

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



Twenty-seventh meeting of the Animals Committee  
Veracruz (Mexico), 28 April – 3 May 2014

Interpretation and implementation of the Convention

Species trade and conservation

Snake trade and conservation management (Serpentes spp.)

REPTILE SOURCING AND TRACEABILITY SYSTEMS  
[DECISION 16.103, PARAGRAPHS B) TO D)]

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.
2. The Conference of the Parties adopted at its 16th meeting (CoP16, Bangkok, 2013) a number of interconnected decisions concerning *Snake trade and conservation management (Serpentes spp.)*. These include the following:

**Directed to the Secretariat**

16.102 *The CITES Secretariat shall, where appropriate in consultation with the Standing Committee:*

- c) *inform Parties of the results of the International Trade Centre (ITC) study on trade in python snakes in Asia, the UNCTAD Biotrade Initiative's Working Group on reptile skin sourcing, when these become available, and other relevant studies and information;*

**Directed to the Animals Committee**

16.103 *The Animals Committee shall:*

- b) *examine the study undertaken by the UNCTAD Biotrade Initiative's Working Group on reptile skin sourcing mentioned in Decision 16.102, paragraph c), and any other relevant available information concerning:*
    - i) *existing marking and tracing systems and, where relevant, accompanying certification schemes of all kinds (and not necessarily limited to those currently in use for trade in wild species), which could provide best practices that might be applicable to snakes;*
    - ii) *a traceability system to confirm the legal origin of snake skins; and*
    - iii) *the economic feasibility of current technologies to implement such a traceability and marking system;*
  - c) *advise the Standing Committee on the feasibility of implementing such a traceability system for snakes; and*
  - d) *report on the status of this work at the 65th and 66th meetings of the Standing Committee.*
3. An advanced, not officially edited version of the study mentioned in Decision 16.103, paragraph b) above (Ashley, D. 2013. *Traceability Systems for a Sustainable International Trade in South-East Asian Pythons*) is available from [http://www.biotrade.org/ResourcesPublications/UNCTAD\\_DITC\\_TED\\_2013\\_6\\_webonly.pdf](http://www.biotrade.org/ResourcesPublications/UNCTAD_DITC_TED_2013_6_webonly.pdf). It was co-commissioned by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and

CITES Secretariats. The publication is a product of the BioTrade Initiative, part of the Division on International Trade in Goods and Services, and Commodities (DITC) of UNCTAD, and part of a larger effort by UNCTAD to analyse trade-related issues of particular importance for developing countries. The study was prepared under the second phase of the BioTrade Facilitation Programme, which is a partnership between UNCTAD and the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO).

4. The scoping study on trade and sustainable sourcing of python skins in South-East Asia mentioned above addresses issues such as: marking and traceability systems and techniques; conservation and sustainable use frameworks; compliance with standards and regulations; capacity building; stakeholder engagement; and costs and benefit sharing. Its findings, along with the inputs received from stakeholders and reviewers (see paragraph 5 below), should provide decision-makers with a number of options for strengthening the regulatory framework for trade in snake skins, and improve traceability.
5. In order to engage and consult a broad range of stakeholders, UNCTAD and CITES jointly organized a meeting on traceability systems for managing international trade in South-East Asian python skins in Geneva on 17 and 18 October 2013 (see <http://unctad.org/en/Pages/MeetingDetails.aspx?meetingid=411> for more information, including key issues, documents and meeting presentations). The meeting was held with financial support from Switzerland (SECO). It provided an opportunity to discuss the preliminary findings of the scoping study, review relevant developments and initiatives, present new traceability technologies and approaches, and promote cooperation and synergies among stakeholders.
6. Prior to this meeting, a roundtable on traceability of python skins had been organized by UNCTAD in Bangkok, Thailand, in the sidelines of CoP16 (see <http://www.biotrade.org/meeting.asp?meetingID=68>). Additionally, an information session to present progress with, and initial results of the scoping study to key stakeholders was organized by the CITES and UNCTAD Secretariats in Geneva on 12 June 2013 (see <http://www.biotrade.org/meeting.asp?meetingID=69> for further information and the session report).
7. With regard to other relevant information concerning marking and tracing systems, or certification schemes, and in addition to those presented at the UNCTAD/CITES meeting in October 2013, the Secretariat is aware of some initiatives that could provide further useful inputs. Document AC27 Doc.19.4, submitted by Switzerland, provides information on the requirements for a global traceability information system for reptile skins, based on questionnaires and consultations with stakeholders. NEST'up (a government-run start-up of *Creative Wallonia*, Belgium) developed *pro bono* a smartphone application involving photos and a unique tracking number that should allow to trace snakes and snake products. Information However, at the time of writing this document (February 2014), no further details on this initiative were available to the Secretariat.
8. The Secretariat has encouraged all stakeholders, researchers, private businesses and others interested in snake skin traceability to liaise closely with the Standing Committee Working Group on snake trade and conservation management, which the Standing Committee at its 64th meeting (Bangkok, March 2013) agreed to continue after CoP16 with the same membership as before and with Switzerland as chair.
9. The study and the other available information address a number of issues that the Animals Committee may wish to consider, and that include:
  - Links between the CITES permit system and marking systems for snake skins or products ;
  - The appropriateness of a “two-step” marking system, as proposed in the study indicated above;
  - Advantages and disadvantages of technologies to identify or trace snake skins and snake products along the supply chain;
  - The robustness of marking and tracing systems in confirming legal origins of snake skins or products;
  - The data management of traceability systems;
  - The costs and economic feasibility of implementing traceability and marking systems; and
  - Options for field-testing traceability systems or marking techniques.

## Recommendations

10. The Animals Committee is invited to examine the UNCTAD/CITES study on *Traceability Systems for a Sustainable International Trade in South East Asian Python* with regard to its findings and recommendations concerning traceability of snake skins, as well as any additional relevant information that is available on this subject.
11. In accordance with Decision 16.103 c) and d), the Committee is furthermore invited to develop advice for the Standing Committee on the feasibility of implementing a traceability system for snakes and prepare its reporting on the status of this work at the 65th meeting of the Standing Committee (Geneva, July 2014). The Animals Committee may wish to consider its collaboration with the Standing Committee Working Group on snake trade and conservation management in this regard.