

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

Species conservation and trade

Fauna

Aquatic species

QUEEN CONCH (*STROMBUS GIGAS*)

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.
2. At its 19th meeting (CoP19; Panama City, 2022), the Conference of the Parties adopted Decisions 19.233 to 19.236 on *Queen conch* (*Strombus gigas*). The present document provides a report on the implementation of those Decisions that are relevant to or are directed to the Standing Committee, specifically Decisions 19.233 [paragraphs e) to i)], 19.234 and 19.236, as follows:

Directed to range States of Strombus gigas

19.233 *The range States of Strombus gigas are encouraged to:*

[.....]

- e) *continue to collaborate in exploring ways to enhance the traceability of specimens of S. gigas in international trade, including, but not limited to, catch certificates, labelling systems and the application of genetic techniques, and consider sharing relevant experiences with the Secretariat, Parties and the Standing Committee, as appropriate, in the context of discussions on traceability systems for trade in CITES-listed species;*
- f) *collaborate on combatting illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing activity;*
- g) *share relevant experiences on traceability systems for specimens of Strombus gigas;*
- h) *share information concerning illegal trade in queen conch, including surveillance and enforcement activities, as appropriate; and*
- i) *provide progress reports on activities a) to h) to the CFMC¹ / OSPESCA² / WECAFC³ / CFRM⁴ / CITES working group on queen conch.*

¹ Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism

² Central American Fisheries and Aquaculture Organization

³ Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission

⁴ Caribbean Fishery Management Council

Directed to the Secretariat

19.234 *The Secretariat shall continue to collaborate with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM/CITES working group on queen conch, WECAFC, UNCTAD, OECS and other relevant international organizations, and, subject to external funding:*

[...]

- b) *provide assistance to range States of *S. gigas* on relevant enforcement issues and report new developments in this regard to the Standing Committee, as appropriate.*
- c) *monitor the development of traceability systems for queen conch and report relevant developments to the Standing Committee, as appropriate; and*
- d) *provide updates on relevant activities of the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM/CITES working group on queen conch to the Animals Committee and the Standing Committee, as appropriate.*

Directed to the Standing Committee

19.236 *The Standing Committee shall consider any reports from the Secretariat under Decision 19.234, paragraph c), and any recommendations coming from the Animals Committee and make its own recommendations to the Parties and to the Conference of the Parties to improve implementation of the Convention for queen conch, as appropriate.*

Implementation of Decisions 19.233, 19.234 and 19.236

3. As reported to the 32nd meeting of the Animals Committee (AC32; Geneva, June 2023) in document [AC32 Doc. 39](#), the Secretariat took the opportunity provided by meetings of the CFMC/ OSPESCA/ WECAFC /CRFM/CITES Working Group on Queen Conch (QCWG) to collect information on the implementation of Decision 19.233 to allow it to report under paragraph d) of Decision 19.234.
4. As noted in document [CoP19 Doc. 77](#), the *Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan* has been endorsed by all range States. However, as demonstrated by the outcomes of the fourth and fifth meetings of the QCWG, there had been limited progress in terms of its implementation at the time of the CoP.
5. In document SC74 Doc. 79, the Secretariat reported that the fifth meeting of the QCWG was held in San Juan, Puerto Rico from 13 to 14 December 2021. Due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, the Secretariat participated remotely. The report of the meeting can now be accessed in English [here](#).
6. The sixth meeting of the QCWG was held in San Juan, Puerto Rico on 16 March 2023. Several range States and regional partner organizations participated, including the Bahamas, Belize, the European Union, France (on behalf of Guadeloupe and Martinique), Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, Saint Lucia, the United States of America, WECAFC, CRFM, CFMC and OSPESCA. The CITES Secretariat participated in the meeting remotely.
7. The objectives of the meeting were to:
 - a) update the status of implementation of the *Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan* and adopt a timeline for implementation of any outstanding elements;
 - b) update the status on the implementation of QCWG recommendations – Recommendation WECAFC/17/2019/12 on *Improved Compliance with Trade Measures for Queen Conch*, Recommendation WECAFC/XVII/2019/13 on *Queen Conch Conversion Factor* adopted at WECAFC17 and WECAFC/XVIII/2022/3 on *Increased efforts in the implementation of the Regional Queen Conch Fishery Management and Conservation Plan in the WECAFC region*;
 - c) receive updates on CITES Decisions and country reporting to WECAFC;
 - d) review workplan activities (2022-2024) and identify priority activities;

