

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

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Seventy-fourth meeting of the Standing Committee  
Lyon (France), 7 - 11 March 2022

Interpretation and implementation matters

Regulation of trade

ELECTRONIC SYSTEMS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES:  
REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP AND THE SECRETARIAT

1. This document has been submitted by Switzerland as Chair of the Standing Committee's working group on Electronic systems and information technologies in consultation with the Secretariat.\*

Background

2. At its 18th meeting (Geneva, 2019), the Conference of the Parties adopted Decisions 18.125 to 18.128 on *Electronic systems and information technologies*:

**18.125 Directed to the Parties**

*Parties are invited to:*

- a) *consider the eCITES Implementation Framework in regard to its potential usefulness in planning and implementing electronic CITES systems and report back on which information is useful to their own particular efforts and what additional support is needed to address other issues affecting implementation such as governance structure, technical capacity, and law enforcement restrictions;*
- b) *call upon donor agencies to take note of the interest of those Management Authorities from developing countries to adopt automated, electronic permit solutions and to provide funding for the implementation of these solutions;*
- c) *consider the implementation of electronic CITES systems in a manner designed to increase transparency and efficiency of the permit issuance and control process, to prevent use of fraudulent permits, and to provide quality data for improved sustainability assessment;*
- d) *take note of the UNCTAD aCITES system (Electronic CITES Certification System) as a low cost, off-the-shelf solution that is now available to Parties for implementation;*
- e) *if using electronic CITES systems:*

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\* 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.

- i) *consider UN/CEFACT Recommendation 14 on Authentication of trade documents as good practice when implementing the electronic equivalent of signatures and seals for electronic CITES permitting systems and exchanges;*
  - ii) *authenticate each user who has access to the electronic system using username and passwords, and/or similar technologies, or both;*
  - iii) *ensure that electronic CITES systems keep an audit trail, i.e. keep electronic records (including, but not limited to, confirmation of transmission and receipt with associated time stamps and message headers) that enable the Management Authority to identify each person who requested, approved, processed, issued, endorsed, or altered electronic CITES permits and certificates;*
  - iv) *keep archives of audit trails for no fewer than five years after the expiry date of the permit or certificate, or no fewer than five years after the date that the trade was reported in the Party's annual report, whichever is later;*
  - v) *provide the CITES Secretariat with copies of all valid electronic signatures it uses for issuance of permits and certificates in accordance with Article IX (4) of the Convention and paragraph 3 q) of Resolution Conf. 12.3 (Rev. CoP18) on Permits and certificates;*
  - vi) *notify the Secretariat immediately when authenticated users are removed or no longer authenticated; and*
  - vii) *recognize that in electronic CITES systems that meet the above requirements i) – iv), the electronic equivalent of a physical signature and seal may be provided through the authenticated identification of any of the following individuals: the permit applicant; the official who issued or authorized the permit or certificate; the official who altered the permit or certificate; the issuing authority; and the inspecting official who endorsed the permit or certificate;*
- f) *establish a systematic dialogue and ongoing collaboration between their Management Authorities and their national customs and border control agencies to implement an efficient, risk-based control system for international trade in CITES-listed species where possible and appropriate; and*
- g) *provide information to the Secretariat on the state of automation of CITES permit processes and the implementation of control systems for international trade in CITES-listed species and share their lessons learned.*

**18.126 Directed to the Standing Committee and to the Secretariat**

*The Standing Committee and the Secretariat shall undertake the following tasks:*

- a) *work with the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the International Trade Centre (ITC), the World Bank, the World Customs Organization (WCO), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and other relevant partners, to continue the development of joint projects that would facilitate Parties' access to electronic permitting services and their alignment to international trade standards and norms, such as the further development and implementation of the UNCTAD aCITES system;*
- b) *work with all relevant partners on the development of standards and solutions for Electronic Permit Information eXchange (EPIX) for the exchange of CITES permits and certificates and to improve the validation of CITES permit data by CITES Management Authorities and customs officials;*
- c) *work with the Secretariat of the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), National Plant Protection Organizations (NPPOs) and other relevant organizations to exchange information and experience on the efforts towards a harmonization of standards and*

