

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



Sixty-second meeting of the Standing Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 23-27 July 2012

Interpretation and implementation of the Convention

Trade control and marking issues

PHYSICAL INSPECTION OF TIMBER SHIPMENTS

1. This document has been submitted by the United States of America*.
2. At the 61st meeting of the Standing Committee (SC61, Geneva, August 2011), Italy, as chairman of the working group on Physical Inspection of Timber Shipments, gave an oral report on the progress of the working group and announced that they could no longer serve as chairman of the working group. The United States offered to confer with other working group members intersessionally in an effort to identify a new chairman for the working group and conclude its work.
3. Following SC61, the United States conferred with the working group via email and the CITES Forum and asked if any Party on the working group was willing to carry on as the new chairman. Unfortunately, no Party was able to assume the chairmanship of the working group, so no further work has been done. However, the former chairman provided the United States with a draft written version of the oral report provided at SC61. That report is provided in Annex 1 to this document.
4. The Standing Committee is invited to review the written report and determine what further work, if any, should be done on this subject or whether it should report to CoP16 that this work, directed to the Standing Committee through Decision 14.61 (Rev. CoP15), Physical inspection of timber shipments, has been completed. If the Standing Committee determines that additional work needs to be done, it will need to recommend that either Decision 14.61 (Rev. CoP15) should be renewed again at CoP16 or that a new Decision, targeting specific activities that have not been completed, should be drafted.

* *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.*

Report Provided at SC61 by Italy as Chairman of the
Working Group on the Physical Inspection of Timber Shipments

Italy, as chairman of the working group, reports the findings of the working group as required.

Background

1. At its 14th meeting (CoP14; The Hague, 2007), the Conference of the Parties adopted Decisions 14.60 and 14.61 on the Physical inspection of timber shipments, directed to the Secretariat and to the Standing Committee, respectively.
2. The decisions aimed at establishing a working group to collect and assess relevant existing material on CITES timber identification and measurement. After the working group was established, Italy, as chairman, contacted interested Parties and relevant inter-governmental organizations (IGOs) to seek their input via an electronic forum established by the Secretariat. The Secretariat also issued Notification No 2009/015 to solicit information from Parties on their procedures for timber identification and physical inspection of timber shipments.
3. Initially, very few responses were received. Therefore, an informal meeting of the working group was convened at the 58th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC58) to obtain preliminary information on procedures and methods for timber identification and measurement. The Working Group also agreed on a draft questionnaire addressing specific issues and procedures adopted and used by customs and enforcement officers at ports of entry and exit for timber shipments.
4. The questionnaire was uploaded to the electronic forum of the working group. At SC59, there had been few responses to questionnaire, and it was therefore decided to defer further work on this subject to the next regular meeting of the Standing Committee after CoP15. Decision 14.61 was reviewed and amended accordingly.
5. At the time of this report, complete responses to the questionnaire have been received by the following Parties and organizations: Cameroon, China, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, ITTO, Malaysia, Spain, United Kingdom, United States.

Preliminary information obtained

Inspection of timber shipments

6. Timber shipments may be subject to document review or physical inspections. Most of the Parties responding to the questionnaire stated that the decision as to whether to inspect a shipment is usually based prior information indicating a potential problem with the shipment and/or the lack of detailed documentation specifying the content of the shipment. One reason given for inspections is to match of the actual quantity of timber with the quantity declared on the CITES permit. For other Parties, the obligation to inspect shipments can be imposed by national regulations pertaining to pest control. For exporting countries, one of the reasons for inspection is to verify the legal origin of the timber.

Identification of timber

7. Most of the Parties that responded have developed their own identification tools (e.g., atlases and manuals) that in most cases cover both CITES- and non-CITES-listed timber species. It appears that many Parties are using the Wood Identification Guide—Tropical Woods developed by Environment Canada. All Parties stated that they have national sample collections, which not specifically devoted to CITES-listed species. Two parties are also using software for wood identification. The availability of these materials varies among Parties from broad access, even by the general public, to intermediate access available to main CITES authorities and bodies, to restricted access limited to enforcement officers only. Other ways in which Parties are achieving identification expertise and skills is through continuous training and capacity building of customs and enforcement officers. ITTO has also developed an identification atlas.

