

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

Regulation of trade

ELECTRONIC SYSTEMS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

1. This document has been submitted by Switzerland as Chair of the Standing Committee's working group on electronic systems and information technologies, in consultation with the Secretariat.*
2. At its 19th meeting (CoP19; Panama City, 2022), the Conference of Parties adopted Decisions 19.150 to 19.152 on *Electronic systems and information technology*:

Directed to Parties

19.150 *Parties are invited to:*

- a) *use the eCITES Implementation Framework, the latest edition of the CITES electronic permitting toolkit, Guidelines and specifications for Electronic Permit Information eXchange (EPIX) of CITES permits and certificates, and the Guidance on CITES electronic signatures in planning and implementing electronic CITES systems;*
- b) *consider the implementation of electronic CITES systems in a manner designed to meet CITES requirements, including those provided in Resolution Conf. 12.3 (Rev. CoP19) on Permits and certificates to increase transparency and efficiency of the permit issuance and control process, to prevent use of fraudulent permits, and to provide quality data for reporting and improved sustainability assessment;*
- c) *work with the customs, National Plant Protection Organizations (NPPOs) and other relevant agencies to ensure that trade in CITES-listed specimens is in compliance with CITES requirements and, where appropriate, in line with, or integrated into, other relevant national cross-border trade systems and procedures;*
- d) *share experience, challenges and know-how with other Parties on the development and implementation of electronic CITES permit management systems and use of the electronic equivalent of paper-based permits and certificates, and provide inputs to the Secretariat for continuous improvement of eCITES reference materials;*
- e) *take note of the eCITES BaseSolution as an automated permit management system option that is now available to Parties for implementation;*
- f) *call upon donor countries and agencies to provide financial support towards the implementation of electronic CITES permit management systems in developing countries; and*

* *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.*

- g) *submit to the Secretariat information on the use of HS codes for risk-based control procedures.*

Directed to the Standing Committee, in consultation with the Secretariat

19.151 *The Standing Committee shall, in consultation with the Secretariat, undertake the following tasks:*

- a) *work with the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the International Trade Centre (ITC), the World Bank, the World Customs Organization (WCO), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Secretariat of the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), and other relevant partners, to continue the exchange of information and the development and implementation of joint projects that would facilitate Parties' access to electronic permitting systems that comply with CITES requirements and where appropriate are aligned with international trade standards and norms;*
- b) *work with relevant partners on the further development of standards and solutions for Electronic Permit Information eXchange (EPIX) for the exchange of CITES permit and certificate data and the improvement of the validation of CITES permit data by CITES Management Authorities and customs officials;*
- c) *recognizing the importance of the requirement for endorsement of permits and certificates at export, explore possible alternatives to the physical endorsement;*
- d) *monitor and advise on Parties' work related to the development of traceability systems for specimens of CITES-listed species to facilitate their harmonization with CITES permits and certificates;*
- e) *monitor the use of HS codes in implementing risk-based control procedures in different countries;*
- f) *support the development of the capacity of Management Authorities, especially those with the greatest needs, to electronically collect, secure, maintain, and transmit data using systems compatible with those of the Secretariat and other Management Authorities;*
- g) *consider ways in which electronic CITES permitting systems can simplify procedures for the non-commercial movement of musical instruments; and*
- h) *submit reports on activities undertaken under paragraphs a) to g) of the present Decision and make recommendations to the Conference of the Parties at its 20th meeting.*

Directed to the Secretariat

19.152 *The Secretariat shall, subject to the availability of external funding:*

- a) *undertake a study on the information used by different Parties in a risk-based approach for CITES trade controls;*
- b) *collect information from Parties on any issues encountered with regard to the application of national data protection laws that affect implementation of Electronic Permit Information eXchange (EPIX) for the exchange of CITES permits and certificates;*
- c) *support the work of the Standing Committee under Decision 19.151 through the organization of workshops, consultations, preparation of studies and guidance materials on relevant topics as identified by the Standing Committee; and*
- d) *provide capacity-building and advisory services to support Parties interested in implementing electronic solutions for the management and control of CITES permits and certificates and support Parties in establishing electronic permit systems and information exchanges.*