*procedures for licenses, permits and certificates frequently used in conjunction of cross-border trade in CITES-listed specimens;*

- d) monitor and advise on Parties' work related to the development of traceability systems for specimens of CITES-listed species to facilitate their harmonization with CITES permits and certificates;*
- e) support the development of the capacity of Management Authorities, especially those with the greatest needs, to electronically collect, secure, maintain, and transmit data using systems compatible with those of the Secretariat and other Management Authorities; and*
- f) make recommendations, as necessary, for the revision of Resolution Conf. 12.3 (Rev. CoP18) on Permits and certificates, Resolution Conf. 11.17 (Rev. CoP18) on National reports and the Guidelines for the preparation and submission of CITES annual reports distributed by the Secretariat.*

#### **18.127 Directed to the Secretariat**

*The Secretariat shall, subject to the availability of external funding:*

- a) organize in collaboration with the World Customs Organization and other relevant partners an international workshop on modern customs procedures for improved control of trade in CITES-listed species to simplify compliant trade and combat against illegal trade in wildlife and prepare recommendations to the Standing Committee;*
- b) work with national and international organizations, such as the World Customs Organization (WCO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the UN Regional Commissions, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the World Bank to support Parties in the implementation of efficient and risk-based procedures for control in CITES-listed species in relation to the automation of CITES permitting processes using information technologies and modern trade control procedures;*
- c) provide capacity-building and advisory services to support Parties interested in implementing electronic solutions for the management and control of CITES permits and certificates and support Parties in establishing electronic permit systems and information exchanges;*
- d) work with relevant partners to explore emerging technologies including Blockchain related technologies for secure and efficient issuance, exchange and control of CITES permits and certificates; and*
- e) submit reports on activities undertaken under Decisions 18.125, 18.126 and 18.127 and make recommendations to the Standing Committee as appropriate.*

#### **18.128 Directed to the Standing Committee**

*The Standing Committee shall review the reports and recommendations of the Secretariat under Decision 18.127, paragraph e), and make recommendations on electronic systems and information technologies as required to the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.*

#### Progress to date: Intersessional working group on Electronic systems and information technologies

3. The intersessional working group on electronic systems and information technologies, established by the Standing Committee at its 72nd meeting, provided an interim report to the 73rd meeting (SC73, online, May 2021) in document [SC73 Doc.18](#). At its meeting, the Standing Committee noted progress and agreed to propose a number of draft amendments to Resolution Conf. 12.3 (Rev. CoP18) for the consideration of the Conference of the Parties as set out in [SC73 SR](#). For ease of reference, the agreed amendments are also set out in Annex 1 to the present document. The Standing Committee also noted that further issues remained to be discussed and agreed in the working group.

4. Following the meeting of the Standing Committee in May 2021, the working group has held two more meetings online in late August and in late November 2021 to review the outcomes of SC73 and to continue its discussion on the pending issues in the implementation of Decisions 18.126 and 18.128.
5. At the meeting in August 2021, the working group reviewed and discussed the relevant findings of the study on current practices in CITES permit authentication and control undertaken by the Secretariat under Decision 18.130. The Secretariat's report on the study is contained in document SC74 Doc. 42.
6. Based on the discussions at these two meetings as well as consultations by email, the working group made further recommendations to amend the text of Resolution Conf. 12.3 (Rev. CoP18) as presented in Annex 1 to the present document. These include:
  - a) inclusion of a new preambular paragraph referring to benefits that electronic permitting systems can provide;
  - b) inclusion of a reference to the use of two-dimensional barcodes to reflect and accommodate the requirements of the electronic permits and certificates;
  - c) clarifying that the signature of the applicant on a permit is optional for a Party to include (box 4 on the standard CITES form), i.e., the CITES permit or certificate will be rendered invalid only if a place for the signature of the applicant is included but not filled;
  - d) inclusion of additional paragraphs on the required security measures and mechanisms for the electronic equivalent of original paper permits and certificates; and
  - e) clarification and consistency of terminology.
7. The working group also identified other issues *inter alia* based on the study undertaken by the Secretariat. These are summarized below and included the possible development of guidance on the dynamic use of two-dimensional barcodes, endorsement of permits and certificates (Box 14), nomenclature changes and the use of the Species+/CITES Checklist Application Programming Interface (API) and whether and how national data protection laws might be an issue for the electronic exchange of CITES permit information. The working group also considered the use of HS codes in implementing risk-based control procedures.

