

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

Thirty-first meeting of the Animals Committee  
Geneva (Switzerland), 13-17 July 2020

Species specific matters

MARINE TURTLES (CHELONIIDAE SPP. AND DERMOCHELYIDAE SPP.)

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.
2. At its 18th meeting (CoP18, Geneva, 2019), the Conference of the Parties adopted Decisions 18.210 to 18.217 on *Marine turtles (Cheloniidae spp. and Dermochelyidae spp.)*, which are presented in Annex 1 to this document.

Implementation of Decision 18.210, paragraphs a), b) and f)

3. In accordance with paragraph a) of Decision 18.210, the Secretariat issued [Notification to the Parties No. 2020/035](#) on 23 April 2020 to convey to Parties the findings of the study [Status, scope and trends of the legal and illegal international trade in marine turtles, its conservation impacts, management options and mitigation priorities](#).
4. In accordance with paragraph b) of Decision 18.210, the Secretariat hereby refers the same study to the Animals Committee at its 31st meeting for its consideration. The study has several Annexes, containing a set of sub-studies for [Madagascar \(Annex 1\)](#), [Mozambique \(Annex 2\)](#), [Colombia, Panama and Nicaragua \(Annex 3\)](#) and [Indonesia, Malaysia and Viet Nam \(Annex 4\)](#). The full study, in English only, can be found in information document [CoP18 Inf. 18](#). The following sections from the study are available in the three working languages of the Convention: i) Executive summary; ii) Discussion and overarching conclusions; and iii) Recommendations. Their compilation is presented in Annex 3 to this document.
5. Pursuant to paragraph f) of Decision 18.210, in the same Notification referred to in paragraph 3 above, the Secretariat requested that Parties also submit information on the status of implementation of Decisions 18.210 to 18.214, including any planned implementation activities.

Implementation of Decision 18.210, paragraphs c) and d)

6. To date, the Secretariat has received no requests from Parties for assistance with the CITES-relevant aspects of the development, implementation and/or update of management and action plans for the conservation of marine turtles; or for assistance with the identification of inconsistencies, overlaps and gaps in national legislation and regulations relating to the implementation of CITES for marine turtles [as per paragraphs c) and d) of Decision 18.210 respectively].

Implementation of Decision 18.210, paragraphs e) and g)

7. In accordance with paragraph g) of Decision 18.210, the Secretariat will report on the information received in response to Notification to the Parties No. 2020/035 to the 73rd meeting of the Standing Committee.
8. To facilitate the implementation of Decision 18.210, paragraphs e) and g), and to complement the global study mentioned in paragraph 3 above, the Secretariat is currently organizing a follow-up study with the

two-fold purpose of (i) investigating the scale, importance and impact of marine turtle bycatch and trade; and (ii) identifying opportunities for practical and effective collaboration between CITES, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and Regional Fishery Bodies to address marine turtle bycatch and illegal trade, and jointly assess technical or other mechanisms and opportunities that can assist Parties in marine turtle conservation. This work will be undertaken thanks to a contribution from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) of the United States of America.

#### Implementation of Decision 18.211, paragraph e), and Decision 18.215

9. To facilitate the implementation of Decision 18.215, directed to the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICCWC), the Secretariat shared with its ICCWC partners data on illegal trade in marine turtles, as reported in the Parties' annual illegal trade reports, pursuant to Decision 18.211, paragraph e). The dataset shared includes data from all available annual illegal trade reports received until July 2019. It contains entries for 391 seizures of Cheloniidae spp. made in 2016 and 2017. No seizures were recorded for leatherback turtles (Dermochelyidae spp.). The Secretariat also brought the global study mentioned in paragraph 3 above to the attention of the ICCWC partners.

