

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

Seventieth meeting of the Standing Committee
Rosa Khutor, Sochi (Russian Federation), 1-5 October 2018

Species specific matters

Totoaba (Totoaba macdonaldi)

REPORT OF THE SECRETARIAT

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.

Background

2. At its 17th meeting (CoP17, Johannesburg, 2016), the Conference of the Parties adopted Decisions 17.145 to 17.151 on *Totoaba (Totoaba macdonaldi)*, as shown in Annex 1 to this document.
3. At its 69th meeting (SC69), the Standing Committee considered two documents on totoaba: document [SC69 Doc. 65.1](#) by the Secretariat; and document [SC69 Doc. 65.2](#) by Mexico, China and the United States of America. The documents reported on the implementation of the Decisions on totoaba, and highlighted the outcomes of the trilateral meeting on “Combating illegal trafficking of Totoaba” held from 23 to 25 August 2017 in Ensenada (Mexico).
4. At SC69, the Standing Committee noted the documents, and encouraged China, Mexico and the United States of America to continue their collaboration, noting the urgency of the issue, to improve the conservation status of totoaba and vaquita (*Phocoena sinus*), by implementing measures agreed at the trilateral meeting in August. Furthermore, regarding the study called for in Decision 17.149, the Standing Committee encouraged Parties and the wider CITES community to provide support for its full implementation. Additionally, based on the views expressed in Plenary, Mexico announced that it would extend an invitation to the Secretary General for a high-level mission to address the issues discussed.
5. Mexico, in collaboration with the Secretariat, has submitted document SC70 Doc. 62.2 to this meeting, which contains an update on the implementation of Decisions 17.145 to 17.148.
6. Following concerns that the decline of the critically endangered vaquita has continued to an estimated 30 individuals, and as part the mandate of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) – World Heritage Centre (WHC) under [Decision 41 COM 7B.15](#), a joint reactive Mission to the “Islands and Protected Areas of the Gulf of California (Mexico)” composed of UNESCO-WHC and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) took place from 12 to 16 February 2018. The mission report was published in May 2018, and is available as an information document. The report includes eleven recommendations on: 1) surveillance and monitoring; 2) viable alternative fishing gears; 3) strengthening the legal status of the permanent gillnet ban; 4) trafficking of totoaba products; 5) recommendations related to the proposed study referred to in Decision 17.149; 6) sustainable fisheries; 7) community programmes; 8) management frameworks; 9) enforcement outcomes; 10) assessment of the totoaba population; and, 11) recommendations related to a potential new “General Law on Biodiversity”.
7. UNESCO-WHC/IUCN’s recommendations concerning the proposed study under Decision 17.149 highlight the gaps in knowledge related to illegal fishing operations, and the illegal trafficking of totoaba swim bladders. As a result, the report includes a recommendation for Mexico, China and the United States of America to

immediately review and act upon the recommendations of the study called for in Decision 17.149 when it becomes available.

Implementation of Decision 17.149

8. The implementation of Decision 17.149 by the Secretariat has not begun yet as no external funding could be identified until recently. The Secretariat can however now confirm that Switzerland has provided the Secretariat with resources for the initiation of the study, which can build on the study by UNESCO-WHC/IUCN. The Secretariat is grateful for the generous support received.
9. Taking into account the available information, including the findings of the UNESCO-WHC/IUCN Mission, the Secretariat has developed, in consultation with Mexico, an outline for the study that would:
 - a) compile the best available information on the status of the vaquita and the totoaba;
 - b) develop a comprehensive analysis of the illegal trade in, and markets for totoaba, together with an assessment of ongoing and potential synergies with key CITES partners; and,
 - c) develop conclusions and recommendations aimed at the recovery of totoaba and vaquita, and combatting illegal trade.

The outline of the study is available in Annex 2 to the present document.

