

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



Seventy-eighth meeting of the Standing Committee  
Geneva (Switzerland), 6–10 February 2024

Species conservation and trade

Fauna

Elephants (Elephantidae spp.)

EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION BETWEEN THE ANNUAL ILLEGAL TRADE REPORT  
AND THE ELEPHANT TRADE INFORMATION SYSTEM

Introduction

1. This document has been prepared by Belgium as Chair of the Standing Committee intersessional working group on the *Exchange of information between the annual illegal trade report and the Elephant Trade Information System*.\*
2. As outlined in document [SC77 SR](#), the Standing Committee at its 77th meeting (SC77, Geneva, 2023), in its consideration of agenda item 32.2 on *Revised Guidelines for the preparation and submission of CITES annual reports and Guidelines for the preparation and submission of CITES annual illegal trade reports*, established an intersessional working group with the following mandate:

*Review the provisions in Resolution Conf. 10.10 (Rev. CoP19) on Trade in elephant specimens, paragraph 27 g), and Resolution Conf. 11.17 (Rev CoP19) on National reports, paragraph 4, relating to exchange of information between the annual illegal trade report and the Elephant Trade Information System (ETIS), as well as the data elements to be reported in both as it relates to elephant specimens; and report to SC78.*

3. The composition of the working group, comprising Parties and Non-Party observers, is as follows: Austria, Belgium (Chair), Canada, China, Germany, India, Italy, Kuwait, Singapore, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America; United Nations Organization on Drugs and Crime (UNODC); and TRAFFIC. Compared to the original list of members as mentioned in document [SC77 SR](#), two changes were made: Argentina requested to be deleted from this working group, and China expressed an interest to join the working group. Both changes were accepted.

Working group discussions

4. The working group was initiated via email by the Chair in February 2024, by sharing with working group members a set of basic assumptions, the identification of the specific problems based on the input during discussions at SC77 and a list of questions, requesting their feedback on these. Based on the replies received, a summary of the inputs provided by working group members was made and circulated, followed by an online meeting on 24 July 2024 to discuss these inputs.

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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.*

5. During the online meeting, agreement was found on amendments to paragraph 27. g) in Resolution Conf. 10.10 (Rev. CoP19) and paragraph 4 in Resolution Conf. 11.17 (Rev. CoP19). The suggested amendments can be found in the Annex to the present document.
6. During the electronic exchanges as well as during the online meeting, several matters were raised that were outside the scope of the working group mandate. As there was sufficient time during the online meeting, and there was support for some preliminary exchanges on these matters, working group members exchanged views and identified key matters that could merit future discussion, as follows:
  - a) Reporting deadlines: The deadline for submission of data to ETIS is 90 days after the occurrence of the seizure, or 31 March of the year following the seizure. The deadline for submission of the Annual Illegal Trade Report (AITR) is 31 of October each year. Members noted that the potential merger of the two reporting deadlines had already been discussed previously.
  - b) Double reporting: Even if data can be exchanged between ETIS and the CITES Illegal Trade Database, Parties will still need to also report data submitted to ETIS in their annual AITR submission. The Secretariat clarified that the provisions in Resolution Conf. 11.17 (Rev. Cop 19) as presently written does not provide for seizures of elephant specimens to be excluded from AITR reporting. It was also noted by the Secretariat that reporting on annual illegal trade is part of Art. VIII of the Convention text and is mandatory, but not subject to compliance procedures. However, elephant specimen seizure data reported by Parties in their AITR also fulfill the reporting obligation to ETIS, since this data can be made available to ETIS by the Secretariat, as provided for in paragraph 4 of Resolution Conf. 11.17 (Rev. CoP19). Further discussion may be warranted to avoid Parties having to report the same data twice.
  - c) Exchange of historical data: There may be a need to discuss how historical data can be exchanged between both databases. If at the 20th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP20), there is agreement on the changes to the relevant resolutions (as presented in the Annex to the present document), future data can be exchanged between ETIS and AITR. However, for historical data, no mechanism is foreseen. It was confirmed that it would be beneficial to obtain and share this historical data so they can be taken into account in future analyses. A mechanism may need to be set-up to accommodate this exchange of historical data. If such an exchange of historical data would be foreseen, members of the working group highlighted that this should not go with an expectation of Parties to submit additional data nor an additional verification of the submitted data (beyond Parties having to give their explicit consent to agreeing or not to the sharing of this historical data).
  - d) Data validation: under ETIS, a data validation process was put into place, allowing Parties to scrutinize the data used in the ETIS analysis that implicates their country. Currently, this ETIS validation process is in place for data that is officially submitted by CITES Management Authorities (MA) and for data coming from other sources. The data validation process takes time, both for the Parties involved as for TRAFFIC. Investments were made to the ETIS Online application to facilitate the data validation process, but nonetheless it requires precious time and resources. It was put into question if such a data validation process is required for all types of data. Some members of the working group suggested that data submitted by Parties through their CITES Management Authorities should not be put into question and should by default be considered as valid. In case of concerns about specific data, it was suggested that bilateral exchanges can be initiated. It was also suggested that data in the ETIS database originating from non-MA sources should still undergo the data validation process as it is currently foreseen. It was furthermore suggested by certain members that if a Party has submitted seizure information, this could be deemed sufficient, thus eliminating the need for additional data coming from non-MA sources. Other members were of the opinion that all data needs validation by the implicated Parties.
  - e) Cost-efficiency: Questions were raised about the cost-efficiency of maintaining two separate databases which include partially the same data.
  - f) Data duplication: Concerns were raised about the potential duplication of data when data is shared between databases. This concern is partially linked to differences in the set-up of the CITES Illegal Trade- and ETIS databases.
  - g) There was a common understanding that having up-to-date data is important. However, certain pieces of information (for example the information on the disposal of confiscated specimens) only becomes available after quite some time. When a Party wants to update information that was already submitted to the AITR, it needs to do this through the CITES Implementation Report (which is only to be submitted

