

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



Thirty-first meeting of the Animals Committee  
Online, 31 May, 1, 4, 21 and 22 June 2021

Species specific matters

ADDENDUM TO PRECIOUS CORALS (ORDER ANTIPATHARIA AND FAMILY CORALLIIDAE)

1. This document has been submitted by the co-chairs of the working group on precious corals.\*

Progress since May 2020

2. Following the postponement of the 31st meeting of the Animals Committee meeting, scheduled to take place from 13-17 July 2020, due to the Covid-19, the Committee took a number of intersessional decisions (see Notification [No. 2020/057](#) of 22 September 2020), including the establishment of an intersessional working group on *Precious corals*, with the following mandate:
  - a) review the study by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), focusing on the following aspects:
    - i) verifying if the preliminary recommendations of the Animals Committee, adopted at AC30, are still valid, and updating them as appropriate;
    - ii) making recommendations on actions needed to enhance the conservation and sustainable harvest and use of all precious corals in international trade, where appropriate; and
    - iii) considering the possibility of additional CITES listings of precious corals in the family Coralliidae; and
  - b) report on the outcomes of its work at the next meeting of the Animals Committee.
3. The membership of the working group was decided as follows: the representative for Central and South America and the Caribbean (Mr. Gongora - Co-chair), the alternate representative for Asia (Ms. Terada – Co-chair), and the representative for Asia (Mr. Giyanto); Chile, China, Georgia, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America; and Observers: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), United Nations Environment Programme / Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (UNEP/RAC-SPA), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Association of Western Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), Assocoral, European Association of Zoos and Aquariums (EAZA), Global Guardian Trust, Humane Society International (HSI), IWMC-World Conservation Trust, South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP), Wildlife Conservation Society and World Wildlife Fund (WWF).

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\* *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.*

4. The group worked electronically and developed a set of recommendations to the Animals Committee on actions needed to enhance the conservation and sustainable harvest and use of all precious corals as outlined in the Annex attached.
5. Members of the working group welcomed the comprehensive report compiled by FAO, recognising the need to have as much information on biology and sustainable use of precious corals as possible, so that fisheries management is based on sound scientific knowledge. The report contains a very useful overview of existing management measures, especially in the Mediterranean (though further additions to the text could be made to incorporate more recent adoptions of management measures in other regions), and presents many recommendations going forward. Members agreed that an improved understanding of taxonomy and life history for many species would be beneficial, especially considering the existing identification issues, while noting that some suggestions made may take time to establish, and in the interim precautionary approaches may need to be considered in management measures where data required to make a thorough assessment are lacking.
6. While there was support for a majority of the recommendations on actions needed to enhance the conservation and sustainable harvest and use of all precious corals in international trade in the FAO report "Global Report on the Biology, Fishery and Trade of Precious Corals", a number of suggestions and concerns were raised by working group members, including the following:
  - a) With respect to Recommendation 2 and 3 in the summary, the need for more fishery-dependent data and improving the availability of harvest data for stock assessments in general was highlighted by some members. As new data are received, it is considered essential to develop adaptive fisheries management approaches that can incorporate and respond to these new data accordingly.
  - b) Regarding the recommendations for fishing methods in the Recommendation 2 (and Suggestion 6.2.2.2), one member from Asia noted that coral net fishery in the country is significantly different from ordinary bottom trawl fisheries. It does not use power for fishing operation but instead uses the natural tidal flow to pull nets during the fishing operation.
  - c) With respect to Recommendation 3 (and Suggestion 6.3.2.2.1 for Pacific Corallidae), improvement of science-based management planning is needed in many harvesting countries. International cooperation is essential for the conservation and management of precious corals that extend beyond the boundaries of each nation's territorial waters or Exclusive Economic Zone.
  - d) The regional fishery management organization (RFMO) was recognized to be a useful tool in facilitating such a international cooperation. However, even so, some members of the working group were not convinced that the establishment of a regional fishery management organization is needed in the Pacific in order to properly manage and eliminate illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing of precious coral resources.
  - e) As measures taken by the existing RFMOs, it was informed that deep-sea coral including precious corals have been subject to the conservation measures as Vulnerable Marine Ecosystem (VME) under the North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC) within high seas of its Convention area and that the 6th Annual Session of NPFC held in February 2021 adopted the additional measures to protect the two areas identified as potential VME sites in the northwestern part of Koko Seamount and the northern ridge of Colahan seamount.
  - f) It was also informed that the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (SPRFMO) also include precious corals in the conservation measures as VME taxa. Antipatharia and Corallidae (under gorgonian octocorals previously known as Order Gorgonacea now in Order Alcyonacea) are listed as VME taxa. This ensures catches of this coral at-sea are reported on, (weight, species ID), and move on rules apply to fishing activity when the coral is taken by bottom trawl or bottom longline to help protect these groups.
  - g) Regarding the recommendations for sustainable management, a working group member concerned that these contain many useful elements, but can read like an endorsement of existing measures already undertaken rather than an assessment of best practice. The absence of references to Resolution Conf. 16.6 (Rev. CoP17) on *Non-detriment findings* was also noted.
  - h) With respect to Recommendation 4 (and Suggestion 6.4.1), the consideration of traceability systems from harvest through to manufacture and sale has been recommended, which, though potentially

complex and costly to implement, could result in reduction of illegal trade. Some members felt that this area could be expanded on in the report including voluntary traceability measures in place already.

