

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

CITES TORTOISES AND FRESHWATER TURTLES TASK FORCE MEETING,
SINGAPORE, 25-27 APRIL 2017

1. This information document has been prepared by the Secretariat in relation to agenda item 64 on *Tortoises and freshwater turtles* (Testudines spp.).
2. At its 17th meeting (CoP17, Johannesburg, 2016), the Conference of the Parties of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) adopted Decisions 17.295, paragraphs a) and d), and Decision 17.296 on *Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles (Testudines spp.)*, as follows:

Directed to the Secretariat

17.295 *The Secretariat shall:*

- a) *with funding already provided, establish and convene a CITES Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles Task Force (Task Force) to operate, as described in Decision 17.296. The members of the Task Force could include the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the members of the ICCWC, Madagascar and those Parties in Asia that are most affected by the illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles and their parts and derivatives and other individuals who the Secretariat determines may contribute to the work of the Task Force;*
...
- d) *transmit the findings and recommendations of the Task Force, under Decision 17.296 c), to the 69th meeting of the Standing Committee for its consideration, and make its own recommendations as appropriate; and*
...

Directed to the Tortoise and Freshwater Turtles Task Force

17.296 *The Task Force shall:*

- a) *as it deems appropriate, exchange intelligence and other information on the illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater and terrestrial turtles;*
- b) *discuss enforcement and implementation issues related to the illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater and terrestrial turtles as outlined in document CoP17 Doc. 73 Annexes 1 – 4 and any other materials it deems relevant; and,*
- c) *deliver findings and recommendations, through the Secretariat, to the 69th meeting of Standing Committee to strengthen the enforcement and implementation of the Convention for these species by the Parties.*

3. The Secretariat convened this CITES Tortoise and Freshwater Turtles Task Force meeting in Singapore, from 25 to 27 April 2017, in close cooperation with its partners in the International Consortium on Combatting Wildlife Crime (ICCWC)¹. The meeting was co-hosted by the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority of Singapore and Wildlife Reserves Singapore, and organized thanks to generous funds provided by the Government of the United States of America.
4. The meeting brought together over 50 representatives from 15 countries affected by illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles (Bangladesh, China, Colombia, India, Indonesia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, United States of America and Viet Nam), and from international inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations, and the South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network.
5. The first day of the meeting consisted of open sessions during which experts delivered presentations on key issues associated with illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles and their parts and derivatives. The aim of these presentations was to inform the discussions of the following two days.
6. The second and third days of the meeting consisted of closed sessions for governmental agencies and intergovernmental organizations only. The second day primarily focused on country presentations delivered by each of the Parties present. These presentations provided an opportunity to share information on best practices and challenges, exchange information and intelligence, identify opportunities for joint action, and identify opportunities for support by intergovernmental agencies, wildlife enforcement networks, and others. It also included presentations on and operation initiated specifically to address illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles, and the tools and services provided by intergovernmental agencies that could be deployed to combat illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles.
7. On the third day participants divided into three Working Groups, each focusing on an identified theme as follows:
 - Strengthening implementation of CITES and Resolution Conf. 11.9 (Rev. CoP13) on *Conservation of and trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles*.
 - Investigative and analyses support, improved international cooperation, operational tools and secure communication platforms.
 - Identification materials, rapid-response identification networks, and awareness raising.
8. The Working Groups worked to identify specific strategies and proposed actions to be implemented to strengthen CITES implementation, enforcement responses and international cooperation, to effectively prevent, detect, investigate and prosecute cases of illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles, including their parts and derivatives.
9. Each Working Group provided feedback on its findings in plenary, and these findings were further discussed and considered during an interactive session. The participants of the Task Force meeting then translated the findings into recommendations.
10. The agenda for the third day also created an opportunity for participants to interact on a bilateral or trilateral basis to discuss issues of mutual interest identified during country presentations or otherwise, exchange information and intelligence on specific cases, and identify opportunities for joint courses of action or operations. These discussions were treated as confidential and representatives were not required to provide feedback to the meeting on the nature of these discussions.
11. In accordance with Decision 17.296, paragraph c), participants in the CITES Tortoise and Freshwater Turtles Task Force meeting developed the following recommendations.

1. All Parties affected by illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles should:

Targeting illegal trade

¹ ICCWC comprises the CITES Secretariat, INTERPOL, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the World Bank and the World Customs Organization (WCO).

- a) Undertake risk profiling and provide capacity-building interventions and detection equipment to enforcement officers at ports to enable them to better target known modes of transport used for trafficking in tortoises and freshwater turtles;
- b) Scale up activities to address illegal trade in tortoise and freshwater turtle specimens being shipped through postal and courier services, and to address illegal trade at identified key locations in domestic markets;

Information and intelligence sharing

- c) Where possible, use platforms such as INTERPOL's Regional Investigative and Analytical Case Management (RIACM) meetings, and the Wildlife Inter-Regional Enforcement (WIRE) meetings of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) for information sharing regarding trafficking in tortoises and freshwater turtles;
- d) Encourage national agencies responsible for wildlife law enforcement to engage with their INTERPOL National Central Bureau (NCB) to request that access to the INTERPOL I-24/7 global communications system and databases be extended to them;

Seizures and disposal

- e) Encourage their national authorities to, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations, academia and other pertinent institutions, prepare general and country-specific protocol(s) for seizure management, by organizing a workshop with appropriate specialists, and/or by establishing a drafting group to prepare preliminary protocols to be circulated among experts for further input and refinement;
- f) Taking into consideration the provisions of relevant national legislation, develop standard operating procedures for unexpected large scale seizures and, where appropriate, consider the construction of facilities to care for confiscated live animals, and dispose of seized specimens in accordance with the provisions of Resolution Conf. 17.8 on *Disposal of illegally traded and confiscated specimens of CITES-listed species* and its annexes;

