North America (Mr. Boles)

4. In response to Decision 19.15, the Secretariat prepared document [PC26 Doc. 10 / AC32 Doc. 10](#) which includes a draft Memorandum of Understanding and joint programme of work with the World Organization of Animal Health and a summary of the activities of the organizations referred to in paragraph d) of Decision 19.15 as well as the United Nations Environment Programme (Decision 19.18). The actual responses received from these bodies appear in Annex 5 to that document.
5. The Secretariat also issued CITES Notification to the Parties [No. 2023/028](#) requesting Parties to report on any measures they have in place to prevent and mitigate the risk of pathogen spillover and transmission from wildlife trade and associated wildlife supply chains including markets. The Secretariat made the responses available in Annex 2 of document [PC26 Doc. 10 / AC32 Doc. 10](#) and indicated that it was in the process of making these available on the CITES website.
6. At its 26th meeting, the Plants Committee (PC26, Geneva, 2023) agreed to nominate the representative for Asia (Ms. Zeng) to participate in the SC Intersessional Working Group.
7. At its 32nd meeting, the Animals Committee (AC32, Geneva, 2023) agreed to nominate the nomenclature specialist (Mr. van Dijk) and the alternate representative for Asia (Mr Diesmos) to participate in the SC Intersessional Working Group, and requested the Secretariat to incorporate the comments made during the meeting in its review of the draft MoU and joint work programme between CITES and WOAH for consideration by the SC. The AC also established an Intersessional Working Group on zoonotic diseases with the mandate to review the information provided by the Parties, organizations and the United Nations Environment Programme in the Annexes of document [PC26 Doc. 10 / AC32 Doc. 10](#) and prepare recommendations for consideration at its 33rd meeting (AC33) in July 2024, on:
  - a) proposed effective and practical solutions for reducing pathogen spillover risk in wildlife supply chains; and
  - b) opportunities for practical collaboration under the direction of existing Resolutions, Decisions and agreements.
8. As the AC Intersessional Working Group will need time to implement its mandate, the SC Intersessional Working Group was tasked by its Co-Chairs, in the interim, to consider paragraph b) of its mandate, i.e., to consider the establishment of a CITES advisory body to provide guidance based on best available science to Parties, in their efforts to reduce the risk of zoonotic pathogen spillover and transmission from wildlife trade

and associated wildlife supply chains, including markets. This document reports on the 23 responses received from 11 Parties, the representative of the Plants Committee, and 18 Observers (as represented in 11 responses). Full replies are included as an Information Document.

Inputs received relating to the establishment of a CITES advisory body to provide guidance to Parties.

9. Members of this Working Group were asked to provide inputs to the questions below. Additionally, noting the World Health Organization's (WHO) ongoing discussions for a new international treaty on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, all members were encouraged to contact their country representatives to these WHO negotiations to raise awareness about CITES and international wildlife trade so that the reduction of risk from this can be reflected in the new treaty.
  - a) Do you think there should be an Advisory Body to provide guidance to Parties, based on best available science in their efforts to reduce the risk of zoonotic pathogen spill-over and transmission?
  - b) If so, what expertise might be needed for such an advisory body?
  - c) What would be the role and responsibilities of such an advisory body?
  - d) How do you think such an advisory body could actually gather and disseminate this guidance to Parties?
10. Of the 23 responses received, the majority agreed that there is little added value to establishing a distinct CITES advisory body for this matter, for a variety of reasons. This view was put forward by Australia, Cuba, Switzerland, Singapore and Zimbabwe, and supported by Born Free Foundation, Animal Welfare Institute, Center for Biological Diversity, David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation, Defenders of Wildlife, Pan African Sanctuary Alliance, and Pro Wildlife, EAZA, FACE, CIC, IWMC-World Conservation Trust, Sustainable Use Coalition Southern Africa, TRAFFIC, WCS, WOA, WRI, and WWF. Reasons provided are summarised as follows:
  - a) Some commented that this matter is tangential to or outside the CITES mandate.
  - b) Some commented that there is low risk of future zoonotic disease emergence being attributable specifically to international wildlife trade.
  - c) Some highlighted the ongoing work being carried out by other bodies, especially the Quadripartite—the World Health Organisation (WHO), World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH), Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Notably, this includes the establishment of an advisory body, the [One Health High Level Expert Panel \(OHHLEP\)](#), in November 2020, and the production of guidance documents such as that on the risk of pathogen spillovers.
  - d) Some felt that the matter could best be covered by the renewed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between CITES and the WOA, with a joint work programme currently being developed between the two organisations.
11. A formal process could be established for Parties to seek advice from OHHLEP, as suggested by Born Free Foundation, Animal Welfare Institute, Center for Biological Diversity, David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation, Defenders of Wildlife, Pan African Sanctuary Alliance, and Pro Wildlife, and echoed by WCS and WRI. To this, UNEP clarified that while the OHHLEP does work on matters relevant to the risk of zoonotic spillover in wildlife trade chains that may be of interest to the CITES community, it may not have the mandate or capacity to address specific requests from CITES Parties.
12. A minority of members who responded saw the value of establishing a CITES advisory body, a view put forward by Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Honduras, and supported by the China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation (CBCGDF). Based on the responses received it was envisaged that this CITES advisory body could keep track of spillover events and analyse risk patterns relating to international wildlife trade and develop briefs to keep Parties abreast of developments on this front. Correspondingly, this CITES advisory body could guide the Conference of the Parties (CoP) in decision-making regarding international trade in species that are implicated in potential zoonoses. Democratic Republic of the Congo and Guinea also requested tailored guidance to be provided by this CITES advisory body, based on needs as expressed by each Party.