- i) With respect to Recommendation 5, a working group member did not agree that work should focus on the likely effectiveness of the conservation of precious corals if they are placed under the provisions of multilateral environmental agreements. It was felt that future work in this area would not be productive. Rather, the focus of future work should be on the improved implementation of CITES listings and determine how to best address any challenges that are identified.
  - j) Concerns were noted by some members of the working group that the discussion in the report of the effectiveness of the CITES listing of black corals does not provide an objective assessment and that some of the references cited were not relevant or out of date.
  - k) Regarding the role of existing CITES listings of precious corals, some members felt that CITES measures can have clear benefits even where other management measures may be lacking. For example, the requirement for NDFs to be made for black coral, due to its CITES Appendix II listing, should not be ignored. It was also noted that the report cited regarding the Hawaiian fishery and the impact of CITES listing of black corals is now rather dated (Grigg, 2010a), as is the report cited regarding the CITES listing of Coralliidae on Appendix III (Grigg, 2010b). One member of the working group stated that current views on benefits/limitations of existing CITES listings from range States will therefore be very useful in aiding ongoing discussions on this topic.
  - l) One member of the working group expressed concerns about further price increases associated with increased demand due to a perception of rarity caused by a CITES listing, as described in the FAO report. The member cited several incidences when a large number of foreign vessels came to poach precious corals at the same time that coral prices increased due to increased demand. Though poaching has decreased thanks to strengthened surveillance activity, the member expressed concern that soaring prices be caused by a CITES listing could trigger poaching once again.
  - m) A number of members of the working group highlighted examples of recent initiatives undertaken on corals that should be taken into account in any updates or future reports by FAO.
7. In the process of reviewing the FAO report, the working group confirmed that the preliminary recommendations of the AC outlined in document AC30 Com. 4 (Rev.), which were based on a draft version of the FAO study, remain valid, particularly those in sections B to D. The recommendations in section A are no longer valid as they reference a process that has already finished. During the discussions, the working group also recognized the need to update some of the recommendations taking into consideration the final recommendations from the FAO study and information provided by the members of the working group. The proposed changes are presented in tracked change in Annex 1 to this addendum, and a clean version is presented in Annex 2.
8. When considering the possibility of additional CITES listings of precious corals in the family Coralliidae, the working group agreed that it was up to Parties to decide whether to propose amendments to the Appendices in the form of a listing proposal.

#### Revised recommendations

9. The Animals Committee is invited to:
- a) note the information provided in document AC31 Doc. 23 and its addendum;
  - b) consider adopting the recommendations in Annex 2 of this addendum;
  - c) encourage the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations to consider the information presented in paragraph 6 in the production of any future reports; and
  - d) confirm that Decision 17.192 (Rev. CoP18) on precious corals has been fully implemented.

**Recommendations from document AC30 Com. 4 (Rev.) (Rev. By Sec.)  
as amended by the working group on *Precious corals***

Suggested textual changes are presented with proposed deletions indicated with ~~strikethrough~~ and proposed new language indicated in underline.

**~~A. On future drafts of the FAO report~~**

~~The in-session working group recognizes that the draft FAO report is very wide-ranging, that it was received by the working group in its present form not long before the Animals Committee meeting, that before it can be finalised it still requires input from Parties and other stakeholders and that it will be peer-reviewed. The working group acknowledges that the FAO will welcome suggestions from the Animals Committee for peer-reviewers of the report.~~

~~The working group recommends that:~~

~~1. The Animals Committee invites the Secretariat:~~

~~a) to work with FAO to finalize the report by CoP18;~~

~~b) in doing so, and in order to make the report as useful as possible and to ensure input from the Parties and from a peer-review process from a broad range of experts, to liaise with the members of the intersessional working group on corals including on the review of future drafts;~~

~~2. The Animals Committee encourages TRAFFIC to make its relevant information on Pacific precious corals available as soon as possible for inclusion in the FAO report.~~

**BA. On conservation and sustainable use**

The ~~working group~~ Animals Committee recognizes the importance of science-based management for conservation and sustainable use.

For the CITES-listed black corals, the ~~working group~~ Animals Committee recognizes the need for better information on their conservation and sustainable use, and the need for strengthening data-collection and reporting from most areas.

