

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

Regional Matters

Regional Reports

OCEANIA

1. This document has been submitted by the regional representative for Oceania (Dr Hugh Robertson, New Zealand).¹

General Information

2. Number of Parties in the region: 8 (Australia, Fiji, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu).

The following 9 countries in Oceania are not Parties to the Convention: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Tokelau, Tonga and Tuvalu. The Cook Islands and Niue are self-governing in free association with New Zealand, and Tokelau is a self-administering dependency of New Zealand. While New Zealand assumes some responsibility for foreign affairs for these countries this does not render them a party to CITES under New Zealand law. In contrast, the French overseas territories of French Polynesia, New Caledonia, and Wallis and Futuna, and the Australian, United States and United Kingdom territories in the region do come under the CITES umbrella through membership of their parent states.

Communication with Parties in the region since AC26 (Geneva, March 2012)

3. Following AC26, Dr Robertson sent a report to member Parties outlining the key outcomes affecting Oceania. This report included:
 - a) updates on progress on the Climate Change WG (3 Oceania members), evaluation of the Review of Significant Trade process, Non-detriment Findings and Introduction from the Sea discussions, Periodic Review of the Appendices and the desirability to remove extinct species from the Appendices. Australia and New Zealand offered to prepare proposals for CoP16 to remove several species from the Appendices.
 - b) update on progress on Review of Significant Trade which retained the Solomon Islands population of *Tursiops aduncus* (Indo-Pacific bottle-nosed dolphin) in the review, and decreased the annual quota to 10 animals pending the results of the collaborative project between the Solomon Islands government and the South Pacific Whale Research Consortium that would not be available until May 2012.

¹ *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.*

- c) update on progress on Review of Significant Trade of *Hippocampus kuda* which was classified as ‘Least concern’ and so removed from the review process
 - d) update on progress on Review of Significant Trade which categorized the Solomon Islands population of *Tridacna derasa* as of urgent concern, and the other four *Tridacna* species (*T. squamosa*, *T. gigas*, *T. crocea* and *T. maxima*) as of possible concern, which led to a recommendation that an immediate trade ban be placed on *T. derasa*, and a fisheries management plan be prepared for *Tridacna* spp. in the Solomons.
 - e) update on progress on Review of Significant Trade of *Macaca fascicularis* (crab-eating monkey) in Palau, *Hippocampus histrix* (spiny seahorse) in FSM, PNG and Samoa, and six taxa of corals, all of which are retained in the review process for parties other than Australia, New Zealand and Tonga.
 - f) coverage of the progress of the Working Groups on sharks and rays, and on sea cucumbers
 - g) an update on the identification of CITES-listed corals in trade.
4. A copy of this report was also sent to representatives of 9 Oceania countries that are not members of CITES, and to several IGOs and NGOs working in the region.
 5. Each day during CoP16, the delegates from the Oceania region met to discuss forthcoming agenda items, and occasionally had presentations from proponents or opponents of proposals to amend the Appendices following consensus decisions to receive such presentations. The CoP provides one of the few opportunities for AC, PC and SC representatives to meet their counterparts in such a far-flung region.
 6. Dr Robertson attended a workshop at the University of Wollongong, Australia, hosted by the Australian National Centre for Oceanic Resources and Security (ANCORS) to examine the regional situation for sea cucumber harvest and trade, following concerns raised by the Melanesian country leaders, and heads of fisheries. This led to the Secretariat of Pacific Community (SPC) commissioning a report aimed at highlighting how a sustainable sea cucumber fishery and better organised bêche-de-mer trade could provide better economic returns to the region.
 7. In December 2013, Dr Robertson attended a regional workshop in Wollongong, Australia, organised by the Australian and New Zealand governments, on the implementation of the listing of various shark and ray species in Appendix II of CITES. This workshop was attended by 21 delegates from 6 CITES Parties (Australia, Fiji, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa and the Solomon Islands); 3 non-Parties (Cook Islands, Kiribati, and Tonga), the Secretariats of CITES, SPC, Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna, TRAFFIC; and the Co-chair of the IUCN Shark Specialist Group. During this meeting, several other marine issues (sea-cucumber fishery and bêche-de-mer trade, corals and giant clams) were discussed.
 8. In February 2014, Dr Robertson attended a regional workshop in Fiji, hosted by the Fijian government and organised by PEW Environment Group and The Coral Alliance, on the implementation of the listing of various shark and ray species in Appendix II of CITES. This workshop was attended by c.70 delegates from all 8 CITES Parties (Australia, Fiji, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu); 1 non-Party (Kiribati), the Secretariats of SPC, Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency, IGOs, NGOs, University of the South Pacific, Stony Brook University, and the Co-chair of the IUCN Shark Specialist Group.

