

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



Twenty-eighth meeting of the Animals Committee
Tel Aviv (Israel), 30 August-3 September 2015

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)]

REPORT OF THE SECRETARIAT

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.*

Directed to the Standing Committee

16.105 *The Standing Committee shall:*

- a) *consider the reports and recommendations from the Animals Committee and the Secretariat provided in accordance with Decisions 16.102 and 16.103 and, as appropriate, the results of the ITC study on trade in python snakes in Asia, the UNCTAD Biotrade Initiative's Working Group on reptile skin sourcing, and any other relevant available information;*
 - b) *examine the study undertaken by the UNCTAD Biotrade Initiative's Working Group on reptile skin sourcing, and any other relevant available information concerning:*
 - i) *the socio-economic implications of such a traceability system; and*
 - ii) *the potential costs of the system at all levels along the supply chain, from producers to consumers;*
 - c) *make recommendations to the Parties, the Animals Committee and the Secretariat as appropriate; and*
 - d) *report on the implementation of Decisions 16.102, 16.104 and 16.105 at CoP17, with recommendations for consideration by the Parties, if deemed necessary.*
3. The study mentioned in Decision 16.103, paragraph b) above (*Traceability Systems for a Sustainable International Trade in South-East Asian Python Skins*. Ashley, D. 2013.) is available from http://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/ditcted2013d6_en.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. An advanced version of the study was brought to the attention of the Animals Committee at its 27th meeting (AC27, Veracruz, April 2014; see document [AC27 Doc. 19.2](#)). Other relevant information on traceability systems for reptile skins was presented in document [AC27 Doc. 19.4](#).
4. Relevant information may also be contained in the four studies on the snake trade and conservation management that were commissioned by the CITES Secretariat pursuant to Decision 16.103, paragraph a) (see document AC28 Doc. 14.1). Italy and Mexico also submitted information on a global traceability information system for reptile skins (see document AC28 Doc. 14.2.2).
5. At AC27, the Animals Committee established a working group on snake trade and conservation management with the mandate to: (i) examine the findings and recommendations concerning traceability of snake skins presented in the UNCTAD/CITES study and in the Annex to document [AC27 Doc. 19.4](#); (ii) examine any additional relevant information that is available concerning existing marking and tracing systems for snakes, accompanying certification schemes, and current technologies to implement such traceability and marking systems; and, (iii) based on these examinations, initiate the drafting of advice on the feasibility, development and implementation of a traceability system for snakes for the Animals Committee to consider and report to the Standing Committee.
6. Based on the deliberations of the Working Group, the Animals Committee at AC27 made initial recommendations on the feasibility, development and implementation of a traceability system for snakes [see document AC27 WG4 Doc. 1 (Rev. 1)]. In support of the implementation of Decision 16.105, these recommendations were reported to the Standing Committee at its 65th meeting (SC65, Geneva, July 2014) as follows (see document [SC65 Doc. 44](#)):
- a) Concerning stockpiles, the Animals Committee made the following recommendations in view of the problems related to large stockpiles of python skins in South-East Asian countries:
 - The Standing Committee may consider recommending that such stockpiles be inventoried and tagged by the countries concerned, and that this information be provided to the Secretariat as a baseline before any traceability system is implemented;

- The inventory should contain information on the species concerned, the stage of processing of the skins (crust, dried, etc.), and the corresponding quantities and tag numbers; and
 - The Standing Committee may also wish to consider how such stockpiles may enter into international trade; and
- b) Concerning traceability, the Animals Committee suggested that the Standing Committee consider implementing a traceability system for snake skins comprising the following characteristics:
- For the formulation of relevant provisions, the Standing Committee may draw upon Resolution Conf. 11.12 (Rev. CoP15) on *Universal tagging system for the identification of crocodylian skins* as a template;
 - In particular, the traceability systems should commence as close to the point of harvest of the animal or production of the skin as possible. It should be made mandatory up to and including finished skins. Any use of the tagging information further on in the trade chain is optional; and
 - The identification of skins should make use of devices that are tamper proof, affordable, uniquely serially numbered and contain the following minimum information: species, country of origin (where relevant regional code), year of harvest or production, unique serial number, source code. In addition, Parties are encouraged to add other information they deem necessary.
7. At SC65, the Standing Committee took note of these recommendations, acknowledging that its working group on snake trade and conservation management would further consider the matter of snake skin traceability and sourcing intersessionally and report at the 66th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC66, Geneva, January 2016).
8. In light of the above, Switzerland, in collaboration with the Secretariat, developed a project on traceability¹ of python skins to better understand:
- the existing electronic track and trace systems in use for wildlife that may have applicability to reptile skins;
 - current technologies that provide, in a cost-effective manner, the ability to track and trace reptile skins from harvest to consumer;
 - the capacity of such systems to confirm the legal origin of the species in trade; and
 - the possible economic consequences related to the implementation of such systems.
9. Other outcomes of the project will include a clear understanding of the three core elements required for track and trace systems, namely:
- the governance structure, including the definition and mapping of the traceability process;
 - the definition of minimum traceability requirements for all partners throughout the business chain and buy-in by all participants involved in the business chain; and
 - the use of, and adherence to, global and open traceability standards² in the development of a track and trace system for python skins.
10. The project was also developed in light of advice received by the Secretariat and Switzerland from international organizations, including United Nations agencies, involved in the development of track and trace systems. This advice was explicit in recognizing that, in order to establish coherent traceability systems, the governance structure, definition and mapping of the business chain should be understood and described prior to deciding on the use of particular track and trace technologies, however important

