

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



Twenty-third meeting of the Plants Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 22 and 24-27 July 2017

Interpretation and implementation matters

General compliance and enforcement

Review of Significant Trade in specimens of Appendix-II species

ESTABLISHMENT AND TESTING OF A
REVIEW OF SIGNIFICANT TRADE TRACKING AND MANAGEMENT DATABASE

The attached information document has been submitted by the Secretariat in relation to agenda item 15 on *Review of Significant Trade in specimens of Appendix-II species*.

**Establishment and testing of a Review of Significant Trade Tracking and Management database
(Dec. 17.108)
Proposed Work Plan**

Background

In Decision 17.108 on *Review of Significant Trade*, Parties have directed the Secretariat to: “...develop, test and establish a Review of Significant Trade Tracking and Management database as an essential tool for the effective implementation and transparency of the process.”

Previous attempts to develop a system to document and monitor the Review of Significant Trade process were undertaken in 2002 and in 2008, the details of which are described in document [PC18 Doc. 8.1](#). The current database (accessible from the CITES website at <http://sigtrade.unep-wcmc.org/>) was developed in 2008. The Secretariat consulted with UNEP-WCMC and considered the best approaches to implement Decision 17.108. A detailed review of the current database has shown that while the system has been operational with regularly updated data, there has been several problems and challenges that seem to have accumulated over time, e.g.:

- The database platform as well as the interface for the database have become outdated
- The system does not achieve some of the original objectives, while some of these objectives may no longer be relevant today
- The original developer left UNEP-WCMC after the database was developed, which may have resulted in difficulties in maintaining and updating the interface/platform

Taking into account the above as well as the requirements of the new Review of Significant Trade process, the Secretariat concluded that it might be preferable to develop a new, in-house system rather than to attempt at adjusting and modifying past systems, both from functional and financial perspectives. Furthermore, this would also allow the new RST system to be better integrated with the core function of the Secretariat's web-based services, allowing more versatility and sustainability.

In developing a new system, the Secretariat aims to focus on improving the user experience of the system, so that it may serve Parties to track the progress of species/countries selected for the RST procedure, including in:

- Creating linkages to relevant information systems, such as the CITES Checklist (and Species+), the CITES Trade Database, and CITES National Contacts
- Promoting better understanding of the different steps of the RST process through the development of a capacity-building package, allowing users to become familiarize themselves with the system
- Enabling the online interrogation of data according to various pivotal elements (e.g. by species reviewed, by country, by year, etc.)
- Providing a deadline-alert mechanism

The Secretariat has also consulted with the Secretariats of UNFCCC, Ramsar, and the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, as well as other relevant experts in electronic document management (particularly through the UNEP IKM initiative) to gain more knowledge on the practical experience and technological developments related to the electronic document management and tracking for the purpose of developing databases such as the RST system.

Project plan and timeframe

From the consultations with other Convention Secretariats, a careful initial planning for document gathering, sorting, labelling, categorizing and enriching would be crucial to the development of a successful and sustainable document tracking tool, such as the RST management system. Some had recounted experiencing setbacks of up to one year when the initial document sorting was later deemed to be insufficient or incorrect. It would also be imperative that significant time and cost be allocated to this work and that highly experienced professionals in the area of semantic web technology to be consulted in this endeavour.

1. Transfer past RST data and development of an interim system

The CITES Secretariat has requested for the transfer of the data collected by UNEP-WCMC to date and contained in the current RST system, and has developed an interim tabular system that allows

searches to be made by various parameters (Party, taxonomic order, phases/stages, meeting, etc.). This system will be made available on the CITES website shortly after AC29/PC23.

2. Document tag (metadata standard) and structure development

The existing electronic information, data and documents must be labelled and sorted so that they may be linked and searched in a meaningful manner. The documentation officer of the Secretariat is currently development a Secretariat tagging terminology, based on understanding users and analysing content and processes.

3. Recruit a project manager

A professional Web database project manager will be hired to oversee the development of the RST management system. The Web database project manager will review the CITES RST process as well as the documents available, discuss the challenges, needs and objectives of the Secretariat and Parties for the RST system, and conceptualize solutions through a work plan. The manager will also review the document tag and structure, and will make amendments based on the technical requirements.

4. Back-tag older documents

Existing electronic resource of the Convention will be labelled (tagged) according to the metadata standard developed in step 2 and technically cleared by the project manager. This will allow different types of documents to be searched using the same keywords, such as species-country combination.

The document tagging exercise will serve multiple purposes in addition to the development of the RST system, and holds a potential for a more dynamic way in which CITES's online resources can be utilized. This may include, but not be limited to: tracking a particular species in other processes (e.g. Periodic Review, NDFs, quotas, Appendix-listing proposals), cross-searching information related to a given Party (e.g. national contacts, quotas, reservations, trade suspensions, RST process, etc.), and searching through documents from CoP and Committees on a particular topic.

Considering that the Convention owns more than 40 years' worth of data and information resources, including legal documents, documents of CoPs and committees, Decisions and Resolutions, Notifications, grey literature, and so on, back-tagging of documents will likely be extremely time-consuming. It would also be useful to hire someone who has some library science background for this task.

5. Develop a database and an interface

The project manager will execute the technical elements through database programmers and web designers. Draft Terms of Reference for the project manager are annexed to this document.

6. Beta testing

Once the database and interface have been developed, selected Secretariat members and Parties will test the RST system to improve the usability and finalize the system.

Proposed timeline (rough estimate, subject to changes by the project manager)

Activity	2017						2018												2019						
	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Transfer past RST data and develop interim system																									
Develop document tag and structure																									
Recruit project manager																									
Back-tag older documents																									
Develop database and interface																									
Beta testing and publication																									