- e) receive updates on the queen conch pilot study in Jamaica for advancing data collection efforts for sustainable queen conch fisheries; and
 - f) develop recommendations for consideration and possible adoption during WECAFC-19, which is scheduled to be held on 6-8 September 2023.
8. The report from the sixth meeting of the QCWG is not yet available but will be made available as an information document, should it become available ahead of this meeting. However, a brief summary of the discussions is provided in paragraphs 9 and 10 below.
9. The CITES Secretariat provided an update on:
- a) the new Decisions adopted at CoP19 on queen conch, highlighting the increased importance of the QCWG in relation to the implementation of those Decisions;
 - b) ongoing CITES activities on queen conch, including the development of Non-Detriment Finding (NDF) guidance and the Blue Biotrade Project on queen conch in collaboration with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS);
 - c) upcoming CITES meetings that are of relevance for the QCWG, where discussions on queen conch will take place; and
 - d) recent trade data on queen conch between 2016-2021, highlighting discrepancies between export and import data for several countries.
10. The meeting adopted two recommendations:
- a) **Qualitative progress of the Regional Queen Conch Fisheries and Conservation Management Plan** – updating the qualitative values collected in 2019–2020 on the degree of implementation of the recommendations in the plan, with additional communication among all countries in the wider Caribbean participating in the queen conch fishery and using the information presented at the 2021 Working Group meeting; and
 - b) **Counteracting IUU Fishing/Genetic Study** – the QCWG Scientific, Statistical and Technical Advisory Subgroup (SSTAG) should liaise with the Regional Working Group on IUU Fishing to further strengthen activities counteracting IUU fishing and pursue the implementation of the queen conch genetic proposal (see paragraphs 24 to 26 below).
11. The Scientific, Statistical and Technical Advisory Subgroup (SSTAG) of the QCWG met on 12 and 13 April 2023. The Secretariat participated remotely.
12. Thanks to funding from the United States of America’s National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Secretariat is collaborating with the SSTAG and the QCWG through the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI) to develop simplified guidance for making an NDF for queen conch (*S. gigas*) in consultation with the main exporting range States, and to develop a case study on queen conch to be presented at the NDF technical workshop envisaged under Decision 19.123 (Gigiri, Nairobi, December 2023).
13. Concerning Decision 19.236, at its 32nd meeting (AC32; Geneva, June 2023), the Animals Committee noted document AC32 Doc. 39. It did not make any recommendations for consideration by the Standing Committee at this meeting.

Update on Blue BioTrade Project on queen conch

14. At CoP19, the Secretariat reported in document CoP19 Doc. 77 that it had been working in partnership with UNCTAD and OECS on a project entitled *Seizing the trade and business potential of Blue BioTrade products for promoting sustainable livelihoods and conservation of marine biodiversity in selected Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Countries*. The beneficiary countries in the first phase are Grenada, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

15. UNCTAD defines BioTrade as “the activities of collection/production, transformation and commercialization of goods and services derived from native biodiversity under criteria of environmental, social and economic sustainability.” The concept of “Blue BioTrade” focuses on marine-based products and services, and was launched by UNCTAD, the Andean Development Corporation and the International Ocean Institute at the United Nations Ocean Conference in 2017. The Blue BioTrade approach involves working across multiple levels of the value chain to develop sustainable livelihoods; adopt an ecosystem-based management approach; and foster swift adaptation to dynamic markets and changing ecological conditions. The overall objective of the project is to empower small-scale coastal producers from OECS member states to produce and trade queen conch products in domestic, regional and international markets under the Blue BioTrade environmental, social and economic sustainability criteria, including CITES provisions concerning international trade in the species.
16. Phase 1 of project ended in January 2023, resulting in several publications that can be accessed [here](#), including the following:
 - a) a stakeholder mapping of the queen conch value chains of Grenada, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines;
 - b) individual country case studies for the three participating countries;
 - c) a summary of the three case study recommendations; and
 - d) a regional plan of action for queen conch in the Eastern Caribbean.
17. Phase 2 of the project is now underway and will be implemented until mid-2026. Subject to available funding, this phase may implement priority areas of the UNCTAD-OECS-CITES Regional Action Plan on queen conch developed under phase 1; include further stock assessments for other participating States; and may also develop Blue BioTrade action plans for the value chains of other non-CITES species.
18. During Phase 1 of the project, the Secretariat was able to provide targeted assistance to Grenada to help it overcome current trade suspensions based on a lack of annual reporting and the Review of Significant Trade (RST) process for queen conch. In the context of the latter, the Blue BioTrade project funded a queen conch stock assessment for Grenada. This stock assessment included a training workshop for Grenadian fisheries authority staff (as well as those from Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) and a field survey that involved the local fishers. This stock assessment has been submitted to the Secretariat and should contribute to the production of an NDF in connection with the recommendation to suspend trade in queen conch from Grenada under the RST process.

