

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



Sixty-ninth meeting of the Standing Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 27 November -1 December 2017

Interpretation and implementation matter

General compliance and enforcement

National reports

IMPROVING ACCESS TO ANNUAL REPORT DATA

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.

Background

2. The Convention requires that Parties provide information regarding their trade in CITES-listed specimens through their annual reports. The Secretariat makes this information available through the CITES Trade Database. Parties recognise the importance of these reports as a tool for monitoring the implementation of the Convention, assessing the effectiveness of their wildlife management and trade policies, and to enhance the detection of potentially harmful or illicit trade.
3. The Secretariat has reviewed the current CITES Trade database interface and found that accessibility of information could be improved in order to enhance data availability so as to be more in line with the provisions of the Convention.
4. The Secretariat has prepared this document to outline the current limitations and propose improvements to increase access to the information in the CITES Trade Database that would expand on the range of data outputs available above and beyond what is currently offered through the current search function.

Provisions under the Convention related to annual reports and their contents

5. Article VIII, paragraph 7 (a) of the Convention requires each Party to submit to the Secretariat an annual report on its CITES trade. Article VIII, paragraph 8 states that these reports "*shall be available to the public where it is not inconsistent with the law of the Party concerned*".
6. The *Guidelines for the preparation and submission of CITES annual reports*¹ approved by the Standing Committee under Resolution Conf. 11.17 (Rev. CoP17) on *National reports*, define the two main objectives of the annual reports:
 - to enable monitoring of the extent of international trade in each species included in the CITES Appendices and identify potentially harmful trade; and
 - to enable monitoring of the implementation of the Convention and the detection of potentially illicit trade.

¹ <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/notif/E-Notif-2017-006-A.pdf>

7. The Guidelines specify that “the report should include a record of each shipment of each species. Multiple species traded on the same permit should be put in separate rows with all corresponding permit information repeated for each species”.²
8. The Specific Instructions section of the Guidelines provides the list of data elements to be included in the annual report. The permit or certificate number³ is one of the data elements that have to be reported. In accordance with Article VIII paragraph 7 (a) of the Convention, the names and addresses of exporters and importers do not need to be submitted to the Secretariat in the annual reports of Parties.
9. The annual reports are made available through the CITES Trade Database. UNEP-WCMC manages the CITES Trade Database on behalf of the CITES Secretariat and is responsible for processing the annual reports and uploading them into the CITES Trade Database for dissemination to CITES Parties and the wider public. UNEP-WCMC works extensively with Parties to identify and correct any errors before including the data into the CITES Trade Database. At present the CITES Trade Database contains over 18 million records.

Discussion

10. The Secretariat fulfils the publication requirement of Article VIII, paragraph 8 to make the annual reports available to the public by providing access to the CITES Trade Database through the CITES Website.⁴
11. Currently the only way the users can access the CITES Trade Database is through a simplified search interface provided by UNEP-WCMC, which aggregates its search results automatically. This means that trade transactions with the same profile⁵ are combined into one line, and the quantity column merely shows the sum of the quantities from multiple permits. The users have no means to know whether they are looking at information on trade to the permit level, or the information has been aggregated.
12. Information returned by the search function does not lend itself for advanced statistical analysis of trade patterns for sustainability. For example, with the current search function, it is not possible to analyse whether trade in a specimen occurred in one single, large shipment or in multiple smaller shipments, whether the specimen was shipped together with other specimens or whether trade and shipment patterns change over time. Extra information of this kind would be particularly valuable in the context of the Review of Significant Trade.
13. The current implementation makes it difficult for the competent authorities to use the CITES Trade Database to assist with the detection of illicit trade. Access to information on the level of the individual trade transactions can allow a link to be made between the CITES permit to other trade documents, such as trade and transport documents or the customs declaration. As the search does not provide identification of the permit such links cannot be established.
14. As a result, the Secretariat is of the view that there are opportunities to provide additional outputs and functionality to harness the full potential of the CITES Trade Database for improved implementation of the Convention.

Improving access to annual report information

15. In order to make annual report information available for sustainability of trade and to assist with the detection of illicit trade as per Resolution Conf. 11.17 (Rev. CoP17), the Secretariat suggests to implement, in addition to the existing search function, a direct access to the information in the CITES Trade Database.
16. The Secretariat has consulted with UNEP-WCMC on the most appropriate approach and suggests the following solution:

² *Guidelines for the preparation and submission of CITES annual reports (January 2017), section 2i.*

³ *“Permit number” in the Guidelines refers to the “Permit Identifier” in box 1 (Permit/Certificate No.) of the CITES form and not to the amount of permits issued.*

⁴ <https://trade.cites.org>.

⁵ *If the same species has been traded on several permits in the same year and using the same purpose code, source code, trade term code, unit of measurement and country of origin/export/destination, the search function will aggregate these records into a single data row. Limitations of this output type include loss of specific detail on the size and number of individual shipments in a given year.*

- The CITES Trade Database will be made available as a downloadable file from the CITES Website. The file will include all information in the CITES Trade Database in a structured and non-aggregated format, as submitted by Parties. This file can be loaded into databases for advanced statistical analysis.
 - The existing search interface will be maintained in its current format, to provide facilitated access to aggregated trade information to users who do not need to make in-depth analysis by individual trade transaction. Continuous improvements will be made to the search functions as necessary. For example, the interface was modified earlier this year so that users can search the interface using higher taxonomic levels. Parties are invited to provide inputs on other improvements they might be interested in.
17. In preparing the download of the CITES Trade Database the Secretariat will remove all information provided by a Party where the Party has notified the Secretariat that publication of this information is inconsistent with the law of the Party concerned, as is required by Article VIII paragraph 8 of the Convention. As of the drafting of this document the Secretariat has not been made aware by any Party that publication of its annual report is in contradiction with its national law.
18. The proposed changes have no impact on how Parties prepare or submit their annual reports. There are also no budget implications, as the changes are considered part of the regular contract between the CITES Secretariat and UNEP-WCMC for the management and maintenance the CITES Trade Database.

Recommendation

18. The Standing Committee is invited to note the information provided in this report.