13. Japan agreed to its value, on the condition that it should be kept within the objectives and mandate of CITES, does not duplicate the mandates of other international organisations such as that of WOA and WHO, and is implemented with external funding resources. In addition to experts on zoonotic disease surveillance, Japan suggested that big-data scientists should also be included as part of this CITES advisory body if one was to be established.
14. While Switzerland and Australia did not see much added value for this advisory body, if one were to be established, however, they suggested that it should be formed with the support of the CITES Secretariat, with a clear mandate to provide information and recommendations to the Animals and Plants Committees and the Standing Committee for their approval and submission to CoP. The discussion that it should be embedded within the existing CITES mechanism was echoed by Burkina Faso, Cuba, and Guinea.
15. Further, WOA suggested a Coordinating Body was an alternative, to bridge CITES needs with the relevant international organisations working on human and animal health. This Coordinating Body could have representatives from the Quadripartite and representatives from the international wildlife trade supply chain, including World Customs Organization (WCO), INTERPOL, and the transport industry. Its mandate could be to assess, based on the CITES needs within the framework of the international wildlife trade, the available guidance and existing gaps, and to liaise with the relevant international organisations working on health for the development of specific guidance filling the gaps identified. The Coordinating Body could also make awareness of available guidance through an annual report, or disseminate the information through the CITES Secretariat where appropriate.
16. Rather than an overarching advisory body that would provide high-level guidance, the United States of America suggested a more pragmatic approach, where the work would be focused on specific aspects of CITES trade that are deemed “higher risk” for zoonoses, such as specific taxonomic groups of hosts used in certain types of trade. For example, if the AC determined that live animals in a certain taxonomic order (e.g., Rodentia) that are traded internationally for food consumption was a “priority risk area” for CITES in terms of zoonotic risk, guidance could be developed around that specific activity/taxa in trade. In this regard, the United States proposed that the Animals Committee could be directed to:
  - a) Identify a small number of priority risk areas for CITES trade where additional guidance would be beneficial for Parties. These could be perhaps 2 or 3 areas of high concern specific to a particular taxonomic group, trade activity, specimen type, or region.
  - b) For each priority risk area, consider forming a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) of relevant experts, including from CITES Authorities.
  - c) These TAG groups could then develop specific, science-based, non-binding guidelines for Parties on that priority risk area.
17. Pertaining to the additional note to contact country representatives to WHO negotiations on a new international treaty on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response to raise awareness about CITES and international wildlife trade, WCS supported this in response, noting that there remains insufficient attention on wildlife/biodiversity issues and the prevention of pathogen spillovers (“prevention at source”). WCS commented that it is an official organisation in Annex E of WHO and therefore able to engage with and provide input to the ongoing negotiations. Democratic Republic of the Congo suggested that the CITES Secretariat could be the bridge among domestic bodies to facilitate the adoption of a One Health approach nationally, by means of issuing a letter of recommendation (or other forms of providing legitimacy) for the CITES Management Authority representative to provide information relating to CITES and international wildlife trade to the in-country WHO representatives. CBCGDF commented that it could also be worth contacting other treaties to which WHO is Party to, to underscore these issues wherever they are relevant.

## Conclusions

18. While the AC Intersessional Working Group continues to implement its mandate, the SC Intersessional Working Group has, in the interim, considered the establishment of a CITES advisory body as part of its mandate. Of the 23 responses received from 11 Parties, the representative of the Plants Committee, and 18 Observers (as represented in 11 responses), the majority did not agree to its value, while some did. Alternatives to an advisory body were proposed and will be discussed further by the Working Group.

Recommendations

19. The Standing Committee is invited to note this interim report of the Working Group.