Activities undertaken by the Secretariat

International cooperation

3. Pursuant to Decision 19.151, paragraph a), the Secretariat has enhanced its collaboration with the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). The Secretariat has engaged in the UN/CEFACT project on Digitization of Transit Accompanying Documents and participates regularly in the UN/CEFACT Forums, plenaries and in the UNECE-ESCAP Task Force on Electronic Permit Information Exchange (EPIX), chaired by the Chair of the working group. The Secretariat maintains ongoing communication with the UN/CEFACT experts on technical matters related to CITES e-permitting systems.
4. The Secretariat has further strengthened its cooperation with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development's (UNCTAD) ASYCUDA Programme. Thanks to financial contributions of Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America, UNCTAD-ASYCUDA has continued to maintain and develop the [eCITES BaseSolution](#), an off-the-shelf solution for electronic CITES permitting systems. To date, UNCTAD-ASYCUDA has implemented their eCITES Solution in Mozambique and Sri Lanka and conducted feasibility assessments for eCITES permitting systems in the Bahamas, Cambodia and Vanuatu. The CITES Secretary-General was invited to join the UNCTAD-ASYCUDA Advisory Board and is now a member.

United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation

5. Pursuant to Decision 19.151, paragraph a), and Decision 19.152, paragraph c), the Secretariat initiated participation in the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation. This is a biennial Survey led by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), together with the other United Nations Regional Commissions and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), in cooperation with other institutions. At the request of the Secretariat, a new question about electronic CITES permit application, issuance and exchange has been added on a pilot-test basis in the 2023 Survey, so that the global progress made in the implementation of the e-permitting systems could be reviewed. The [Survey results](#) indicated partial eCITES system implementation in 31 Parties, with 12 Parties in the planning stages out of 163 survey respondents. While not all CITES Parties partook, overall eCITES implementation remained relatively low.

CITES e-Permitting Toolkit

6. Pursuant to Decision 19.151, paragraph f), and Decision 19.152, paragraph c), the Secretariat published the version 3.0 of the *CITES Electronic Permitting Toolkit* in [English](#), [French](#) and [Spanish](#). The Toolkit consists of two sections – a business view for policy makers and a developer view for programmers. The Annex (technical specifications) to the Toolkit is also available in html in English. The Schema can be downloaded from the CITES website too.

Guidelines and specifications for Electronic Permit Information Exchange

7. Pursuant to Decision 19.151, paragraph b), the Secretariat translated the guidelines and specifications for Electronic Permit Information eXchange (EPIX) of CITES permits and certificates into [French](#) and [Spanish](#). The Secretariat plans to revise the guidelines and specifications for EPIX using the latest technical specifications from the version 3.0 of the CITES Electronic Permitting Toolkit, subject to availability of funding.

Study on two-dimensional (2D) barcode

8. Pursuant to Decision 19.151, paragraph c), and Decision 19.152, paragraph c), the Secretariat commissioned a Study on the use of two-dimensional (2D) barcodes on CITES permits/certificates. The main objective of the study is to collect information regarding the current practices on the use of two-dimensional (2D) barcodes on CITES permits, analyse and prepare the elements of draft guidelines on the use of 2D codes in electronic CITES permitting. The findings and recommendations in the study are expected to support the discussions of the working group for identifying possible alternatives to the physical endorsement. It provides alternative solutions based on various business requirements including security, connectivity, interoperability, simplicity, automation, identification and standards. The study report is currently being finalized. The working group on electronic systems and information technologies will review the study report and may make any recommendations to the Standing Committee at its next meeting.

