

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 ORNAMENTAL FISHES

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.
2. At its 18th meeting (CoP18, Geneva, 2019), the Conference of the Parties adopted Decisions 18.296 to 18.298 on *Marine ornamental fishes* as follows:

**18.296 Directed to the Secretariat**

*The Secretariat shall, subject to external funding:*

- a) *convene a technical workshop to consider the conservation priorities and management needs related to the trade in non-CITES listed marine ornamental fishes worldwide with a particular focus on data from importing and exporting countries;*
- b) *invite the Animals Committee, representatives from range States, exporting, and importing countries, fishery stakeholder, industry representatives and relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to participate in this workshop;*
- c) *contract appropriate technical experts to prepare workshop documents on marine ornamental fishes' biology; conservation status; trade and management; applicable trade regulations; and enforcement, and invite workshop participants to [submit the] contribute relevant information and expertise to the workshop; and*
- d) *submit findings and recommendations of this workshop to the Animals Committee.*

**18.297 Directed to the Animals Committee**

*The Animals Committee shall consider the results of this workshop and make recommendations to the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.*

**18.298 Directed to Parties, organizations and donors**

*Parties, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, private businesses, and other donors are encouraged to provide funding to the Secretariat for implementing Decision 18.296.*

Implementation of Decision 18.296

3. Concerning the implementation of Decision 18.296, and following consultations with the Chair of the Animals Committee, the Secretariat concluded that the work should focus on international trade in live specimens of non-CITES listed coral reef fishes (fish which live amongst or in close relation to coral reefs that are found

in the tropical and subtropical Western Atlantic and Indo-Pacific oceans, typically occurring between 30°N and 30°S latitudes), and on those species (including sharks and rays) that are caught and traded for display in public or private aquariums.

4. Document [CoP18 Doc. 94](#) on *Conservation management of and trade in marine ornamental fishes* stated that the number of coral reef fish species in trade was estimated to have increased from around 1,000 species in 2001 (Wood, 2001) to 1,471 in 2004/05 (Rhyne et al., 2012), and 2,300 species at present (Rhyne et al., 2017).
5. Paragraph c) of Decisions 18.296 specifies five topics for which workshop documents need to be prepared: biology; conservation status; trade and management; applicable trade regulations; and enforcement. The Secretariat proposes to cluster these thematic studies as follows:

Thematic study 1: International trade in non-CITES listed live coral reef fishes

Thematic study 2: Biology and conservation status of the main non-CITES listed coral reef fishes traded internationally as live specimens

Thematic study 3: Fisheries management of non-CITES listed live coral reef fishes in international trade

Thematic study 4: Regulations for international trade in non-CITES listed live coral reef fishes and their enforcement

6. As indicated in [Notification to the Parties No. 2020/032](#), it is estimated that the implementation of Decision 18.296 would cost a total of USD 400,000 (USD 200,000 for the workshop, and USD 200,000 for the workshop documents and workshop report). Thanks to contributions from Switzerland and the European Union, the Secretariat initiated the implementation of paragraph c) of Decision 18.296, and is in discussion with technical experts, industry representatives and relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations (IGOs and NGOs), with a view to organize the preparation of the thematic studies indicated above. Noting the interrelated nature of the topics that will be covered in these studies and their need to inform each other, the Secretariat will preferably look for arrangements whereby the production of workshop materials is coordinated by a single implementing entity with separate parallel workstreams.
7. For the development and conduct of the thematic studies and the organization of the workshop, the Secretariat intends to work closely with, and consult, as appropriate, relevant range States, exporting, and importing countries; fishery stakeholders; industry representatives; and relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. The Secretariat also intends to keep the Animals Committee informed about progress in its implementation of Decision 18.296.
8. The Secretariat proposes to start with Thematic study 1, which aims to identify which species of non-CITES listed coral reef fishes are found in international trade, in what abundance, and what trade patterns and trends exist. This study is expected to produce interim outputs outlining a preliminary list of the major non-CITES listed coral reef fish species (and species groupings) traded internationally as live specimens and proposing priority species and countries to focus on for the remaining thematic studies. Additional specific activities envisaged include the following:
  - a) in consultation with technical experts, Parties, fishery stakeholder, industry representatives and relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, compile a list of existing literature and data sources on international trade in live coral reef fishes (public and proprietary), including a short assessment of the nature and quality of the data per data source;
  - b) review the available information and data to:
    - i) compile an overview of the coral reef fish species and taxa in international trade;
    - ii) complete a preliminary assessment of volumes and trends in trade, by coral reef fish species or key species groupings;
    - iii) identify major trade routes, and the main exporting, transit and importing countries of live coral reef fish species (to identify priority countries for more targeted consultation);

