

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

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).

Although they do not show up on the CITES world map, the Oceania region still has a large number (8) and hence proportion (47%) of states that are not members of CITES: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), 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. Norfolk Island, American Samoa, Pitcairn Island) do come under the CITES umbrella through membership of their parent states.

Communication with Parties in the region since AC 30 (Geneva, July 2018)

3. Following AC30, Dr Robertson sent a report to member Parties in the region outlining the key outcomes affecting Oceania:
 - Of the species examined as part of the **Periodic Review of the Appendices** process, four marsupials and two bristlebirds from Australia were the only candidates from the Oceania region. At the meeting, Australia presented their assessment that all six species should be downlisted to Appendix II because adequate legal protection mechanisms exist, there has been no legal or known illegal trade in them, and there is unlikely to be any trade even in Appendix II. One of the six species is shared with Papua New Guinea. The AC recommended that Australia proceed with downlisting proposals for all 6 species to present at CoP18.

* *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.*

- The recommendation to CoP18 that the standard **nomenclature** used by CITES for corals is a snapshot download of the WoRMS database. This fits with what New Zealand uses, but will require some changes to the coral nomenclature used in Australia and perhaps elsewhere in the region.
 - A draft FAO report on **precious corals** came out too late for the intersessional working group (including New Zealand) to consider fully. A working group at the meeting felt it was better to continue to get comments from a wide range of coral experts rather than do this in a hurry at the AC meeting with limited expertise. The AC therefore advised FAO to continue to receive peer-review comments and asked the CITES Secretariat to submit the final report and formulate draft Decisions for consideration at CoP18. In addition, TRAFFIC (Trade Records Analysis of Flora and Fauna In Commerce) was encouraged to make its information on trade of Pacific precious corals available for inclusion in the FAO report.
 - A working group concentrated on trade issues for European **eels** (*Anguilla anguilla*), which is relevant to the region. At CoP18, range states of non-CITES eel species (particularly *A. rostrata*, *A. japonica*, *A. marmorata*, and *A. bicolor*) are likely to be asked to collaborate in implementing conservation measures to ensure that international trade of all eels is sustainable, to monitor abundance, and improve the reporting and traceability of eels in trade. Of these four species, *A. marmorata* is widely found in the Pacific islands, *A. bicolor* occurs in Australia and Papua New Guinea, and *A. japonica* probably migrates into our region to spawn.
 - The first application of **RST for captive-bred and ranched specimens** had included the species/country combination of giant clam *Tridacna crocea*/ Federated States of Micronesia in the review process. The Federated States of Micronesia had responded to the Secretariat's questions about the trade and AC30 was satisfied by the explanations received, and so FSM has been removed from the review process.
 - The **Sharks and Rays** Working Group examined implementation issues arising from listing several commercially important sharks and rays at CoP16 and CoP17. The Working Group produced 16 recommendations, grouped into five general areas: (1) inviting the Secretariat to revise the existing Resolution on Sharks and Rays; (2) increasing capacity to conduct non-detriment findings including collecting and sharing relevant data; (3) trade issues, especially getting Parties to report trade by weight for each species product (e.g. recording 118 kg of dried fins of scalloped hammerhead) rather than by the number of items; (4) identification issues; and (5) enforcement issues. Probably the most important news is the recent development by Florida International University of a genetic technique to rapidly and accurately identify nine of the 12 CITES-listed sharks at the cost of less than \$US1 per sample, with results available within 4 hours. There are significant equipment set-up costs, but once running, this will be a very valuable tool for border authorities when faced with a range of shark products that are not as readily identified as fresh fins (e.g. processed fins/ meat/ fish meal, etc).
 - The European Union presented their draft proposal to amend the CITES Appendices at CoP18 by adding four species of teatfish (sea cucumbers) of the genus *Holothuria* to Appendix II. The AC encouraged Parties and organisations that have any comments or useful information to send it directly to the proponents before the 24 December 2019 submission deadline.
 - I noted that a new Alternate Representative for Oceania was needed for the AC, and a new Representative for Oceania was needed for the Plants Committee at CoP18.
4. A copy of this report was also sent to nine Oceania countries that were not members of CITES, and to several key IGOs and NGOs working in the region.
 5. CITES officials from Australia and New Zealand, and from New Zealand and the Secretariat for the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) have held approximately bi-monthly phone meetings to address common implementation issues.
 6. On 25–27 March 2019, In the lead-up to the planned CoP18 in Sri Lanka, SPREP hosted a pre-CoP meeting in Apia, Samoa. This was attended by all nine Parties to CITES, Niue as an observer, staff from SPREP and the Secretariat for the Pacific Community (SPC), and Haruko Okusu from the CITES Secretariat. I helped to explain how the CoP was run, and outlined the 57 proposals to amend the CITES Appendices at CoP18, highlighting the 10 proposals that had most direct impact on the Oceania region: guitarfish, wedgefish, mako sharks, teatfish and Australia's six downlisting proposals. I facilitated a workshop to examine the sharks and rays proposals, and parallel workshops examined the teatfish proposal and several controversial proposals that would likely take up a lot of time at CoP18.

7. At CoP18 in Geneva, the Oceania region held daily meetings, supported by Haruko Okusu and Daniel Kachelriess of the CITES Secretariat. Through these meetings, and through one-on-one discussions, and through correspondence, I was able to discuss scientific issues facing the region, especially the preparation of NDFs, which continues to be a major concern for Parties.

