

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



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Species specific matters

Rosewood timber species [Leguminosae (Fabaceae)]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN THE TIMBER-PRODUCING
SPECIES "MUKULA" (*PTEROCARPUS* SPP.) FROM DRY MIOMBO FORESTS
(CENTRAL / SOUTHERN AFRICA)

1. This document has been submitted by Germany and Belgium (Scientific Authorities).*
2. This document was formulated in application of Decision 17.234 on *Rosewood timber species [Leguminosae (Fabaceae)]*, addressed to the Plants Committee.

Background

3. For around ten years now, the pressure from the international trade on wood from rosewood timber species and similar has increased dramatically, closely linked to the Asian markets' growing demand for rosewood, which is highly sought after for cabinetmaking and furniture in the Asian Hongmu (红木) sociocultural tradition.
4. Whilst the Hongmu furniture industry is still booming due to the development of the middle classes in the Asian economy, for several years now it has been faced with a decline in its traditional sources of supply in South East Asia and in other tropical regions (West Africa, Madagascar); where several local rosewood species that have long been overexploited are now in danger of extinction and were recently listed under Appendix II of CITES. Moreover, the luxury furniture industry has benefited from speculative investments over the last few years, and in 2014 the sector's Chinese leaders said they expected a continued appreciation in the price of luxury furniture and raw materials within the sector in years to come (Wang Man, 2014).
5. Since 2011, this commercial dynamic has had an increasingly significant impact on Mukula timber from various species in the genus *Pterocarpus*, which are common in the dry Miombo forests that encircle the equatorial zone of Central Africa and Southern Africa (from Angola to Mozambique). Given the aesthetic qualities of these Mukula timbers are similar to those of the Asian rosewood species most highly prized in the Hongmu tradition, they have gradually been adopted as the preferred alternatives for this growing industry¹.

* 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 Several African species in the genus *Pterocarpus* have been listed as first-class (A1) Hongmu timber in the Chinese official standard of valuable rosewood updated by the Chinese authorities in 2008 (QB/T 2385-2008). The inclusion of these species as A1 class Hongmu timber in this official standard explains to a great extent their current popularity on the international markets. For a detailed analysis of this standard and its implications for the species listed in it, see JIANG 2011 and FORESTS TRENDS 2014.

6. Over the last five years, the expansion of this “Hongmu demand” in order to supply the Chinese markets, has led to an unprecedented interest in Mukula timber in the main producer countries within its range, notably (but not exclusively) in Zambia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo².
7. This exponential development of the logging market chain over the course of the last five years has led to cumulative extractions estimated as several tens of thousands of m³ in several countries within the range of the species concerned (Zambia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique, Malawi, Angola), although no precise assessment of the volumes involved is available.
8. In some places, there may be problems regarding the legality and sustainability of the logging operations. The uncontrolled expansion of logging has been made possible by the extreme poverty of the rural populations, for whom the purchase prices proposed by the intermediaries are an unparalleled windfall, despite being obscenely low.
9. Although the extraction of Mukula timber affects several species in the genus *Pterocarpus*, they are not differentiated or are poorly differentiated by loggers and traders on the international markets. Empirical observations indicate that several of these species are in critical decline in numerous regions of the countries within their range.
10. Due to the predominance of Mukula species in the forests where this timber is currently exploited, logging leads to significant changes in its environment where it constitutes the key element, which de facto leads to the dry forest being transformed into savannah (a very fragile ecosystem), with all the environmental impacts that this involves.

Conclusions

11. It is essential to develop a realistic and scientifically founded strategy in order to reduce the pressure from the informal Mukula timber extraction sectors that sell to international markets: to know the resources involved from a scientific point of view, to understand the *modus operandi* of the extraction sectors, and to identify the management options within the framework of the implementation of forestry codes in the most heavily impacted countries in the sub-region.

Recommendations to the Plants Committee

In the application of Decision 17.234, the Plants Committee is invited to

- assess the potential desirability of listing species in the genus *Pterocarpus* that are affected by the international commercial pressure on Mukula timber under Appendix II of the Convention;
- encourage the improvement of knowledge on the species involved, so as to assess the status of their populations and to better appreciate the impact on their populations of current extractions to supply the international market;
- encourage the Parties to the Convention to support scientific studies on the points above.

References

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² See Freeman, S. (2017) and Cerutti, PO et al. (2018).

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