- iv) differentiate between wild-caught and captive-bred coral reef fishes in international trade, and examine trends in source countries and proportions of fishes coming from captive breeding; and
  - v) identify issues in the supply chain that impact positively or negatively on the sustainability of the coral reef fish species;
- c) consult industry representatives, government officials, coral reef fish experts, relevant IGOs and NGOs, and other stakeholders to cross-validate the findings of paragraphs a) and b) listed above, and to identify – and where possible fill – data or knowledge gaps; and
  - d) prepare a draft study, with key findings and draft recommendations, for consideration at the technical workshop.
9. Thematic study 2 will focus on the biology and conservation status of the main non-CITES listed coral reef fishes traded internationally as live specimens, as identified in Thematic study 1, and examine how their conservation status relates to, or may be affected by, international trade. The specific activities envisaged include the following:
- a) compile information from existing sources on the biology and conservation status of non-CITES listed coral reef fishes, including a short assessment of the nature and quality of these data sources;
  - b) identify patterns (e.g. taxonomic, spatial) where species of non-CITES listed coral reef fishes that are in international live trade have an unfavorable or unknown conservation status and, to the extent possible, assess the relative importance of the international ornamental coral reef fish trade as a threat to these;
  - c) consult coral reef fish experts and other stakeholders to fill knowledge gaps where possible;
  - d) suggest priority species (or species groupings) for which conservation measures may be warranted based on their potential vulnerability to overfishing for the international ornamental fish trade; and
  - e) prepare a draft study, with key findings and draft recommendations, for consideration at the technical workshop.
10. The Secretariat notes that the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has secured funding from Switzerland to complete Red List assessments for all bony fish species found in the ornamental marine fish trade that are not already assessed in the Red List. The process will be implemented in two phases. Phase 1 includes the compilation of a species list, assessments for 275 priority species (those identified to be most highly traded) in 2020, and the publication of these Red List assessments. Subject to additional funding, Phase 2 concerns undertaking and publishing the assessments of a further, yet to be determined, number of species. This work overlaps with that proposed in paragraph 9 above. The Secretariat is consulting with IUCN to see how the research activities might be as complementary as possible in terms of species coverage, outputs and timeframes.
11. Thematic study 3 will focus on fisheries management of non-CITES listed coral reef fishes traded internationally as live specimens. The specific tasks envisaged include the following:
- a) compile an overview of current and past international, regional and national (or local) management initiatives and frameworks that regulate, monitor or support live coral reef fish fisheries, including general wildlife and fisheries legislation where relevant, and if possible with reference to the priority species and geographic regions identified under Thematic studies 1 and 2;
  - b) review the strengths and weaknesses of the fishery management approaches and frameworks identified, including the sustainability of the fisheries, the conservation status of target species, and their impacts on reef ecosystems and livelihoods;
  - c) consult coral reef fishery experts, industry representatives, government officials, relevant IGOs and NGOs, and other stakeholders to cross-validate the results of Thematic study 3; and
  - d) prepare a draft report, with key findings and draft recommendations, for consideration at the technical workshop.

12. Thematic study 4 will focus on applicable trade regulations for international trade in live coral reef fish, and on their enforcement. The specific tasks envisaged include the following:
- a) for those priority species in international trade identified in Thematic studies 1 and 2, compile an overview of national legal frameworks and tools in place in exporting and importing countries to regulate international trade in live marine ornamental fish, addressing questions such as:
    - i) What regulations or measures are in place to monitor and control international trade in live ornamental fish species in exporting countries (with possible differences for wild and captive bred fishes)?
    - ii) What regulations or measures exist in transit countries?
    - iii) What regulations or measures exist in importing countries?
    - iv) Who is generally responsible for monitoring and controlling these regulations and measures, and how are controls normally conducted?
    - v) What control and compliance mechanisms exist to enforce these regulations or measures?
    - vi) What infractions have been documented?
  - b) consult with relevant customs, sanitary and veterinary inspectors, and trade officials to document the perceived effectiveness of, and compliance with existing regulations on international trade in live marine ornamental fishes; and
  - c) prepare a draft report, with key findings and draft recommendations, for consideration at the technical workshop.
13. Following completion of the four thematic studies and available external resources, a workshop will be held to consider the conservation priorities and management needs related to the trade in non-CITES listed marine ornamental fishes worldwide, based on findings and recommendations proposed in the studies. The Animals Committee, representatives from range States, exporting, and importing countries, fishery stakeholder, industry representatives and relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations will be invited to the workshop, and be asked to contribute relevant information and expertise. The workshop should suggest findings and draft recommendations for consideration by the Animals Committee.
14. The Secretariat has indicated in paragraph 6 above that it has secured partial funding for implementing Decision 18.296 on marine ornamental fishes, specifically to initiate research mentioned in paragraph c). But this is insufficient to fully implement all research activities envisaged under the Decision, or for hosting a workshop. In this regard, donor Parties and stakeholders are invited to contribute the requisite financial support.
15. In light of ongoing meeting and travel restrictions relating to the COVID-19 outbreak, it is not clear if or when the technical workshop envisaged under Decision 18.296, paragraph a), could take place if funding would become available to organize it. Alternatives, such as organizing a full or partial online expert workshop, may need to be envisaged if the Animals Committee is to fully implement Decision 18.297.

#### Recommendation

16. The Animals Committee is invited to:
- a) confirm the scope of the work on marine ornamental fishes envisaged in Decisions 18.296 to 18.298, as outlined in paragraphs 3 and 5 above, i.e. international trade in non-CITES listed live coral reef fishes (including small sharks and rays); and
  - b) provide comments on the activities outlined in paragraphs 8, 9, 11 and 12 of this document concerning the preparation of Thematic studies for the workshop, including suggestions for stakeholders that could be consulted, or useful sources of information.