Species identification

- g) Implement a three-step identification process for tortoises and freshwater turtles as follows:
 - i. Enforcement officers (including customs officers) use available identification materials to identify the most frequently traded tortoise and freshwater turtle species and their parts and products;
 - ii. Where doubt remains about identification after using available identification materials, enforcement officers should share photographs of traded animals with national identification experts, for specific identification or confirmation. National authorities are encouraged to designate a national facilitator for this purpose; and
 - iii. Where doubt continues to remain after consulting national identification experts, enforcement officers should share photographs and other information, through their national designated facilitator, with global identification experts, and draw upon forensic analysis, in particular molecular analysis, as may be needed; and
- h) Develop supplementary identification guidance containing basic information on the characteristics used for tortoise and freshwater turtle identification to support the accurate application of existing identification materials. This guidance should be tailored to the specific needs of each country.

2. All Parties should:

Illegal trade on the internet

- a) Engage online communities, e.g. auction platforms and closed discussion groups, to create awareness about all aspects of illegal wildlife trade;

Cooperation

- b) When possible make use of INTERPOL's National Environmental Security Seminars (NESS)² to promote inter-agency coordination; and
- c) As appropriate, cooperate through regional wildlife enforcement networks for the better involvement of their member countries.

3. All Parties and organizations should:

Public awareness and empowerment

- a) As appropriate, create and implement awareness tools that can engage target audiences and cultures, in particular young adults, through social and other digital media;
- b) As appropriate, highlight the plight of tortoises and freshwater turtles in their campaigns to address wildlife trafficking;
- c) Empower the general public by raising awareness about existing tools available to report wildlife crime, e.g. mobile phone applications, hotline numbers, toll-free phone numbers, social media, etc.; and
- d) Encourage the general public to act as the eyes and ears of law enforcement through awareness raising initiatives and materials targeting for example public transport, roadside stops and restaurants, airports and other transport hubs.

4. The Standing Committee is invited to:

Targeting illegal trade

- a) Discuss the fact that in some countries non-native species are not being covered in national legislation;

Illegal trade on the internet

- b) In its deliberations, consider the best way to fight the use of social media platforms as a form of e-commerce for illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles;

Funding opportunities

- c) Encourage donors to increase funding initiatives to combat illegal trafficking in tortoises and freshwater turtles;

Resolutions

- d) Propose to the Conference of the Parties revisions to Resolution Conf. 11.9 (Rev.CoP13) *on Conservation of and trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles*, as follows³:
 - i. Removal of the word "Asian" in the Resolution unless specifically relevant for certain issues;

²<https://www.interpol.int/en/Media/Files/Crime-areas/Environmental-crime/Leaflets-brochures/National-Environmental-Security-Seminar-NESS/>.

³ NB: Text proposed to be deleted is crossed out. Proposed new text is underlined.

- ii. (Para 1a) “all Parties, especially range States and exporting and importing States of Asian tortoises and freshwater turtles, to enhance and increase enforcement and prosecution efforts with regard to existing legislation as a matter of urgency”;
 - iii. (Para 1b) “all Parties, ~~especially range States and exporting and importing States of Asian tortoise and freshwater turtles,~~ to enhance cooperation amongst wildlife-law enforcement agencies at national and international levels concerning control of trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles, and between enforcement agencies and national CITES authorities”;
 - iv. (Para 1h) “all Parties, especially in the Asian region, to collaborate on all aspects of conservation and management of, trade in, and implementation of the Convention for, tortoises and freshwater turtles, ~~taking into consideration the recommendations formulated at the technical workshop on Conservation of and trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles held in Kunming, China, 25-28 March 2002~~”;
 - v. (Para 2): “DIRECTS the Secretariat to provide assistance with securing financial resources from Parties, United Nations specialized agencies, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, trade associations, industry and others as appropriate, for range States in need of and requesting financial support to develop and implement management and enforcement strategies and action plans concerning CITES-listed tortoises and freshwater turtles in accordance with this Resolution”; and
- e) Establish a working group of enforcement experts to draft a resolution on operational intelligence support to enforcement work.

5. Members of the CITES Tortoise and Freshwater Turtles Task Force should:

Information and intelligence sharing

- a) Work towards the development of an enforcement alert on tortoises and freshwater turtles, including information on species trafficked, *modus operandi*, trafficking routes, concealment methods, and nationalities of offenders involved, to be updated on a rotational basis in accordance with a timeframe identified by Task Force members; and
- b) Each aim to, where possible, issue at least one INTERPOL Red Notice on known high priority offenders involved in illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles, and consider the use of other INTERPOL Notices as appropriate.⁴

6. The CITES Secretariat should:

Targeting illegal trade

- a) Request the World Customs Organization (WCO) to develop a set of risk profiles and indicators focusing on illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles;
- b) Request UNODC to use enforcement alerts on tortoises and freshwater turtles, and any risk indicators for these species developed by WCO, in its capacity-building activities on container profiling;

Information and intelligence sharing

⁴ <https://www.interpol.int/INTERPOL-expertise/Notices>

- c) Create a platform on the CITES website where Parties legislation can be shared, and encourage Parties to consult the CITES permit samples as available on the CITES Management Authorities Forum and in WCO's ENVIRONET,⁵ if needed;

Seizures and disposal

- d) Post a list of tortoise and freshwater turtle rescue facilities on the CITES website;

Species identification

- e) Request the IUCN/SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtles Specialist Group to:
 - i. Establish a rapid identification assistance network for live tortoises and freshwater turtles and their parts and derivatives; and
 - ii. Develop guidance on how to photograph tortoise and freshwater turtle specimens for identification.

⁵ <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/notif/E-Notif-2015-039.pdf>