10. The Secretariat is in contact with possible consultants in order to initiate the study, with a view of having preliminary outcomes, mostly based on desk study work, in time for consideration by the 71st meeting of the Standing Committee as required by the Decision. The available resources are however insufficient for conducting a comprehensive study covering all of the elements indicated under Decision 17.149.

Recommendations

11. In compliance with Decision 17.150, the Standing Committee is invited to:
 - a) encourage donors to make co-funding available to the Secretariat for undertaking the study called for in Decision 17.149; and
 - b) provide comments on the Secretariat's plan for the implementation of Decision 17.149, as indicated in paragraphs 10 and 11 above, and in Annex 2.

CoP17 Decisions on Totoaba (*Totoaba macdonaldi*)

17.145 Directed to Parties

Parties acknowledge that Mexico, the United States of America and China are committed to collaborating and contributing towards the conservation of totoaba, and urge other parties to join them in this effort.

17.146 Directed to range, transit or consumer States of totoaba

Parties should intercept illegal shipments, and, as appropriate and to the extent possible, share information on such illegal catch and illegal trade, with the Secretariat, as well as CITES authorities of relevant Parties.

17.147 Directed to range, transit or consumer States of totoaba

Parties should engage in awareness raising activities about the endangerment of totoaba and its grave implications for vaquita (*Phocoena sinus*, an endangered species threatened with extinction and listed under Appendix I), eliminate supply of and demand for totoaba, and increase law enforcement measures to prevent and address illegal fishing and trade.

17.148 Directed to range, transit or consumer States of totoaba

Parties shall submit to the Secretariat information to be made available to the 69th and 70th meetings of the Standing Committee on the number and quantity of seizures of illegal totoaba products, arrests of those engaged in the illegal fishing and trade, results of any prosecutions, and actions taken to implement these decisions.

17.149 Directed to the Secretariat

Subject to availability of external resources and in consultation with relevant organizations [i.e. the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), etc.] as well as the range State, the Secretariat shall commission a report, to be submitted to the Standing Committee, on the current status of totoaba and vaquita, and ongoing conservation efforts, information on illegal trade and markets, and recommendations to guarantee the recovery of totoaba and vaquita and combat illegal trade.

17.150 Directed to the Standing Committee

The Standing Committee shall evaluate the data and information submitted by Parties at its 69th and 70th meetings and make recommendations for any additional actions.

17.151 Directed to Parties and other relevant stakeholders

Parties and other relevant stakeholders are urged to support efforts to stop illegal fishing, trafficking, and support activities benefitting the recovery of wild populations of totoaba.

OUTLINE FOR A STUDY ON VAQUITA AND TOTOABA,
IN ACCORDANCE TO DECISION 17.149

- 1. Acknowledgments**
- 2. Executive summary**
- 3. Background**
- 4. Setting the scene: Best available information on vaquita and totoaba's status**
 - 4.1. Vaquita**
 - a) Status and trends
 - b) Threats
 - c) Conservation efforts
 - 4.2. Totoaba**
 - a) Status, trends
 - b) Threats
 - c) Conservation efforts
- 5. Comprehensive diagnosis of the totoaba's illegal trade and markets**
 - a) Characteristics of illegal trade, and drivers
 - b) Supply and market developments
 - c) Challenges and prospects along illegal trade chain
- 6. Integral cooperation: Assessment of ongoing activities and potential synergies with key CITES partners**
 - a) Ongoing activities & synergies, and gap analysis
 - b) Potential for new strategic partnerships
- 7. Discussion: Progress, challenges and opportunities**
- 8. Conclusions and recommendations**
 - 8.1. Conclusions**
 - a) Avenues for the recovery of vaquita [General measures; CITES-related measures]
 - b) Avenues for the recovery of totoaba [General measures; CITES-related measures]
 - 8.2. Recommendations**
 - a) Source/Range state (Mexico)
 - b) Transit countries
 - c) Consumer/Destination Parties
- 9. Literature**