Measurement of timber

8. The procedures adopted by Parties to measure the various timber products in a shipment are not uniform among the Parties. In the case of a shipment containing different types of products, two Parties stated that the inspection is either tailored on the packing list (when available), or carried out by measuring separately each product type in the shipment. The measurement of the various product types (supposedly by a sampling procedure) is made according to formulas contained in manuals. Other parties stated that they did not inspect mixed shipments, either due to legal restrictions or because they did not encounter such shipments. Others stated that they lacked experience with such shipments due to a low occurrence of timber imports.
9. In the case of a homogeneous shipment of timber, some Parties stated that it uses specific formulas to assess volumes of logs and semi-finished products. One Party indicated that it measures logs by weight, whereas other timber products are never encountered by inspectors. Another Party stated that it uses weight to measure semi-finished products. In the case of finished products, weight is the measure usually used by most of the Parties, with one exception, where the Party uses an estimate of the volume occupied by the pallet on which specimens are packed. This method is used to calculate the cubic meters of finished products like mouldings, plywood, particle board and furniture parts. As with other types of specimens, other Parties reported a lack of experience in dealing with measurement of finished products.

Conclusion

10. Identification materials are generally available and developed locally by various Parties. The CITES Identification Guide – Tropical Woods developed by Environment Canada has been cited by various Parties as a commonly used tool for identification. Additional tools mentioned as being useful were the identification atlas of ITTO, identification software, and sample sets that could be possibly made available to all CITES Parties. All these identification materials could be included in a toolkit to assist Parties in the identification of timber specimens.
11. Measurement techniques vary among Parties, due probably, among the other reasons, to the variety of timber products in trade. Whether measuring a mixed shipment or a homogeneous shipment of timber, it seems that each Party has its own standard procedure, based also on sampling techniques, but respondents stressed the need for harmonization and standardization in the units of measurement and methodologies. Therefore it is the opinion of the Chair that a general guideline should be developed for CITES timber inspection, also recognizing the existence of discrepancies between methodologies used by traders and those used by CITES enforcement authorities for measuring a timber shipment. Any guidance should be practical and easy to follow, since the equation-based formulae previously considered have proved complex and difficult to use.

Recommendations

The Working Group recommends that the Standing Committee, in evaluating the information provided, takes into consideration the possibility of developing a toolkit comprising relevant identification materials, databases, and atlases developed by Parties and providing guidelines for the measurement of timber specimens.

The Working Group invites the Standing Committee to consider whether the Working Group has completed its terms of reference or whether there are specific issues it should address before the next meeting of the Committee. Unfortunately, it will be impossible for Italy to continue as chairman of the Working Group after SC61 due to the lack of staff in the CITES Management Authority. Therefore, if the Working Group should continue its activities, we would ask that the Standing Committee identify a new chairman.

Proposal

It seems fewer problems are encountered when measuring sawn wood, veneer sheets and plywood because they are usually packed in squared-off lots, which makes determination of volumes easier. More problems occur with homogeneous shipments including logs. These problems may be reduced if CITES permits and certificates included the number of logs and stated whether or not the logs had bark attached or removed. In the case of mixed shipments, the CITES permits and certificates should declare both the number of logs included and the volume of sawn wood. This procedure would be useful for inspection of shipments to evaluate more easily if discrepancies regarding the weight or volume of timber is due to fraud or natural hygroscopic changes occurring during transportation by sea. In the above-mentioned case it would be helpful to supply

Customs and other enforcement officers with a weight table reporting the percentage of increase anticipated during timber transportation by sea.

In any case, a review of the Resolution Conf. 12.3, section XI, is needed. The Working Group could be tasked with developing possible amendments to Resolution Conf. 12.3 (Rev. CoP15) and integrating these in a draft revision of the Resolution for consideration by the Standing Committee at its 62nd meeting.