

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



Twenty-ninth meeting of the Animals Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 18-22 July 2017

Species specific matters

Terrestrial species

TORTOISES AND FRESHWATER TURTLES
(TESTUDINES SPP.)

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.
2. At its 17th meeting (CoP17, Johannesburg, 2016), the Conference of the Parties adopted the following Decisions on *Tortoises and freshwater turtles*:

Directed to the Secretariat

17.291 *The Secretariat shall, subject to available funding:*

- a) *in collaboration with Parties requiring assistance, and relevant experts, provide or develop guidance to CITES Scientific and Management Authorities concerning:*
 - i) *techniques to survey and monitor wild populations of tortoises and freshwater turtles, to assess impacts of offtake, and to implement adaptive management programmes in the context of the making of non-detriment findings; and*
 - ii) *the differentiation of specimens originating from the wild from those from captive or ranching production systems;*
- b) *contract consultants to develop, in collaboration with relevant Parties, experts and the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC), a guide on categories of turtle parts and derivatives in trade, for national agencies responsible for wildlife law enforcement, to raise their awareness of the trade in these types of specimens, to enable initial recognition of such specimens, and to provide guidance on further identification resources and expertise that can be consulted; and*
- c) *in collaboration with ICWC, relevant Parties and experts, establish a secure rapid-response identification network to connect inspecting officials to a network of verified specialists on species identification, with an initial pilot phase focusing on tortoises and freshwater turtles, that could be extended to other species, if appropriate.*

17.292 *The Secretariat shall report at the 18th meeting of the Conference of the Parties on the implementation of Decision 17.291.*

Directed to the Animals Committee

17.293 *The Animals Committee shall review the guidance provided or developed in accordance with Decision 17.291, paragraphs a) and b), and make recommendations for consideration by the Secretariat.*

Directed to the Secretariat

17.294 *The Secretariat shall engage the government of Madagascar and other relevant stakeholders to provide urgent assistance to combat illegal collection and trade in the Ploughshare tortoise (*Astrochelys yniphora*) or Angonoka.*

17.295 *The Secretariat shall:*

- a) *with funding already provided, establish and convene a CITES Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles Task Force (Task Force) to operate, as described in Decision 17.296. The members of the Task Force could include the Wildlife Enforcement Network of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the members of ICCWC, Madagascar and those Parties in Asia that are most affected by the illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles and their parts and derivatives and other individuals who the Secretariat determines may contribute to the work of the Task Force;*
- b) *seek funding to support the work and additional meetings of the Task Force through the 18th meeting of the Conference of the Parties;*
- c) *work to establish a secure electronic communications platform for the Task Force (i.e. the CENComm Environet of the World Customs Organization);*
- d) *transmit the findings and recommendations of the Task Force, under Decision 17.296 c), to the 69th meeting of the Standing Committee for its consideration, and make its own recommendations as appropriate; and,*
- e) *transmit to the Standing Committee, for consideration at its 70th meeting, a progress report on the implementation of the Committee's recommendations by the Parties, as described in Decision 17.298 c).*

Directed to the Tortoise and Freshwater Turtles Task Force

17.296 *The Task Force shall:*

- a) *as it deems appropriate, exchange intelligence and other information on the illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater and terrestrial turtles;*
- b) *discuss enforcement and implementation issues related to the illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater and terrestrial turtles as outlined in document CoP17 Doc. 73 Annexes 1 – 4 and any other materials it deems relevant; and,*
- c) *deliver findings and recommendations, through the Secretariat, to the 69th meeting of Standing Committee to strengthen the enforcement and implementation of the Convention for these species by the Parties.*

Directed to Parties

17.297 *The Parties shall:*

- a) *take steps to strengthen implementation and enforcement of the Convention for tortoises and freshwater and terrestrial turtles, especially the recommendations of the Standing Committee under Decision 17.298 a) and b); and,*
- b) *report to 70th and 71st meetings of the Standing Committee, through the Secretariat, on steps taken to implement the Committee's recommendations, under Decision 17.298 a) and b).*