#### Implementation of Decision 18.216

10. Concerning Decision 18.216, the Animals Committee is asked to review, at its 31st meeting, the study contained in information document CoP18 Inf. 18 and any additional information received in response to the Notification issued under paragraph f) of Decision 18.210. Paragraph f), however, indicates that the information provided by Parties should be considered by the Standing Committee at its 73rd meeting. As the new Decisions came into force on 26 November 2019, this left little time for Parties to be in a position to report on their implementation of the numerous elements called for in Decisions 18.210 to 18.214 in time for this meeting of the Animals Committee. It is worth noting that much of the information that Parties are requested to report on relates either to implementation of the Convention or enforcement matters. It is thus not yet known if the responses to Notification to the Parties No. 2020/035 will contain any additional information of a scientific nature for the Animals Committee to review. The Secretariat proposes that should the responses to the Notification contain any information of a scientific nature, that this would be made available for review by the Animals Committee at its 32nd meeting.
11. In its workplan for 2019 - 2022, the Animals Committee has identified Mr. Hugh Robertson (representative for Oceania) and Mr. Arvin Diesmos (alternate representative for Asia), as co-leads for the review of the study on marine turtles. A preliminary review and draft recommendations prepared by Mr. Robertson are presented in Annex 2 to this document.

#### Recommendation:

12. The Animals Committee is invited to:
  - a) take note of the information in this document; and
  - b) consider adopting the draft recommendations for consideration by the Standing Committee, presented in Annex 2 to this document.

Decisions adopted by the 18th meeting of the Conference of the Parties  
on Marine turtles (*Cheloniidae spp. and Dermochelyidae spp.*)

**18.210 Directed to the Secretariat**

The Secretariat shall, subject to available resources:

- a) convey to Parties the findings of the study presented in information document CoP18 Inf. 18 on the legal and illegal international trade in marine turtles with a view to inform targeted conservation and management efforts;
- b) refer the study contained in information document CoP18 Inf. 18 to the Standing Committee at its 73rd meeting and the Animals Committee at its 31st meeting for consideration;
- c) support Parties, upon request, with the CITES-relevant aspects of the development, implementation and/or update of management and action plans for the conservation of marine turtles;
- d) assist Parties, upon request, with the identification of inconsistencies, overlaps and gaps in national legislation and regulations relating to the implementation of CITES for marine turtles; and
- e) convey to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) the findings of the study presented in information document CoP18 Inf. 18 to inform efforts, including by Regional Fisheries Bodies, addressing marine turtle bycatch and illegal take, and promote collaboration, as appropriate.
- f) issue a Notification requesting that Parties provide information on implementation of Decisions 18.210 to 18.214 for consideration by the Standing Committee at its 73rd meeting; and
- g) report on the implementation of Decisions 18.210 to 18.215, and on any technical and financial mechanisms and opportunities that can be provided through CITES to assist Parties in marine turtle conservation, to the 31st meeting of the Animals Committee and the 73rd meeting of the Standing Committees as appropriate, and to the Conference of the Parties at its 19th meeting.

**18.211 Directed to Parties**

Parties are urged to:

- a) review the findings of the study presented in information document CoP18 Inf. 18 and use these to inform targeted conservation and management efforts;
- b) fully implement the provisions of CITES that are relevant to the seven species of marine turtles listed on Appendix I;
- c) develop and/or update management and action plans for the conservation of marine turtles inclusive of the recommendations in information document CoP18 Inf. 18;
- d) use CITES fora, including the Animals Committee and Standing Committee, to raise and discuss challenges relating to illegal trade in marine turtles;
- e) collect in a standardized manner, including at different governance levels, illegal wildlife trade data, that can be used for monitoring trade in CITES-listed marine turtles; and submit comprehensive and accurate information on illegal trade in marine turtles in their annual illegal trade reports to the Secretariat;