¹ The project uses the ISO standard 9000:2000 on traceability: the ability to trace the history, application or location of an entity by means of recorded identification.

² A standard is a document that provides requirements, specifications, guidelines or characteristics that can be used consistently to ensure that materials, products, processes and services are fit for their purpose (ISO definition, see: <http://www.iso.org/iso/home/standards.htm>).

these may be. Approaches that start by recommending one or more technologies (e.g. labels, radio frequency identification, biometric image recognition, microchips, bar coding, etc.) may fail to meet needs linked to specific elements in the business chain, direct Parties and users in the adoption of inappropriate track and trace technologies, or result in fragmented systems.

11. Furthermore, the Secretariat was advised that track and trace initiatives for particular CITES-listed taxa should, to the extent possible, be designed to provide insights and lessons learned for parallel track and trace activities for other CITES-listed species. Such a design must first take into account general and specific requirements of the CITES business chain, understand available track and trace standards, and only then decide on the use of the technology.
12. Switzerland has contracted GS1³, a not-for-profit, international organization that develops and maintains global standards for supply and demand chains across multiple sectors, to assist in the development and implementation of the project, and in the identification of possible standards and technologies for use in a track and trace system for CITES-listed species. GS1 was chosen because of its expertise in the development of standards for track and trace systems, and because of its experience in working with United Nations agencies and services.
13. In the development of the project, Switzerland and the Secretariat noted that many of the challenges identified are of direct relevance to work currently underway in the development of track and trace systems for other CITES-listed species, including queen conch, sharks, and sturgeons and paddlefish. There is also a danger of developing many different track and trace systems using different standards which may create difficulties in the compilation and use of the data derived from such systems. That is why understanding the governance structure, and defining and mapping the business chain is given priority in the project.
14. The Secretariat, therefore, discussed with the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) the possible development of a business requirement specification for international trade in wildlife. Such a specification would provide guidance on the use of a potential 'umbrella model' for developing track and trace systems for CITES-listed species. The business requirement specification would provide a core set of general standards for all species, harmonized with international standards and norms for track and trace systems. The general standards could then be customized as required as new species-specific track and trace systems are developed. UN/CEFACT's Programme Development Area for Agriculture is developing a business specification for agriculture⁴ and will advise the Secretariat on its relevancy to the development of a similar specification for wildlife in trade.
15. Given the above, the Animals Committee may wish to consider recommending to the Standing Committee to draft a resolution on track and trace systems to provide general guidance in the development of such systems for CITES-listed species. General standards could in principle be extensible to accommodate for the needs of any species in trade throughout its business chain, including Asian snakes and other reptiles. Such a resolution would provide the necessary understanding of the business requirement specifications in trade in CITES-listed species and provide guidance in the choice of track and trace systems. The resolution would also prevent Parties in choosing technologies that may be attractive, but could fail to provide the services required under a CITES trade business chain.

Recommendations

16. The Animals Committee is invited to review the studies and information mentioned in paragraphs 3 and 4 above, as well as any other relevant available information, and consider the status of the work concerning activities indicated in Decision 16.103, paragraphs b) to d). The Animals Committee working group on snake trade and conservation management may wish to provide its comments and findings in this regard.
17. The Animals Committee is invited to continue the elaboration of recommendations and guidance for consideration by the Standing Committee, and report its findings at the 66th meeting of the Standing Committee. To this effect, the Committee may wish to consider intersessional collaboration with the Standing Committee working group on snake trade and conservation management.

³ Information on GS1 and GS1 standards are available at: www.gs1.org.

⁴ The species included in the business requirement specification for agriculture include: porcine, ovine, caprine, bovine, equine, poultry and fish.

18. The Animals Committee is invited to consider proposing to the Standing Committee the drafting of a resolution on the development of business requirement specifications of and use of standards related to track and trace systems to provide guidance in the development and use of such systems.