

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



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GUIDANCE ON PROJECTIONS OF SPECIES DECLINES FOR USE IN EVALUATING OR PREPARING
SPECIES PROPOSALS

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Introduction

The CITES guidelines for amending the Appendices in Resolution Conf. 9.24 (rev. CoP16) include biological criteria that make reference in several places to projected declines of populations.

Annex 5 of Resolution Conf. 9.24, which provides definitions, explanations and guidelines, indicates that “projection involves extrapolation to infer likely future values.” However, there is little other guidance for how projected declines should be interpreted in applying the biological criteria. This document considers the available guidance and makes recommendations concerning evaluation of projected declines of populations for use in applying the biological criteria.

The information in this document can be used as part of the evaluation or preparation of proposals for amending the CITES Appendices but does not constitute a full set of recommendations for evaluation of proposals involving species projected to undergo declines. Consideration of the full text of Resolution Conf. 9.24 would be necessary, including other factors such as whether a species is or may be affected by trade, whether other requirements of the Appendix I or II criteria are satisfied, or whether the precautionary measures apply.

Evaluation of projected decline is discussed below in the context of Appendix I and II criteria. The criteria for Appendix II are discussed first because they employ terminology that is particularly useful in discussion of Appendix I.

Projected Decline and Appendix II

Paragraph 2aA: Paragraph 2aA of the Appendix II criteria in Resolution Conf. 9.24 indicates that a species should be included in Appendix II if “it is known, or can be inferred or projected, that the regulation of trade in the species is necessary to avoid it becoming eligible for inclusion in Appendix I in the near future.”

According to Annex 5, “near future” refers to a time period in which it can be projected or inferred that a species would satisfy one or more of the Appendix I criteria unless it’s included in Appendix II. The Annex indicates that the time period for near future is to be taxon- and case-specific, but should be greater than five years and less

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than 10 years. This is one of the very few places in the Resolution that a time-frame is given as a definitive guideline, rather than as an indicative guideline.

Another source of guidance on projecting into the future with respect to Appendix II is in the guidance regarding listing of commercially exploited aquatic species in Appendix II (in the footnote of Annex 5). A species could be considered for Appendix II if it were to fulfil criteria for recent rate of decline for Appendix I within approximately a ten-year period. This time frame is consistent with the guidance for near future, above.

Paragraph 2aB: Paragraph 2aB of the Appendix II criteria indicates that a species should be included in Appendix II “to ensure that the harvest of specimens from the wild is not reducing the wild population to a level at which its survival might be threatened by continued harvesting or other influences.”

There is debate as to how paragraphs A and B should be interpreted in relation to one another, including the time frames associated with projecting declines and the extent of those declines. In paragraph B there is no particular reference to Appendix I, or the time period under which the “reduction” might be occurring. For purposes of this document, we will assume that paragraph A contains a definitive time frame but that paragraph B does not.

Guidance: A species with a projected decline could be considered as satisfying the near future requirement for Appendix II under paragraph 2aA if the decline will be evident within five to ten years in the future. Annex 2aB could be considered if the declines were projected to be taking place somewhat longer into the future.

Projected Decline and Appendix I

The biological criteria for inclusion of species in Appendix I allow for projected decline to be considered as a factor that contributes to risk of extinction. For two of the three biological criteria, a decline is considered in conjunction with other risks for extinction: Criterion A of the biological criteria requires that a species have a small population size with the possibility of a projected decline; and Criterion B requires the species to have a restricted area of distribution with a projected decrease. However, for Criterion C, a projected decline or ongoing decline can be considered alone as a risk for extinction if it is significant enough to be considered a marked decline. The focus Appendix I will be on applying projected decline when using Criterion C, as this criterion has caused the most difficulty in interpretation.

There are two sources of guidance on projecting into the future with respect to Appendix I Criterion C.

Marked decline: The first source of guidance is the numerical guidance provided for assessing when a decline in the past (recent or historical) can be considered a “marked decline” under criterion C. In Resolution Conf. 9.24 it is stressed that the numbers are presented only as examples, and that they are not strict thresholds. Marked recent rates of decline for a population call for a percentage decline in population size of 50% or more in the last 10 years or three generations, whichever is longer (for a small population: 20% or more decline in the last five years or two generations, whichever is longer). The other type of marked decline is a marked historical decline, which can be taken as a decline to 5%-30% of baseline values that has occurred over a long time period in the past (note that the guidelines are somewhat narrower for application of extent of decline to commercially exploited aquatic species). A possible approach for projected decline is to assume that guidelines for applying past declines, above, also can be applied to ongoing declines or declines in the future. Used in this way, the guidance for marked decline would be satisfied, for example, if the species were projected to decline by 50% in 10 years or three generations, with the time period for evaluation of marked decline including any combination of the past, present and the future.

Near future: The second source of guidance that can be used for assessing projected marked decline associated with Appendix I can be found in the criteria for inclusion in Appendix II: ‘near future’ in paragraph 2aA of the Appendix II criteria. For Appendix II, a decline in the near future means that it will have occurred within five to ten years in the future. By extension of this logic to Appendix I, a species projected to fulfil criteria for a marked decline within the next five years would be eligible for consideration under the Appendix I criteria. Wording to this effect was included in the original wording to 9.24, but removed in revisions at CoP12.

For projecting into the future, the conclusions from both of these sources of guidance would be identical only when the requirements for marked decline would be satisfied within the next five years. That is, there is a conflict between the two sources of guidance when considering projections further into the future. For example, in a situation in which the criteria for marked decline would only be satisfied at some point after five years had

passed, the criteria for Appendix I Criterion C would be met, but the criteria associated with paragraph 2aA (near future) as extended to apply to Appendix I (five years or less) would not be met.

There is no completely unequivocal way of reconciling the guidance from these two different sources. However, the fact that ten years into the future is the maximum time explicitly referred to in the Resolution (in the definition of near future and in the footnote regarding listing commercially exploited aquatic species in Appendix II) could be taken as indicating that this is a timeframe that Parties regarded as generally useful for assessing potential future circumstances. The fact that meetings of the CoP take place every three years or so also means that ten years into the future is a reasonable time to use as the basis for making decisions about projecting into the future in the context of CITES. Were the CoP only to meet every ten or fifteen years, decisions would clearly be made on a very different basis. The Parties might be expected to exercise caution in using longer-term projections as the basis for decision-making, as such projections are subject to far greater uncertainty increasing the further into the future the projections are made. Also particular to the case of inclusion in Appendix I, experience has shown that such a listing essentially forecloses other species management options and such decisions are difficult to reverse.

Guidance: The biological criteria for Criterion C of Appendix I could be considered to be met when the requirements for a projected marked decline will be fulfilled within the next five years.