- f) improve monitoring, detection and law enforcement activities related to marine turtles in coastal areas and at transaction points (e.g. in the marketplace, online, maritime areas, and at air- and seaports);
- g) collect samples of marine turtles for DNA analysis, including from seized specimens, to determine species involved and populations of origin and provide these to forensic and other research institutions capable of reliably determining the origin or age of the samples in support of, for example, research, investigations and prosecutions;
- h) improve intra- and interregional cooperation, collaboration and exchange of actionable intelligence regarding illegal take of and trade in marine turtles;
- i) ascertain key trade routes, methods, volumes, and trade 'hot-spots' using available technologies, and enforce national and international regulations or other mechanisms that apply to marine turtles take and trade;
- j) improve accountability for the practices undertaken by all vessels and improve the monitoring and control related to CITES-listed marine turtles at landing sites;
- k) support fisheries management authorities in implementing turtle mitigation and safe handling practices;
- l) coordinate efforts at the regional level, involving Parties and bodies with relevant mandates, to identify and address trade, use and other threats, such as fisheries' interactions with marine turtles (particularly bycatch), with a view to supporting multilateral environmental agreements; and
- m) respond to the Notification issued by the Secretariat per Decision 18.210, paragraph f) on the implementation of Decisions 18.210 to 18.214.

**18.212 Directed to Parties that are marine turtle range States**

Parties that are marine turtle range States are urged to:

- a) develop, and where such legislation already exists, conduct a thorough review of legislation that protects marine turtles, taking account of its effectiveness in enforcement and management including direct and incidental harvest, and standardization or alignment with other national and sub-national legislation, neighbouring states, as well as international regulations and commitments;
- b) where domestic harvest of specimens of marine turtles, including eggs, is legal, ensure any domestic harvest quotas are established based on robust science-based methods and the principles of sustainability, including accounting for existing quota or no-take quotas in other States' that share marine turtle stock(s), taking into account national enforcement capacity;
- c) respond to the Notification issued by the Secretariat pursuant to Decision 18.210 paragraph f) on the implementation of Decisions 18.210 to 18.215.

**18.213 Directed to Parties, governmental, intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations and other entities**

Parties, governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and other entities are invited to provide financial or technical assistance for, inter alia:

- a) training and capacity building of relevant authorities at the national and regional level, including on the implementation and enforcement of national and international regulations that apply to marine turtles, and on identification, monitoring, reporting and wildlife enforcement capability;
- b) build community and political awareness on the conservation status of marine turtles and on the importance of promoting the conservation of the species through compliance with CITES at the national level;

- c) research into the socioeconomics associated with the legal and illegal harvest and use of specimens of marine turtles, including eggs, including assessments of the sustainability of alternative livelihood options for communities depending on marine turtles and the motivations for their use;
- d) research that establishes a baseline for the status and distribution of marine turtles in the different countries/regions; and
- e) research into the scale and impact that national (and its international) artisanal, semi-industrial and industrial fisheries, including illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, have on marine turtle populations and their linkage to illegal trade.

**18.214 Directed to the Secretariat, Parties and other organizations**

Parties, the Secretariat and relevant multilateral agreements such as the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), its Indian Ocean and South-East Asia Marine Turtle Memorandum of Understanding (IOSEA), the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC), and the Ramsar Convention and the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) are encouraged to communicate and collaborate with each other on the management and sustainable use of marine turtles to ensure the compatibility of activities, optimize resources, promote research, and enhance synergies concerning the conservation of marine turtles.

**18.215 Directed to the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICCWC)**

The International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICCWC) is encouraged to, as appropriate, use data on illegal trade in marine turtles submitted under Decision 18.211, paragraph e) to the Secretariat in Parties' annual illegal trade reports in its activities.

**18.216 Directed to the Animals Committee**

The Animals Committee is asked to:

- a) review, at its 31st meeting, the study contained in information document CoP18 Inf. 18 and any additional information received by the Secretariat in response to the Notification issued under Decision 18.210, paragraph f); and
- b) submit recommendations, as appropriate, for consideration by the Standing Committee.