For ~~Corallium~~ species in Family Corallidae, the ~~working group~~ Animals Committee acknowledges that there have been advances and developments in fishery management and conservation arrangements in some regions, such as Japan's ~~new~~ regulation in the Pacific, the ~~new~~ adaptive management plan by the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) for red corals (*Corallium rubrum*) in the Mediterranean Sea, the conservation measures by the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (SPRFM) and the North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC), and others.

~~The working group recommends that:~~

~~4~~1. The Animals Committee:

~~a) to continue to look at issues of conservation and sustainable use of precious corals, and to continue to keep track of new institutional changes in order to understand their effectiveness;~~

~~b~~a) encourages Parties to continue to strengthen their domestic management and conservation measures concerning all precious corals; and

~~e~~b) reminds Parties which export CITES Appendix II listed black coral species, to make non-detriment findings (NDFs) and encourage these Parties to provide copies of the NDFs to the Secretariat for publication on the CITES website.

## **CB. On international trade**

The ~~working group~~ Animals Committee recognizes the challenges in acquiring data on international trade in precious corals from many countries.

~~The working group recommends that:~~

~~52.~~ The Animals Committee:

- a) notes the challenges of analysing trade in coral products since the current Harmonized System (HS) classification amalgamates them with other species due to the lack of specific custom codes;
- b) further notes the cumbersome process of adopting specific custom codes on an international level;
- c) in this light, ~~recommends~~ to the Standing Committee to ~~take into account~~ consider the challenges posed by the lack of specific customs codes for international trade in precious corals and their parts and derivatives when ~~considering~~ reviewing the ~~finalized~~ FAO report and making its recommendations, as appropriate.
- d) ~~recommends~~ to the Secretariat to follow-up on cases of illegal trade for CITES-listed black corals referred to in the FAO report and provide an update on their findings to the Animals Committee and Standing Committee as appropriate.

## **DC. On a way forward**

~~63.~~ The ~~working group~~ recommends that the Animals Committee notes [Decision 17.181](#) on the new treaty on marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) which may have relevance to CITES listed corals and CITES Introduction from the Sea certificates.

~~74.~~ The ~~working group~~ recommends that the Animals Committee notes that there are many potential impacts on many coral populations in the wild (including climate change, ocean acidification, and others) which may affect precious coral too, which should be taken into account to understand the coral diversity ~~of marine waters~~ within the marine environment.

~~8.~~ ~~Notwithstanding the possible future implementation of Decision 17.192, the working group encourages the~~ Animals Committee to keep the issue of precious corals under review, in order to determine what new data are available with a view to updating the study before the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP19, 2022).

**Clean version of the revised recommendations from document [AC30 Com. 4 \(Rev.\) \(Rev. By Sec.\)](#)  
as amended by the working group on *Precious corals* for consideration  
by the Standing Committee at its 74th meeting**

**A. On conservation and sustainable use**

The Animals Committee recognizes the importance of science-based management for conservation and sustainable use.

For the CITES-listed black corals, the Animals Committee recognizes the need for better information on their conservation and sustainable use, and the need for strengthening data-collection and reporting from most areas.

For species in Family Corallidae, the Animals Committee acknowledges that there have been advances and developments in fishery management and conservation arrangements in some regions, such as Japan's regulation in the Pacific, the adaptive management plan by the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) for red corals (*Corallium rubrum*) in the Mediterranean Sea, the conservation measures by the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (SPRFM) and the North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC), and others.

1. The Animals Committee:
  - a) encourages Parties to continue to strengthen their domestic management and conservation measures concerning all precious corals; and
  - b) reminds Parties which export CITES-listed black coral species to make non-detriment findings (NDFs) and encourages these Parties to provide copies of the NDFs to the Secretariat for publication on the CITES website.

**B. On international trade**

The Animals Committee recognizes the challenges in acquiring data on international trade in precious corals from many countries.

2. The Animals Committee:
  - a) notes the challenges of analysing trade in coral products since the current Harmonized System (HS) classification amalgamates them with other species due to the lack of specific custom codes;
  - b) further notes the cumbersome process of adopting specific custom codes on an international level;
  - c) in this light, recommends to the Standing Committee to consider the challenges posed by the lack of specific customs codes for international trade in precious corals and their parts and derivatives, when reviewing the report by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and making its recommendations, as appropriate.
  - d) recommends to the Secretariat to follow-up on cases of illegal trade for CITES-listed species black corals referred to in the FAO report and provide an update on their findings to the Animals Committee and Standing Committee as appropriate.

**C. On a way forward**

3. The Animals Committee notes [Decision 17.181](#) on the new treaty on marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) which may have relevance to CITES-listed corals and CITES Introduction from the Sea certificates.

4. The Animals Committee notes that there are many potential impacts on many coral populations in the wild (including climate change, ocean acidification, and others) which may affect precious coral too, which should be taken into account to understand the coral diversity within the marine environment.