Directed to the Standing Committee

17.298 *The Standing Committee shall:*

- a) *at its 69th meeting, consider the findings and recommendations of the Secretariat and the Task Force, under Decisions 17.295 d) and 17.296 c) and recommend actions by the Parties, as it deems appropriate, to strengthen enforcement and implementation of the Convention for these species;*
- b) *at its 70th and 71st meetings, evaluate the reports of the Parties under Decision 17.297 b) and determine whether additional recommendations or measures are needed, including appropriate compliance measures in accordance with Resolution Conf. 14.3; and,*
- c) *report on actions and progress achieved by the Committee, Task Force and the Parties at the 18th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.*

Implementation of the Decisions on tortoises and freshwater turtles relevant to the Animals Committee

3. At the time of writing (May 2017), the necessary external funds had not been secured to implement Decision 17.291 a) and b). In this regard, donor Parties and stakeholders are invited to contribute the requisite financial support as soon as possible.
4. With regard to Decision 17.291 a), the Secretariat points out that a considerable amount of work has already been carried out in developing guidance for Parties on the making of non-detriment findings for tortoises and freshwater turtles. In particular, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group of the Species Survival Commission of IUCN (IUCN/SSC) conducted a study which was called for in Decision 16.109, as agreed at the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP16, Bangkok, 2013). The study, entitled *Non-Detriment Findings and Trade Management for Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles – a guide for CITES Scientific and Management Authorities*, was reviewed and welcomed by the Animals Committee (see [AC28 Doc. 15 Annex 2](#)). Therefore, the Secretariat seeks the guidance of the Animals Committee in clarifying what additional guidance (e.g. survey methodologies) is required to implement this part of the Decision.

Implementation of other Decisions on tortoises and freshwater turtles

5. Concerning Decisions 17.295 and 17.296, the Secretariat, in cooperation with the Government of Singapore and with financial support from the United States of America, hosted the CITES Tortoise and Freshwater Turtles Task Force in Singapore from 25 to 27 April 2017. This meeting was developed in close collaboration with partners in the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC) and was attended by tortoise and freshwater turtle experts, as well as government law enforcement agencies and intergovernmental agencies. The CITES Secretary-General provided an opening statement via video to the meeting.¹ It brought together Parties in Asia that are most affected by the illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles and their parts and derivatives, including Madagascar and the ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network. The meeting provided an opportunity for participants to discuss enforcement best practices and challenges in relation to tortoises and freshwater turtles, as well as share information and intelligence with their counterparts in other countries. To combat illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles, the Task Force has developed a number of strategies and proposed actions on information and intelligence sharing, cooperation, illegal trade on the internet, species identification, seizures and disposal, public awareness and empowerment, among others. These include:
 - a) the development of an alert on illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles for enforcement agencies, to be updated on a rotational basis by member states of the Task Force
 - b) engaging online communities such as auction platforms and closed discussion groups to create awareness about this illegal trade

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BtqFJGRPooE>

- c) progressing the fight against the illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles through platforms such as INTERPOL Regional Investigative and Analytical Case Meetings (RIACM) and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime's Wildlife Inter-Regional Enforcement (WIRE) meetings
 - d) using INTERPOL notices to trace and locate offenders
 - e) requesting the World Customs Organization to develop a set of risk profiles and indicators focusing on illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles, and
 - f) implementation of a three-step identification process to be used by law enforcement agencies for the identification of illegally traded tortoises and freshwater turtles.
6. The Secretariat will submit a report on the outcomes of the Task Force to the next meeting of the Standing Committee, to be held in Geneva from 27 November to 1 December 2017.
7. The Secretariat notes that the one of the recommendations from the Task Force meeting referred to in paragraph 5 is the development of a three-step identification process, which might be useful in terms of implementing paragraph b) of Decision 17.291.

Recommendation

8. The Animals Committee is invited to consider the points raised in paragraphs 4 and 7 above and provide recommendations or clarification on the sort of the guidance required for the implementation of Decision 17.291 paragraph a) i).