**18.217 Directed to the Standing Committee**

The Standing Committee is asked to:

- a) review, at its 73rd meeting, the study contained in information document CoP18 Inf. 18 and any additional information received by the Secretariat in response to the Notification issued under Decision 18.210, paragraph f), and the recommendations of the Animals Committee; and
- b) submit its recommendations to the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties, as appropriate.

Marine turtles (Cheloniidae and Dermochelyidae)

1. This document has been prepared by Mr Hugh Robertson (Representative for Oceania), as one of the co-leads for the Animals Committee on *marine turtles*, in response to a request from the Chair of the Animals Committee for a preliminary review of the study referred to in Decision 18.216 and the preparation of draft recommendations for consideration at the 31st meeting of the Animals Committee.
2. At its 18th meeting (CoP18, Geneva, 2018) the Conference of the Parties adopted decisions on marine turtles (*Cheloniidae and Dermochelyidae*), which are presented in Annex 1 of this document.

Background to Decision 18.216

3. The Secretariat explained in CoP18 Doc 70 that financial support for undertaking a study of the *status, scope and trends of the legal and illegal international trade in marine turtles, its conservation impacts, management options and mitigation priorities* called for in Decision 17.222, paragraph a), had been secured from Australia (through the CMS Secretariat), the European Union [through the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States Secretariat (ACP)], and the United States of America
4. The study on the legal and illegal international trade in marine turtles was done by the Marine Research Foundation (MRF), the Wildlife Trade Monitoring Network (TRAFFIC) and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). It had been done in close collaboration with *inter alia* the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC), and the Secretariat of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), in particular its Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Marine Turtles and their Habitats of the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia (IOSEA Marine Turtles MoU).
5. The study, entitled *Status, scope and trends of the legal and illegal international trade in marine turtles, its conservation impacts, management options and mitigation priorities*, was presented in information document CoP18 Inf. 18. The report focuses on *in situ* assessments in eight countries from three geographical sub-regions (the East African, Inter-American, and Southeast Asian/Coral Triangle). The eight countries (Madagascar, Mozambique, Colombia, Nicaragua, Panama, Indonesia, Malaysia and Viet Nam) were selected because they had emerged as potentially significant locations involved in illegal trade in marine turtles, following a review of recent literature and consultations with experts [including the International Union for Conservation of Nature Species Survival Commission Marine Turtle Specialist Group (IUCN/SSC MTSG)].
6. At SC69, the Standing Committee established an intersessional working group (United States of America (Chair), Australia, China, Indonesia, and Japan; and the Food and Agricultural Organization, Humane Society International, International Union for Conservation of Nature, TRAFFIC, and the World Wide Fund for Nature) on marine turtles to *review the information and recommendations contained in the study and formulate its own recommendations for consideration by the Standing Committee at its 70th meeting for its reporting to the Conference of the Parties, at its 18th meeting*.
7. At SC70, the Secretariat explained in document SC70 Doc. 50 that the study had been delayed and the working group was not able to submit a document with its own recommendations for consideration by the Standing Committee at SC70, as per its mandate. The Standing Committee agreed to propose to the Conference of the Parties, at its 18th meeting (CoP18), the extension of Decisions 17.222 and 17.223.
8. Given the scientific and technical nature of parts of the study, and based on discussions at SC70, the Secretariat was of the view that Decision 17.223 could be amended to include the Animals Committee in the review process, as agreed in Decision 18.216.
9. Noting that CoP18 adopted Decision 18.216, and also adopted a set of decisions (especially 18.211-18.213), based on a cursory rather than detailed review of the study, the Animals Committee can focus on identifying actionable findings and developing recommendations from the study that are not yet reflected in the decisions adopted at CoP18, and which may help Parties and the Standing Committee to fulfil their tasks under these marine turtle decisions.

