

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



Thirtieth meeting of the Animals Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 16-21 July 2018

Species specific matters

Aquatic species

QUEEN CONCH (*STROMBUS GIGAS*)

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.
2. At its 17th meeting (CoP17, Johannesburg, 2016), the Conference of the Parties adopted Decisions 17.285 to 17.290 on *Queen Conch* (*Strombus gigas*). The following Decisions are pertinent to the work of the Animals Committee:

Directed to the Animals Committee

17.287 *If requested by range States of S. gigas, the Animals Committee shall provide advice regarding the making of non-detriment findings for trade in S. gigas, research in support of sustainable queen conch fishery and trade, and other technical matters.*

17.288 *The Animals Committee shall review the process for the setting of scientific quotas for queen conch, in particular where scientific quotas make up a large portion of the overall export quota.*

Directed to the Secretariat

17.289 *The Secretariat shall, pending the availability of external funding,*

- a) *continue to collaborate with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Working Group on Queen Conch composed of the Caribbean Fisheries Management Council (CFMC), the Organización del Sector Pesquero y Acuícola del Istmo Centroamericano (OSPESCA, Organization for the Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector of the Central American Isthmus), the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC) and the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM), WECAFC and other relevant international and regional bodies to provide assistance to range States of S. gigas in order to enhance the capacity of their CITES Management and Scientific Authorities, fisheries authorities and other stakeholders to implement the Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan and apply the NDF guidance;*
- b) *monitor the development of traceability systems for queen conch; provide assistance, as appropriate, to FAO, the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM Working Group on Queen Conch and others in reviewing options for the development of an auditable "chain of custody" procedure; and report relevant developments to the Standing Committee; and*
- c) *continue to provide assistance to range States of S. gigas on relevant enforcement issues, and report new developments in this regard to the Standing Committee, as appropriate.*

Background

3. The Secretariat reported on progress with the implementation of these Decisions to the Animals Committee at its 29th meeting (AC29, Geneva, July 2017) (see document [AC29 Doc. 26](#)). The status of implementation of Decisions 17.287 and 17.289 remains unchanged, as no external source of funding could be identified.
4. Concerning Decision 17.288, the Animals Committee drafted a notification at AC29 about the setting of quotas, including scientific quotas, for trade in queen conch, and requested the Secretariat to publish it.

Implementation of Decision 17.288 – Responses from range States

5. Pursuant to the instructions by the Committee, the Secretariat published [Notification to the Parties No. 2018/035](#) of 18 April 2018, requesting information from range States of queen conch (*Strombus gigas*) on:
 - a) *the extent to which they use scientific research in the making of non-detriment findings;*
 - b) *their process for establishing levels of export for specimens of queen conch;*
 - c) *the process for, and the objectives of setting ‘scientific quotas’, if any, for queen conch; and*
 - d) *whether the catch from scientific surveys contributes to their overall exports.*
6. Seven Parties responded to the Notification (Belize, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America). The responses are attached in Annex 1 to this document in the language in which they were submitted. The Secretariat made an exception for the reply by Honduras, which was translated into English, because Honduras had previously been referred to as one of two Parties making use of scientific quotas (see document [AC29 Doc. 26](#)).

Regarding a) the extent to which they use scientific research in the making of non-detriment findings

7. Three range States that are regularly exporting queen conch (Belize, Honduras and Jamaica) reported on how they make non-detriment findings (NDFs), and what scientific information is collected to support this.
8. Three other range States (the Netherlands, United Kingdom and the United States) reported that there are currently no large scale commercial queen conch fisheries, and no commercial exports from their countries or territories. The United Kingdom reported that the only exports allowed from the Cayman Islands and Virgin Islands would fall under personal effects.
9. Mexico reported that it had in place a closure of its queen conch fishery from 20 March 2015 to 28 February 2017, replaced by annual temporal closures in the month of February and from 1 May to 30 November. It further reported that there were no legal exports of specimens from the wild from Mexico in the last 7 years, and before that it had only exported shells.
10. The Netherlands reported that it has recently commissioned research on the population status of queen conch of the Saba Bank in the Caribbean Netherlands.
11. The United States reported that, should an application to export queen conch from the United States be made, pursuant to its general CITES regulations, the best available scientific information would be used to determine whether the harvest is sustainable. In its response, it shared a document listing the various factors that would be considered for making an NDF.