every 3 years). In practice this is rather difficult and a request was made to investigate also this element to see if this could be organised in a more practical and efficient manner.

7. The working group invite the Standing Committee to take note of the matters as contained in paragraph 6 of the present document, that went beyond the mandate of this working group, but could likely benefit from further discussion. The Committee may wish to decide at its present meeting if and how these matters can be taken forward.
8. Members of the working group agreed that the reporting burden on Parties should be as low as possible and that data sharing and data collection should be done in a transparent manner.

#### Recommendations

9. The Standing Committee is invited to:
  - a) consider and agree the proposed amendments to paragraph 27 g) in Resolution Conf. 10.10 (Rev. CoP19) on *Trade in elephant specimens* and paragraph 4 in Resolution Conf. 11.17 (Rev. CoP19) on *National reports*, presented in the Annex to the present document, for submission to the 20th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP20) for consideration; and
  - b) take note of the matters as contained in paragraph 6 of the present document, that went beyond the mandate of this working group, but could likely benefit from further discussion.

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO RESOLUTION CONF. 10.10 (REV. COP19) ON *TRADE IN ELEPHANT SPECIMENS* AND RESOLUTION CONF. 11.17 (REV. COP19) ON *NATIONAL REPORTS*

*NB: Proposed new text is underlined.*

**Resolution Conf. 10.10 (Rev. CoP19), paragraph 27. g)**

- g) summaries and aggregates of data provided to MIKE and ETIS, and the analyses of such data, constitute information that will be considered to be in the public domain once they are published on the CITES website, or otherwise publicly distributed. The detailed data on individual seizure cases, elephant mortalities and law enforcement submitted to MIKE or ETIS are owned by the respective data providers, which in most case are the CITES Parties; any such data relating to a CITES Party will be accessible to that Party, the CITES Secretariat, the members of the MIKE and ETIS Technical Advisory Group for information and review purposes and the members of the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC) for global research and analysis purposes, unless otherwise specified by the reporting Party as provided for in paragraph 4 of Resolution Conf. 11.17 (Rev. CoP19) on *National reports*, and data submitted by the reporting Parties will be shared annually with the CITES Secretariat to supplement the CITES Illegal Trade Database. The detailed data on individual seizure cases, elephant mortalities and law enforcement will not be released to any third party without the consent of the Party concerned; data may also be released to contractors (e.g. statisticians) or other researchers (e.g. MIKE ETIS Subgroup-approved research collaborations) under appropriate nondisclosure agreements;

**Resolution Conf. 11.17 (Rev. CoP19), paragraph 4**

AGREES that, unless otherwise specified by the reporting Party, data collected in the annual illegal trade report and included in the database under the responsibility of the CITES Secretariat, should be made available to Parties for research and analysis of wildlife and forest crime as it affects them, and to the members of the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC) for ICWC global research and analysis studies on wildlife and forest crime and any data related to seizures of elephant specimens (as prepared by the Secretariat) to ETIS, on an annual basis to supplement the ETIS database and to support the monitoring the illegal trade in ivory and other elephant specimens as provided for in Resolution Conf. 10.10 (Rev. CoP19) ;