Relevant CITES implementation issues in the region

8. 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 a range of environmental threats, including invasive species, global climate change, habitat loss, and domestic over-exploitation. Coral bleaching has had a dramatic effect on the reefs in some parts of the region (e.g. in Australia and Fiji) and there are concerns about the rapid depletion of stocks of marine species such as sharks and rays, and many species of sea cucumber. 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 role in ensuring the sustainable use and protection of species in the marine environment of the region.
9. For many countries in Oceania, a large part of the population is dependent on marine resources for their livelihoods, either through artisanal fisheries or through ecotourism. In some countries, international tourism makes up >50% of the total GDP. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is likely to be felt seriously in the Oceania region even though many Parties and non-Parties in Oceania have either escaped, or have successfully limited, the direct impact of Covid-19 to date. International tourism has temporarily ceased and may never return to pre-Covid levels because of the newly perceived risks associated with the industry. Many Oceania people working in the tourism sector have lost their jobs and livelihoods, and the consequent loss of national and personal incomes from tourism will undoubtedly lead to greater pressures on natural resources for both sustenance and for international trade.
10. There has been considerable interest in the region in the implementation of the listing of commercially-important shark and ray listings since CoP16 and the challenges of providing NDFs for migratory species where little data exists because historically shark catches and exports have generally not been recorded to species level. Many Oceania parties plan to use a generic regional template to do their NDFs for sharks and ray, with some fields already populated with biological and regional information, with country-specific data to be entered into remaining fields. In January 2020, I shared with the region the mako shark NDF that New Zealand had prepared because elements of it, including the finding that New Zealand stocks, which are stable or increasing, are shared with those of near neighbours in the region and so current fisheries pressures in their waters and in the high seas in between appear to have been sustainable.
11. The inclusion of three species of teatfish, two of which occur in Oceania, will pose new issues for the development of NDFs for teatfish and CITES permitting once the listing agreed at CoP18 comes into effect on 28 August 2020. Before Covid-19 intervened, plans were being made to hold one or two regional workshops as part of the Pacific-European Union Marine Partnership (PEUMP) programme implemented by regional agencies such as SPREP and SPC. These workshops aimed to concentrate on the development of NDFs using the best available national and regional information, and to highlight gaps in our knowledge that could be filled as a condition of any positive but conservative NDF, and through ongoing and new monitoring programmes. It is not yet known when these workshops will be held, but most likely they will be done as virtual workshops.
12. 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 and in the model implemented by federal government departments in Australia. Some Parties have very low levels of trade in CITES-listed 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, if not impossible. The recent listing of commercially important marine species has raised the profile of CITES within many parties and regional organisations in the Oceania region, and this has led to improved cooperation between environmental, fisheries and police/customs agencies within countries and across the region. I especially want to acknowledge the increasing role that SPREP has played as a coordinating body for CITES issues in the region. Their environmental network through the Pacific is very well established and their staff have assisted greatly with the implementation of CITES regionally.

13. 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. The region appears keen to implement electronic permitting to overcome some of the permitting and reporting load borne by a few CITES staff.

Capacity-building activities and awareness campaigns

14. The main capacity-building activity I should be reporting on, a workshop to support the implementation of the forthcoming listing of teatfish, including the development of non-detriment findings, has been postponed, and is likely to move to a virtual workshop, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. EU funding promised at CoP18 to implement this new listing has been channelled through the Pacific European Union Marine Partnership (PEUMP) programme, which is funded through the Eleventh Round of the European Development Fund (EDF 11). Working with the By-catch and Integrated Ecosystem Management (BIEM) project and TierraMar in Australia, the CITES lead in SPREP is exploring options to hold the training by Webinar if a real workshop is unable to be organised before the listing comes into force. Currently, SPREP is assessing the internet meeting platform capabilities of each Party in the region.
15. In the meantime, New Zealand has circulated a high-level template to assist Oceania Parties to develop NDFs and the New Zealand NDF for mako sharks was circulated as a reference for the general topic headings to address when doing teatfish NDFs. Advice was also given that initial NDFs should be conservative (but this does not mean that trade must be halted unless there is a moratorium in place already) and should have conditions requiring fishers/traders to gather and share more information that will help to refine the NDFs in future. The aim is to get to a point where the trade in sea cucumbers is sustainable so that coastal communities can derive a consistent source of income from sea cucumbers rather than go through boom periods followed by periods with no trade whatsoever as stocks recover. Sea cucumber fisheries should take care not to switch pressure from teatfish to other sea cucumber species to make up for a lack of, or a reduced, harvest of teatfish.
16. 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 are still looking for effective ways to support requests for assistance from our Pacific colleagues. We appreciate the increasing input from colleagues in the SPREP who were particularly active in supporting delegates from small island nations in the lead-up to and at CoP18. 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 10 years that I have been Oceania representative on the AC, because their input and expertise has been invaluable in this distant and far-flung region.

Agenda items of particular interest in the Oceania region

17. The following items are of particular interest to the nine Parties of Oceania:
 - Sharks & Rays
 - Marine turtles
 - Songbird trade
 - Eels
 - Precious corals
 - Capacity building
 - Identification materials