

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

Forty-first meeting of the Standing Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 8-12 February 1999

CITES issues in southern Africa

REPORT BY THE NAMIBIAN CITES MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY AS A
REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR AFRICA TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE

Introduction

CITES implementation in southern Africa is generally coordinated through the Southern African Development Community structures, particularly the Wildlife Sector Technical Coordination Unit in Malawi, and there continues to be considerable interest within governments, Parliaments, the NGO communities and media in CITES issues. CITES issues have nevertheless somewhat declined in prominence in the aftermath of COP10, with other urgent domestic conservation and management issues predominating. It may be of interest to other regions that CITES in southern Africa often has to be implemented with resources that could have been targeted at e.g. habitat protection and protected area management. Unfavourable exchange rates, in some cases very dramatic, have continued to erode the purchasing power of conservation resources in the region, and there should be concern about the ability of conservation authorities to meet increasing obligations under such circumstances. There is a danger that CITES could distract from national priorities or consume a disproportionate amount of resources for the conservation benefits that the Convention brings to domestic conservation problems.

Capacity building issues

Not discounting the welcome progress made by the CITES Secretariat in capacity building, it has become more urgent than ever before that better assistance be provided to African Parties regarding the implementation of CITES. More needs to be done to assist States which recently became Parties - it seems that very little assistance is available to such countries. Other Parties can equally benefit from more targeted information material than is currently available and directly relevant to their involvement in CITES. Standardized permit issuing software that would facilitate the production of annual reports is much needed, as well as a simplified implementation manual for exports (which account for most CITES business in southern Africa). Parties will also benefit from a summary of all important dates in CITES implementation, ie in the form of a calendar, as there are a remarkable number of deadlines to meet regarding reports, proposals, meetings etc.

Similarly, further attention is needed regarding the implementation of Article IV in developing countries, including southern Africa. Trade in species of considerable economic importance to rural communities might be jeopardized unless the basic management of such resources can be improved. We hope therefore that the CITES Secretariat will review its capacity building programme and if necessary give greater consideration to the special circumstances of developing countries. The Secretariat should also be encouraged to maintain and improve its training programme for Management Authorities, to help Parties deal with the problems of rapid

staff turnover. The possibility of offering specific training to customs services and scientific authorities should also be considered.

Elephant conservation issues

Elephant conservation issues have continued to dominate CITES-related activities in southern Africa as in previous years:

- The year 1998 was marked by some controversies in the implementation of CITES in southern Africa, notably the interpretation of annotation 604 regarding trade in elephant specimens from Botswana (live animals) and Zimbabwe (hides). It is clear that this annotation has to be revisited at COP11 to more accurately define the form of trade required by the relevant Parties. Variable interpretations of the annotation have aggravated the issue. It is regrettable that so much negative publicity was given to wildlife trade issues. Improved liaison between the CITES Secretariat and affected Parties regarding complex issues of interpretation may be a way to avoid such controversies in future.
- The Southern African region (with considerable support from other regions) remains committed to the successful implementation of COP10 decisions regarding elephants and ivory, as apparent from the third African Elephant Dialogue meeting held in Arusha, Tanzania in November 1998. Delegations from States with Appendix II elephant populations as well as the CITES Management Authority of Japan were able to report on further steps towards the implementation of the requirements of CITES Decision 10.1. Considerable progress was made regarding a common approach by the States which declared ivory stocks in terms of Decision 10.2. This meeting was regarded as constructive, and the Government of Tanzania as host, the IUCN Species Survival Commission as facilitator, and the European Commission, the Governments of Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States are sincerely thanked for funding this meeting.
- In late 1998, Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe were subject to a final certification by the CITES Secretariat regarding compliance with the conditions for the resumption of trade in ivory, as provided for in Decision 10.1. (The outcome of this exercise will be discussed under another agenda point at SC41).

On behalf of the southern African Parties to CITES, ongoing support from the CITES Secretariat, IUCN, TRAFFIC, other Parties and institutions with regards to wildlife conservation and CITES implementation are gratefully acknowledged.