Illegal trade in *S. gigas*

19. An examination by the Secretariat of the data on queen conch seizures submitted by Parties in the annual illegal trade reports from 2016 to 2020 was conducted on data extracted from the CITES illegal trade database, in December 2021, the results of which were presented to the Standing Committee at its 74th meeting in document [SC74 Doc. 79](#). Data from the same data source was extracted in July 2023, to provide an update on queen conch seizure data for the period 2016 to 2021 as presented below.
20. The total number of seizures reported in 2016 was 412; 456 in 2017; 383 in 2018; 406 in 2019; 260 in 2020; and 106 in 2021. This is based on reports submitted by 36 Parties that had made seizures of queen conch. Where indicated, most shipments were by air or mail, with smaller numbers by boat. In many cases, the seizures were the result of joint operations with multiple agencies.
21. There is a large variation in the reporting units making it very difficult to make direct comparisons and analyses. The majority of seizures are in shells and meat (see table below), with seizures of 35 pearls in 2016; 110 in 2018 and 43 in 2019. Smaller number of seizures have been recorded as body (BOD), carapace (CAP), derivative (DER), extract (EXT), jewellery (JWL), oil (OIL), scientific specimen (SPE) and trophy (TRO). In some cases, codes that are not found in the *Guidelines for the preparation and submission of the CITES annual illegal trade report* are used, e.g. SPR, UNS, WHO.
22. It is difficult to determine the total quantity of queen conch seized as reported by Parties in their annual illegal trade reports over the same period, as the values recorded are not consistent. Shells and meat are reported as numbers or kilograms, making it difficult to analyse the data. A standard average weight of 1.3 kg was applied to shells where these were reported by weight; for meat the totals only include those records where

the quantity seized was reported in kg. One important element that is not recorded for the meat was the level of processing (e.g., dirty, % processed or clean fillet), making it difficult to determine what conversion factor to use to estimate the total number of conch specimens illegally exported. The breakdown of specimens recorded as either shells, meat or pearls, seized for each year is presented in the table below.

Year	Total number of seizures reported	Quantity seized		
		SHELLS (number; including an average weight of 1.3kg for shells reported by weight)	MEAT (kg, where indicated)	PEARLS (number)
2016	412	1,113	22,489	35
2017	456	1,050	15,686	
2018	383	706	12,786	110
2019	406	2,011	28,852	43
2020	260	103	330	
2021	106	405	1,625	

23. Closer examination of the data shows that many of the seizures of shells are less than 3 specimens. In this context, the Secretariat notes that under Article VII, paragraph 3 of the Convention and paragraph 3 b) iv) of Resolution Conf. 13.7 (Rev. CoP17) on *Control of trade in personal and household effects*, up to three specimens of queen conch shells are exempt from the requirement for CITES permits.

Queen conch genetics project

24. Concerning paragraph b) of Decision 19.234, the Secretariat would like to draw the Standing Committee's attention to a project on queen conch genetics to address illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, involving the University of Rhode Island and the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI) that will look at genetic variation as a way to identify illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing with steps geared towards:
- a) identifying genetic discontinuities across populations/stocks in different islands or nations;
 - b) finding the molecular markers that allow distinction of the different populations/stocks; and
 - c) developing a molecular assay that uses the molecular markers to identify product caught by IUU fishing.
25. The objective of this work will be to use the new genetic approaches [RadSeq] to understand and quantify genetic variation across the Caribbean using samples collected by collaborating nations and islands. It will identify and clarify the geographic and genetic limits of the various stocks distributed across the Caribbean. Genetic markers associated with differences among the different stocks will then be selected and validated and a protocol designed to identify and trace illegal queen conch specimens in trade. Activities a) and b) will be addressed through a pilot project, that is partly funded by the Netherlands through the CITES Secretariat.
26. Phase 1 of the pilot project on queen conch genetics to address illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing is underway. Progress updates will be provided to the Animals Committee at its 33rd meeting and to the Standing Committee at its 78th meeting.

Recommendations

27. The Standing Committee is invited to:
- a) note the reports produced under Phase 1 of the UNCTAD-OECS-CITES Blue BioTrade project on queen conch referred to in paragraph 16;

- b) remind Parties that the *Guidelines for the preparation and submission of the CITES annual illegal trade report* in Annex 2 to Notification to the Parties No. 2021/044 indicate that shells should preferably be reported by number and that meat should be reported in kilograms; and
- c) remind Parties that, according to paragraph 3 b) iv) of Resolution Conf. 13.7 (Rev. CoP17) on *Control of trade in personal and household effects*, up to three specimens of queen conch shells are exempt from the requirement for CITES permits.