Capacity-building activities

9. Pursuant to Decision 19.152, paragraphs c) and d), the Secretariat organized a hybrid [CITES-ESCAP regional workshop on electronic CITES permitting systems in Asia](#) targeted at the CITES Parties in Asia on 17-18 July 2023. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) hosted the workshop in the United Nations Conference Centre, Bangkok, Thailand. A total of 28 participants from the following thirteen CITES Parties were present: Armenia, Bangladesh (online), Cambodia, Fiji, Hong Kong SAR China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Oman, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore and Thailand. A number of international organizations and experts also attended the workshop in person. Topics covered during the workshop included: Electronic CITES Toolkit version 3.0; risk management and border control; CITES Species+ API; two-dimensional barcodes (2D) in CITES permits; alternatives to physical endorsement; EPIX; integration with national single window systems; alignment with HS codes; eCITES project implementation; and UNCTAD-ASYCUDA eCITES BaseSolution. Representatives of all the Parties participating in the workshop presented their e-permitting systems or their plans to implement such systems.
10. Through the agreement between the Secretariat and UNCTAD-ASYCUDA, the latter conducted a feasibility assessment for the implementation of the e-permitting system in Vanuatu and presented its findings at a [national stakeholder consultation](#) on 29-30 September 2022, in Port Vila, Vanuatu. The Secretariat also organized the [regional workshop on electronic CITES permit systems](#) on 3 October 2022, jointly with UNCTAD-ASYCUDA and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP).
11. At CoP19, the Secretariat organized a side event titled [Implementation of e-permits: lessons learned and advancing towards an integrated digital solution for eCITES](#), where Parties shared their e-permitting systems including the benefits and challenges.
12. Finally, the Secretariat arranged several online meetings with Management Authorities to provide technical advice for their e-permitting systems and continues to engage with the Parties as and when needed.

Working group on electronic systems and information technologies

13. At its 76th meeting (SC76; Panama City, November 2022), the Standing Committee established the intersessional working group on electronic systems and information technologies with Switzerland as its Chair. As agreed at SC76, the working group members¹ were added after receiving feedback from the call for expression of interest in Notification No. [2023/008](#) of 27 January 2023. The first meeting of the working group took place online on 4 July 2023. The members of the working group discussed three issues: i) possible alternatives to the physical endorsement of the CITES permits at the border including in transit; ii) the use of two-dimensional barcodes; and iii) risk-based control procedures. Parties shared their permit endorsement procedures, some of which use two-dimensional barcodes, such as QR codes in various ways. Some Parties raised concerns about Parties having too many options for endorsing permits, which can be confusing for the border control agencies of the Party of import. The Secretariat informed the members of the working group about the ongoing study on two-dimensional barcodes and the 'Verifiable Credentials'² technology as a potential alternative for physical endorsement. The members agreed to discuss the findings of the study upon its completion. The members also agreed to have a presentation about the 'Verifiable Credentials' technology from an expert at the next meeting of the working group.
14. The members of the working group also discussed the challenges of using HS codes in implementing risk-based control procedures in different countries. Some Parties mentioned that the Management Authorities may not be aware about the revision of HS codes by customs. Sometimes one HS code is used for a big group of CITES as well as non-CITES listed specimens. It is therefore difficult to develop a one-to-one relationship between a particular HS code and a CITES-listed specimen. One Party suggested to create one HS code for live specimens of CITES-listed species and one for non-live specimens of CITES-listed species.

¹ Armenia, Argentina, Australia, Bahrain, Belgium, Botswana, Brazil, Canada, China, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ecuador, European Union, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Liberia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru, Republic of Korea, Rwanda, Singapore, South Africa, Switzerland (Chair), Thailand, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Zimbabwe; World Conservation Monitoring Centre of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP-WCMC); Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), Chambre Syndicale de la Facture Instrumentale (CSFI), Confederation of the European Music Industries (CAFIM), ForestBased Solutions Llc, Forest Trends, International Federation of Musicians, International Fur Federation (IFF), IWMC-World Conservation Trust, League of American Orchestras, Parrot Breeders Association of Southern Africa (PASA), Pearle, Professional Hunters Association South Africa (PHASA), South African Taxidermy and Tannery Association, Taylor Guitars, TRAFFIC, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), Wildlife Ranching South Africa (WRSA).

² UN/CEFACT White Paper on eDATA Verifiable Credentials for Cross Border Trade, Available at: https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-08/WhitePaper_VerifiableCredentials-CrossBorderTrade_September2022.pdf

However, members discussed that the World Customs Organization may not agree as they have other ways of developing HS codes. The members agreed that, even in the light of the above, the HS codes could be used to implement risk-based control procedures by narrowing-down the shipments with CITES-listed specimens to a more manageable number.

15. The Secretariat informed the members of the working group about the plan for updating the Guidelines and specifications for Electronic Permit Information eXchange (EPIX) of CITES permits and certificates based on the revised technical specifications in the version no. 3 of the CITES e-Permitting Toolkit. The Secretariat also provided an update about the capacity-building activities and advisory services, available in paragraphs 9 to 12 of the present document.

Recommendations

16. The Standing Committee is invited to take note of the present document.