

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

Regional matters

Regional reports

OCEANIA

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

General Information

2. Number of Parties in the region: nine (Australia, Fiji, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu). We welcomed Tonga as the 183th Party to join the CITES community on 20 October 2016, a few weeks after the close of CoP17.

The accession of Tonga to CITES reduces the number of non-member countries in Oceania to eight: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Tokelau, and Tuvalu. The Cook Islands and Niue self-govern in free association with New Zealand, and Tokelau is a self-administering dependency of New Zealand. While New Zealand has some role in the 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 (e.g. American Samoa, Pitcairn Island) do come under the CITES umbrella through membership of their parent states.

Communication with Parties in the region since AC 28 (Tel Aviv, August-September 2015)

3. Following AC28, Dr Robertson sent a report to member Parties outlining the key outcomes affecting Oceania. This report included updates on:
 - **Capacity building materials and identification materials** - some Oceania parties had no access to internet in CITES offices or at the borders, and so reliance on internet-based tools was not going to work in the region.
 - **Extinct or Possibly Extinct species**, of interest to both Australia and New Zealand as members of the intersessional working group.

* *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.*

- **Evaluation of the Review of Significant Trade**) mechanism and the development of a quicker and simpler process, along with recommendations to develop a tracking database and further consideration of the pros and cons of country-wide reviews.
 - **Review of Significant Trade** of species chosen after CoP16, - a Papua New Guinean butterfly *Ornithoptera meridionalis*, was deleted from the review after appropriate information had been provided by Papua New Guinea. Other older reviews, such as of giant clams (*Tridacna* spp) in the Solomon Islands, have been passed to the Standing Committee to agree and enforce export quotas.
 - The mis-application of **Source Codes** is being investigated and a new guide is being prepared to make clear the circumstances where each code should be used. A draft Resolution contains the provision that the Standing Committee can suspend all trade from a country if incorrect source codes have been applied to wild-caught specimens traded as captive-bred or ranched.
 - The **Sharks and Rays** Working Group considered documents and oral submissions by 23 Parties (including Australia, Fiji and New Zealand) in response to CITES Notification 2015/027. The working group made recommendations on the making of and publication of NDFs; ongoing collaboration with FAO, CMS and Regional Fisheries Bodies; on identification and traceability issues, including expanding the FAO's iSharkFin identification tool to dried and skinned fins, and sharing knowledge on DNA testing of shark products; on development of better methods to reduce bycatch and improve the survival chances of released sharks; and on provision of new information to be considered at AC29.
 - Of the nine species examined as part of the **Periodic Review of the Appendices** process, five were from the Oceania region. Four Australian proposals, two to retain their bird species in Appendix 1 and two to shift the bird species from Appendix I to Appendix II were accepted, along with New Zealand's proposal to retain tuatara (*Sphenodon punctatus*) in Appendix I.
 - Differences in opinion between Australia and IUCN Seahorse specialists on the **nomenclature** of *Hippocampus* seahorses were noted and the AC suggested that with more data the taxonomy may be resolved at CoP17. Suggested changes to the taxonomy of four species of bird of paradise, all of which occur in Papua New Guinea, were not accepted at this stage; regardless of the new taxonomy which places them outside the Paradisaedae family, they will all remain covered by CITES provisions.
4. A copy of this report was also sent to representatives of nine Oceania countries that were not at that time members of CITES, and to several IGOs and NGOs working in the region.

Relevant CITES implementation issues in the region

5. 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 sharks and rays, *Nautilius* species, and the many species of sea cucumber. There has been considerable interest in the region in the implementation of the shark and ray listings that came into force in September 2014 following COP16, and the challenges of providing NDFs for migratory species where little data exists because shark catches and exports have generally not been recorded to species level. Several Parties in the region were co-proponents of some of the successful marine listing proposals decided at CoP17. Following a workshop held in Fiji (see Paragraph 9), many Oceania parties plan to use a generic regional template to do their NDFs for sharks and ray, with country-specific data entered into certain fields, and other fields already populated with regional information. 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.
6. 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.

The recent listing of commercially important sharks and rays 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.

7. 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.

Capacity-building activities and awareness campaigns

8. The CITES Secretariat held a half-day session “Illegal and unsustainable trade as a threat to species” as part of a 3-day, IUCN-led, “Pacific Islands Species Forum” in Fiji in July 2015. The day after the forum, a technical workshop picked up issues and challenges for Parties in implementing CITES, and for non-Parties in joining the Convention, and how various national/regional stakeholders can help implement CITES. The increased activity in the region by the Secretariat and its leadership has helped to increase membership of the CITES community in a region where membership remains proportionately very low. Continued efforts at all levels are required to try to increase the number of Parties in the region.
9. Australia facilitated a successful bid to the Secretariat to obtain EU funding to assist Parties (and non-Parties) in Oceania to develop NDFs (or comparable documentation) for their CITES-listed stocks of sharks and rays. Dr Colin Simpfendorfer and Dr Cassie Rigby (Centre for Tropical Fisheries and Aquaculture and College of Science & Engineering at James Cook University, Queensland, Australia) summarised existing fisheries knowledge of CITES-listed sharks and rays, and their existing fisheries management and conservation measures, and ran a capacity-building workshop in Fiji that was attended by five island Parties in the region. They used Australian and New Zealand NDFs as case studies and the workshop then developed a template that could be used by island nations in the region to carry out their own NDFs. An example template, developed for scalloped hammerheads *Sphyrna lewini*, has been posted on the CITES Sharks & Rays Portal:

<https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/prog/shark/docs/Pacific%20NDF%20template%20for%20Scalloped%20Hammerhead%20S.%20lewini.pdf>

The workshop also developed protocols for the ongoing regional collection of data on CITES-listed sharks and rays, and identified responsibilities and capacity-building requirements for ongoing region-wide monitoring.

10. With funding from the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and with assistance from SPREP and PEW, New Zealand has organised a regional CITES capacity-building workshop to be held in Fiji from 22-26 May 2017. The workshop will be for members of MAs, SAs and Customs officials, and will cover a broad range of implementation topics, but with a special focus on the prevention of illegal wildlife trade. Indications are that most Parties and many non-Parties will attend the workshop, and the Secretariat and CITES officials from the USA will be assisting. I will report verbally on this workshop at AC 29.
11. Since 2010, New Zealand and Australia have funded and/or organised over a dozen CITES-related workshops in eight Pacific countries. As the largest Parties in the region, both Australia and New Zealand still look for effective ways to support requests for assistance from our Pacific colleagues, and we appreciate the increasing input from colleagues in the SPREP (South Pacific Regional Environment Programme) who were particularly active in supporting delegates from small island nations at COP17. I would also 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 7 years that I have been Oceania representative on the AC, because their input and expertise has been invaluable to this distant region.

Agenda items of particular interest in the Oceania region

12. The following items are of particular interest to the nine Parties of Oceania:

- Capacity building and identification materials
- Non-detriment findings
- Review of Significant Trade in Appendix II specimens
- Precious corals
- Sharks & Rays
- Periodic Review of the Appendices
- Appendix III listings
- Nomenclature – identification of CITES-listed corals in trade