## Implementation of Decision 18:216

10. In accordance with paragraph a) of Decision 18.210, on 22 April 2020, the Secretariat issued Notification 2020/035 which included a copy of the full report on the legal and illegal international trade in marine turtles (as originally presented in English only in information document CoP18 Inf. 18) along with translations of key sections from the study (executive summary, discussion and overarching conclusions, and recommendations). The notification also requested Parties to submit information on the status of implementation of Decisions 18.211 to 18.214, including any planned implementation activities.
11. Paragraph f) of Decision 18:210 directs the Secretariat to “*issue a Notification requesting that Parties provide information on implementation of Decisions 18.210 to 18.214 for consideration by the Standing Committee at its 73rd meeting*”, yet Decision 18:216 directs the Animals Committee to *review, at its 31st meeting, the study contained in information document CoP18 Inf. 18 and any additional information received by the Secretariat in response to the Notification issued under Decision 18.210, paragraph f)*;
12. Because responses to Notification 2020/035 are not due until 30 June 2020, and depending on the number and detail of the responses, it may not be practical for the Animals Committee to consider the responses to the notification in any detail at AC31, except through a report presented by the Secretariat at the meeting.
13. All seven species of marine turtle – loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*), green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), leatherback turtle (*Dermochela coriacea*), Kemp’s ridley turtle (*Lepidochelys kempii*), olive ridley turtle (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) and the flatbacked turtle (*Natator depressus*) are included in Appendix I of CITES. As such, the international trade for commercial purposes is strictly prohibited for these species.
14. From in-country investigations and interviews, and from seizure data, the marine turtle study found evidence of illegal harvest and trade of marine turtles in all eight countries from the three widely separated geographical regions. However, these particular countries had been selected on the basis of recent evidence that they were significantly implicated in illegal trade markets, and so it is not clear how widespread the exploitation of marine turtles is globally.
15. Some additional information was provided on the illegal take and trade of marine turtles in two other regions, the Mediterranean and West Africa, which painted a similar picture to that from the selected countries.
16. In all cases, national laws and regulations offered full or partial protection of live animals and their eggs. Partial protection was due to some regions or specific sites having a legal marine turtle fishery for adults or eggs.
17. The main marine turtle species exploited were hawksbill turtles (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) mainly for their carapaces, and green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) mainly for their meat. Eggs of a wider range of species were harvested, and other products such as penises and taxidermied animals were noted in some countries.
18. Marine turtles are taken in both targeted and non-targeted fisheries, with bycatch from semi-industrial and industrial fisheries being reduced by the use of turtle excluder devices. Most of the take of marine turtles is from artisanal fisheries and most animals are consumed locally or traded within countries. Domestic use and trade within these eight countries was much greater than international trade, which was mainly limited to trade to neighbouring countries or within a subregion. In the Southeast Asian/ Coral Triangle subregion, there were indications of more organised illegal international trade, such as increased use of online marketing, and seizures of large numbers of marine turtles on foreign fishing vessels.
19. The number of confiscated or seized specimens, mainly for “personal use”, recorded globally in the CITES trade database from 2000 to 2017 showed a decline in the number of illegal transactions between 2008 and 2013 followed by a plateau, but the report was not able to determine whether this decline was genuine or reflected poor enforcement and uneven reporting efforts by CITES Parties.
20. Decisions 18:211 – 18.215 on marine turtles that were adopted at CoP18 are comprehensive and cover a wide range of scientific, reporting, legal and enforcement measures stemming directly from “CITES-focused recommendations” and “overarching recommendations” contained in the study report on marine turtles.
21. Particular paragraphs of these decisions which have a strong scientific component are:
  - 18:211 g) *collect samples of marine turtles for DNA analysis, including from seized specimens, to determine species involved and populations of origin and provide these to forensic and*

*other research institutions capable of reliably determining the origin or age of the samples in support of, for example, research, investigations and prosecutions;*

- 18:213 a) *research into the socioeconomics associated with the legal and illegal harvest and use of specimens of marine turtles, including eggs, including assessments of the sustainability of alternative livelihood options for communities depending on marine turtles and the motivations for their use;*
- 18:213 b) *research that establishes a baseline for the status and distribution of marine turtles in the different countries/regions; and*
- 18.213 c) *research into the scale and impact that national (and its international) artisanal, semi-industrial and industrial fisheries, including illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, have on marine turtle populations and their linkage to illegal trade.*