#### *Guidance on the use of 2-dimensional barcodes*

8. In addition to recognizing the use of 2-dimensional barcodes, such as the QR-codes, in Resolution Conf. 12.3 (Rev. CoP18), the working group recommended the development of guidance on their different dynamic uses, e.g. for the purpose of endorsement of permits and certificates. The working group agreed that such guidance could be developed and later be added to the eCITES toolkit.

#### *Endorsement/validation of permits*

9. The working group agreed that endorsement of permits and certificates at the point of export by the exporting Party is necessary and desirable and that this requirement should be maintained in Resolution Conf. 12.3 (Rev. CoP18) and on the model permit. The working group also agreed that this endorsement does not have to be physical (wet stamping) and can take other forms but did not yet agree on any guidance for this electronic/digital endorsement and suggested that possible alternatives to physical endorsement be further explored.

#### *Nomenclature changes and the use of the CITES Checklist API*

10. At its 31st meeting (online, June 2021) the Animals Committee, under the agenda item on *Listing of pangolins in the Appendices* (Decision 18.315), requested the Standing Committee's working group on electronic systems and information technologies to "*explore how Management Authorities address nomenclature changes in their electronic permitting systems*".<sup>1</sup>
11. The working group members provided views on how they address nomenclature changes in their electronic permitting systems, including the advantages and disadvantages of the use of the [CITES Checklist Application Programming Interface \(API\)](#). The API enables the Management Authorities to pull data

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<sup>1</sup> See [AC31 Sum.1\(Rev. 1\)](#).

automatically from the CITES Checklist for use in their electronic permitting systems, including information on nomenclature changes and to update the data as needed.

12. Some information on the use of the API was also collected in the context of the study on permit authentication and control and the Secretariat reached out to other Parties with e-permitting systems to collect their experiences. Members of the working group and other Parties reviewed in the study by the Secretariat had various experiences with the use of the API. These ranged from Parties depending on the API, other Parties considering integrating the API into their own system to Parties not using this at all. The United Nations Environment Programme-World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) provided responses to some of the questions and observations raised with regard to the API and invited Parties to provide any feedback on the use of the application and the guidance documents in order for UNEP-WCMC to improve these if needed.

#### *National data protection laws*

13. The working group considered whether personal data protection laws could be an issue for electronic exchange of permit data. However, at this stage, this did not seem to be the case for members of the working group and so no further work is recommended at this time.

#### *Use of Harmonized System (HS) codes*

14. A number of Parties had suggested that it should be explored whether the HS codes could be useful for the control of trade in CITES-listed species. The working group agreed that the first step would be to explore if and how Parties are currently using HS-codes in order to consider whether any further work on this issue would be warranted and proposes to include this in the draft decisions for the consideration by the Conference of the Parties.

#### *Review of the e-permitting toolkit*

15. The CITES electronic permitting toolkit v. 2.0 provides the technical specifications and standards and describes the business processes that can assist Parties in implementing their e-permitting systems. The Toolkit has not been updated since version 2.0 was published in 2013. However, as recognized in Resolution Conf. 12.3 (Rev. CoP18), the toolkit requires updates and revisions to reflect the ongoing development of international standards. The Secretariat has, therefore, in consultation with the Chair of the working group and with generous funding from Switzerland, initiated the revision of the CITES e-permitting toolkit. The revision will take into account the development of new UN/CEFACT standards as well as new guidance produced by the CITES Secretariat and be elaborated in consultation with members of the working group and other interested parties. It is expected that the revised toolkit will be available before the next meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

#### Recommendations

16. The working group invites the Standing Committee to:
  - a) take note of the present document;
  - b) propose the draft amendments to Resolution Conf. 12.3 (Rev. CoP18) on *Permits and certificates* contained in Annex 1 and the draft decisions contained in Annex 2, for the consideration of CoP19; and
  - c) agree that Decisions 18.125-128 have been implemented and propose to CoP19 that they can be deleted.