Relevant CITES implementation issues in the region

9. Oceania covers a vast area of mostly tropical regions dominated by the marine environment. Trade risks to wild fauna and flora must be seen in the context of the usual range of environmental threats, including habitat loss, invasive species, domestic over-exploitation and global climate change. Coral bleaching has had a dramatic effect on the reefs in some parts of the region (e.g. in Fiji) and there are concerns about the rapid depletion of stocks of some marine species such as oceanic whitetip shark, silky shark and many species of sea cucumber. There is considerable interest in the implementation of the new shark and ray listings in September 2014, and the challenges of providing NDFs for migratory species where little data exists because shark catches and exports have generally not recorded to species level. It is likely that a regional approach will be taken to improve data collection and input to NDFs. Marine resources form a key part of the local culture and the local economy, therefore trade issues concerning them are of critical and growing interest to the countries of the region. The relationship between trade and other pressures needs

to be kept in mind, but CITES has an important potential role in ensuring the sustainable use and protection of species in the marine environment of the region.

10. Because the region has a very small human population in relation to area administered, and small sizes of government departments, capacity remains a critical issue for the Parties and non-Parties in Oceania. CITES is normally but a small part of the wide range of environmental and conservation responsibilities of a small number of government officials. Often just one or two people deal with all of the Multilateral Environmental Agreements, and staff turnover rates are often high in the small public services of island nations. Some Parties have very low levels of trade in CITES species and so attending to CITES requests for information is a low priority, and electronic communications to registered MAs and SAs is sometimes technically difficult. These troubles are evidenced by several Parties in the region having difficulties in submitting their annual or biennial national reports by the deadline. The regional record of submitting biennial reports is poor, with only two parties submitting all necessary reports in the last five periods (i.e. covering 2003-2012). The forthcoming implementation of new shark and ray listings has raised the profile of CITES within many parties and regional organisations, and has seen a new level of cooperation between environmental and fisheries agencies within countries and across the region.
11. In some Oceania countries, suitable legislation supporting CITES is still not in place, and the roles and responsibilities of MAs and SAs have not been clearly defined, thereby making CITES implementation difficult.
12. The Capacity Building Workshops (see paragraphs 14-19 below) and the Shark and Ray Implementation Workshops held in the region (see paragraphs 7 & 8 above) have been very beneficial in bringing environmental and fisheries agencies up-to-speed with CITES and what is required by 14 September 2014, and for networking within the region.
13. Scientific expertise is often difficult to obtain when needed, hence the value of building regional networks of expertise which can fulfil some of the technical requirements of CITES, notably those of Scientific Authorities. In this regard, Dr Robertson is preparing a regional directory of zoological experts.

Capacity-building activities and awareness campaigns

14. In March 2012, the New Zealand Management Authority ran CITES workshops in Samoa and the Cook Islands. The objective of these workshops was to build the capacity of respective agencies in Samoa and the Cook Islands on the national implementation, operation and administration of CITES or equivalent body. The workshops covered issues such as the background to CITES; implementation of CITES through national legislation; functions of the Management Authority; functions of the Scientific Authority; and inter-agency collaboration.
15. In June 2012, a CITES implementation/Prevention of Illegal Wildlife Trade workshop was held in Port Vila, Vanuatu, and extra CITES training was given to three staff members (Peer Educators) who could then help with other in-country training programmes.
16. In June 2012 a CITES implementation workshop was held in Honiara, Solomon Islands to follow-up on specific issues (legislation and permitting) identified at a December 2010 workshop. The June workshop was followed by a high-level seminar in December 2012 aimed at engaging senior officials in the prevention of the trans-national organised crime element of illegal trade.
17. In April 2013, CITES implementation/Prevention of Illegal Wildlife Trade workshop was held in Tonga. As a non-Party, the focus was on providing information on how they could ensure wildlife exports (e.g. coral) were consistent with the CITES obligations of importing countries.
18. Also in April 2013, the CITES Implementation / Prevention of Illegal Wildlife Trade training was extended to the north Pacific, and a workshop was held in Palau. The focus of this workshop was on clarification of and compliance with CITES permitting and legislative requirements.
19. In May 2013, a CITES implementation workshop was held in Nadi, Fiji. Roll-out to Fiji was important, given that it is a regional transport hub, it has high levels of species diversity (and species that are in demand in international markets), and poachers/smugglers are known to travel to Fiji. The Peer Educators who had been trained in Vanuatu in 2012 were also brought to Fiji to further build Pacific networks and capacity.

20. Since 2009, New Zealand has funded and organised over a dozen CITES-related workshops in eight Pacific countries. While the New Zealand Pacific CITES programme has now wound down, both Australia and New Zealand still look for effective – but less resource-intensive ways – to support any requests for assistance from our Pacific colleagues. I would like to express sincere thanks to staff of the CITES Secretariat for all of the assistance they have provided to the workshop organisers during the past 5 years, because their input and expertise has been invaluable to the region.

Agenda items of particular interest in the Oceania region

21. The following items are of particular interest to the 8 Parties of Oceania:

- a) Review of Significant Trade, especially regarding Solomon Islands species
- b) Conservation and management of sharks
- c) Capacity building regarding NDFs.