

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

Fiftieth meeting of the Standing Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 15-19 March 2004

Interpretation and implementation of the Convention

STURGEONS

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.
2. At its 12th meeting (Santiago, 2002), the Conference of the Parties adopted Decision 12.52:

In consultation with the Parties and other relevant entities, the Secretariat shall explore the possibility of establishing a clearing-house mechanism for information regarding all permits issued for international trade in caviar to assist in the control of illegal trade and report its findings to the Standing Committee before the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

3. Misuse of CITES permits and certificates has played a significant role in illicit trade in caviar. The Secretariat has provided information to the Parties regarding this issue through Notifications to the Parties and through Alerts. Awareness of this problem now seems to be widespread and those countries that regularly import caviar conduct careful verifications of shipments and accompanying documents. The Secretariat regularly communicates intelligence on this subject on a case-specific basis.
4. The increased use of the universal labelling system for the identification of and trade in caviar has also contributed significantly to reducing illicit trade.
5. During discussions prior to the 12th meeting of the Conference of the Parties it was suggested by some non-governmental organizations that all Parties should consult the Secretariat to confirm the validity of permits or certificates before accepting imports of caviar and this led to the adoption of Decision 12.52.
6. Since the 12th meeting of the Conference of the Parties the Secretariat has continued to maintain an overview of the trade in caviar. It is clear that the Parties are usually able to identify suspicious documents or shipments and to seek technical input from the Secretariat as and when needed. Since the majority of international caviar shipments are *bona fide* and take place without problems, there does not appear to be any justification for routine permit confirmation to be undertaken by the Secretariat.
7. That said, the current practice of the main caviar producing countries regularly supplying to the Secretariat copies of export permits they issue has been extremely useful in allowing it to compare them against any suspicious documents presented to importing countries and thus rapidly identify frauds and forgeries. Acquiring copies of all permits also enables the Secretariat to monitor the trade in caviar in general terms, the countries and companies

involved, and this contributes significantly to the Secretariat's ability to prepare intelligence briefings and targeting advice against illicit trade.

8. Having discussed this matter with several Parties and border control agencies, the Secretariat believes that the current practice provides a sufficient 'clearing-house' mechanism to satisfy Decision 12.52 and that no other system needs to be developed. However, to date, the practice of supplying copies of export permits has been restricted primarily to sturgeon range States around the Caspian Sea. The Secretariat believes that having copy permits on file is so useful that this practice should be adopted by all caviar exporting and re-exporting countries.

Recommendation

9. The Secretariat proposes that the Standing Committee adopt the following recommendation:

The practice of supplying to the Secretariat copies of all export permits relating to caviar should be continued and all caviar exporting and re-exporting Parties should do so. Parties are encouraged to continue to contact the Secretariat, on a case-by-case basis, whenever there are suspicions about the validity of any permit or certificate or the legality of shipments of caviar.