Regarding b) their process for establishing levels of export for specimens of queen conch

12. Two range States (Belize and Jamaica) base their levels of export on biomass estimates derived from data collected through regular population monitoring and, in the case of Jamaica, supported by the annual analysis of fisheries data.
13. Three range States (Mexico, Netherlands and the United States), where currently no levels of export are established, state that, should levels of export be established, they would be based on scientific information. The Netherlands remarked that local consumption would have to be taken into account for determining non-

detrimental levels of export, and the United States reported that it would additionally consider whether effective management measures were in place.

14. Honduras reported that it had set an annual scientific export quota of 360 tonnes (see Annex 1). The Secretariat notes that, in accordance with the commitment that Honduras made in 2006 (see document [AC22 Inf. 4](#)), the country maintained an export quota of 210 tonnes annually until 2016. For 2017, Honduras informed the CITES Secretariat that, in line with its newly adopted National Queen Conch Management Plan, it had established a quota of 310 tonnes, which should evolve into an adjustable commercial quota that would be set annually on the basis of ongoing population monitoring pursuant to the National Queen Conch Management Plan¹.
15. The United Kingdom reported that no levels of export for specimens of queen conch were established in any of its territories, but that their fisheries were managed in a manner that the only international movement of specimens would be as personal effects (e.g. Cayman Islands: strict bag and possession limits).

Regarding c) the process for, and the objectives of setting 'scientific quotas', if any, for queen conch

16. Six range States (Belize, Jamaica, Mexico, Netherlands, United Kingdom and United States) reported that they do not set "scientific quotas" for queen conch.
17. Honduras, in its response, outlined the historical background for its use of scientific quotas (see also document AC29 Doc. 26), namely that, in 2006, it had committed itself, among other things, to
 - a) *maintain a moratorium on the queen conch fishery until scientifically justified annual harvest and export quotas for queen conch can be established, based on research and analyses of the status of the exploitation and abundance of the resource in Honduras;*

[...]

- f) *ensure that the scientific catch obtained in the monitoring and stock assessment cruises does not exceed 20 % of the 2003 clean-meat reported landings (i.e. does not exceed 210 tonnes), which is considered precautionary taking into consideration the levels of production during the 10 years preceding the moratorium on the fishery that was established in September 2003;*
- g) *issue CITES export permits for the scientific catch to cover the considerable costs required to implement a queen conch stock assessment plan over a wide area of the Honduras continental shelf;*

It clarified that consequently, the objectives of its scientific export quota were two-fold: (1) the collection of scientific information to establish scientifically justified annual harvest and export quotas, as committed to in paragraph a); and (2) ensure that annual harvest and export quotas are ecologically possible and economically profitable without causing damage to the stock.

Regarding d) whether the catch from scientific surveys contributes to their overall exports

18. For Honduras, the only range State that responded to the Notification that sets such quotas, the scientific quota makes up 100% of the export. The scientific quota represents approximately 85% of the total catch, with the other 15% allocated for domestic consumption. For the other range States, catch from scientific surveys are stated not to contribute to overall exports.

Other information submitted by range States

19. In addition to the information reflected above, Jamaica, in its response to the Secretariat, reported that it had developed expertise and trained two staff in using molecular genetics for traceability of queen conch products in trade, in cooperation with the University of the West Indies (UWI), Mona, Jamaica and the Smithsonian Institute, United States.

¹ At the time of writing of this document (May 2018), the increased quota for 2017 had not been correctly reflected in the database for CITES national export quotas, but this has now been rectified.

20. In addition to its response to the Notification, Jamaica submitted a document entitled “Scientific Authority of Jamaica – Comments on CITES Document AC29 Doc. 26”, which is attached in Annex 2 to this document, offering views on the implementation of Decision 17. 288.

Recommendations

21. Based on the information in this document and its Annexes, the Animals Committee is invited to review the process for the setting of scientific quotas for queen conch, in particular where scientific quotas make up a large portion of the overall export quota, and consider any recommendations in this regard.
22. The Animals Committee is further invited to note the progress that Honduras made in implementing its commitments regarding the management of and trade in queen conch (see document [AC22 Inf. 4](#)) and, based on the information provided to the present meeting, consider whether Honduras has now fulfilled these commitments.