22. Particular recommendations of a biological or socio-economic science nature in the study report that are relevant to international trade and which were not captured in the marine turtle decisions agreed at CoP18 were:

- 5. *Where harvest quotas for marine turtle specimens are necessary, develop robust and standardized frameworks for determining national harvest quotas. These should be science based, integrate a determination of suitable offtake levels, account for existing quotas in other States sharing the marine turtle(s) stocks, and account for national enforcement capacity.*
- 8. *Work with States and their fisher communities to ensure that there is effective documentation at the national level of marine turtle fisheries bycatch and mortality that can inform posterior conservation and management measures.*
- 13. *Develop science-based operational protocols for marine turtle captivity and hatchery establishments to follow as a way to ensure that their operations provide conservation value to marine turtle populations.*
- 24. *Undertake future comparative research in the locations and communities covered in the present assessment to understand how trade has evolved.*
- 27. *Develop holistic regional marine turtle survival probability models to assess sustainability of current harvest levels. These should take into account threats from multiple countries (number of turtles of different age classes taken from populations), limitations of source rookeries (number of turtles recruited per year), natural survival probabilities, and marine turtle biology. Where possible, these models should build on existing models, such as those developed by the IUCN Marine Turtle Specialist Group.*
- 28. *Undertake biological and socio-economic research that can support the development of (additional) (spatial) protection measures for marine turtle foraging, nesting and migratory areas.*

#### Assessment and recommendations

- 23. Although Decision 18:216 b) does not specify when the Animals Committee needs to submit recommendations for consideration by the Standing Committee, Decision 18:217 a) requires the Standing Committee to review the recommendations from the Animals Committee at its 73rd meeting, which falls between AC31 and AC32.
- 24. We recommend that the Animals Committee should in the interim report to the 73rd meeting of the Standing Committee that the study, commissioned with financial support from Australia, the European Union and the United States of America, was very valuable in identifying key issues where CITES and others can help with the conservation of marine turtles. The report provided a useful analysis of the legal and illegal take and trade in marine turtles in eight countries, from three geographical regions, that were selected because of recent information implicating them in illegal exploitation and trade of marine turtles. It is, however, not clear how many other countries have similar issues, or face some completely different issues.



25. The responses of Parties to Notification 2020/035 may provide useful information on their implementation of Decisions 18.211 to 18.214, and thus shed light on issues they face that are relevant to consideration by the Animals Committee.
26. Because Party response to Notification 2020/035 are not likely to be available before AC31, we recommend that it may be necessary to establish an intersessional working group to consider the responses received and report back on their analysis and findings at AC32 with the view to make recommendations to the Standing Committee at their 74th meeting, in time for the Standing Committee to submit its recommendations to the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.
27. Decisions 18:211 to 18:214 are very comprehensive, and cover all of the “CITES-focussed recommendations” and most of the “overarching recommendations” from the study report. There are only a few of the “overarching recommendations” of a biological or socio-economic science nature in the study report that are relevant to international trade that were not clearly captured in the marine turtle decisions agreed at CoP18 (see paragraph 22).
28. A weakness of the study report, however, was the limited analysis of global trends in illegal international trade because it was suspected that the existing data are a reflection of reporting effort by certain Parties rather than the real picture. Further analysis would be especially valuable when standardized reporting by Parties of confiscated and seized specimens becomes more widespread and routine through annual illegal trade reports.
29. We recommend that if an intersessional working group is established at AC31, then their mandate should be to report to AC32 with recommendations, as appropriate, to the 74th meeting of the Standing Committee. This report should address the outstanding items noted in paragraph 22 and any additional ones raised at AC31, together with issues raised by Parties in response to Notification to the Parties No. 2020/035 that are relevant to the Animals Committee.