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO RESOLUTION CONF. 12.3 (REV.COP18) ON  
*PERMITS AND CERTIFICATES*

The proposed amendments set out below includes those that were agreed by the Standing Committee at its 73rd meeting (SC73SR) as well as additional amendments proposed by the working group for SC74.

- a) After the sixth preambular paragraph, insert the following new paragraph:

RECOGNIZING that electronic permitting systems can support Parties in regulating trade, in incentivizing compliance with legal trade frameworks, in monitoring the legality and sustainability of trade, including with regard to producing CITES annual trade reports, and in combatting illegal trade;

- b) Amend the tenth, eleventh and twelfth preambular paragraphs as follows (agreed by SC73):

NOTING that the *eCITES Implementation Framework, CITES electronic permitting toolkit, Guidelines and specifications for Electronic Permit Information eXchange (EPIX) of CITES permits and certificates, and the Guidance on CITES electronic signatures* provides guidance to Parties on common internationally recognized information exchange formats, protocols and standards, and electronic signatures;

RECOGNIZING the need to adopt the principles outlined in the *CITES electronic permitting toolkit above-mentioned guidance* to facilitate the exchange of information among national Management Authorities;

RECOGNIZING that ~~the CITES electronic permitting toolkit~~ this guidance will require updates and revisions to reflect the evolution of technologies and ongoing development of international standards;

- c) Amend paragraph 2 e) as follows (agreed by SC73):

- e) if a permit or certificate form, whether issued in an electronic or paper format, includes a place for the signature of the applicant, the absence of the handwritten signature or, in case of electronic forms, any electronic equivalent, should render the permit or certificate invalid, taking into account the *Guidance on CITES electronic signatures*; and

- d) In paragraph 3, insert a new subparagraph c), amend the current subparagraph c), insert two new subparagraphs after subparagraph c) and renumber the subsequent subparagraphs as follows:

- c) all Parties consider the development and use of electronic permit management systems such as those outlined in the *eCITES Implementation Framework that, inter alia, support the production of annual reports required under the provisions of Article VIII, paragraph 7 (a)*; where relevant and appropriate, Parties consider the implementation of electronic processes for permit issuance and the development and use of the electronic equivalent of paper-based permits and certificates;

- ed) Parties using or developing electronic permits and certificates, adopt the standards recommended in the *CITES electronic permitting toolkit, Guidelines and specifications for Electronic Permit Information eXchange (EPIX) of CITES permits and certificates* and the *Guidance on CITES electronic signatures*;

- e) Parties that issue electronic permits and certificates submit information to the Secretariat documenting that when their system issues electronic permits and certificates, these are the electronic equivalent of original paper permits and certificates and information on how to verify the validity of permits and certificates issued electronically;

- f) the Secretariat, via Notification, provide the information from Parties submitted under [subparagraph e] on their electronic systems;

- e) Amend paragraph 3, subparagraph n) as follows:

- n) Parties that do not already do so affix a security stamp to each permit and certificate, or add a two-dimensional barcode, or both, or use any other relevant manner to secure each permit and certificate;

- f) In paragraph 3 after the current subparagraph o), insert a new subparagraph as follows:
- AA) Parties that issue electronic permits and certificates ensure that their systems issue electronic equivalent of original paper permits and certificates, and that their systems have adequate security measures, including mechanisms that:
- i) in the case of a single-use document, prevent more than one movement under the same document; and in the case of a multiple-use document, prevent its unauthorized use;
  - ii) receive information from the importing Party when a document has been used;
  - iii) enable the authorities of any Party to verify whether the document is valid or has been used;
  - iv) contain security protocols that maintain integrity of all communications and data transfer, including use of two-dimensional barcodes;
- g) Amend the current paragraph 3, subparagraph q) to read as follows (agreed by SC73)
- q) Parties that have not yet done so communicate to the Secretariat the names of the persons empowered to sign permits and certificates, as well as three specimens of their signatures, or in case of electronic permits and certificates, the names of the empowered persons and methodologies used to authenticate them, and that all the Parties communicate, within one month of any change thereto, the names of persons who have been added to the list of those already empowered to sign, the names of persons whose signatures are no longer valid and the dates the changes took effect;
- h) Amend Annex 1, paragraph l) as follows (agreed by SC73):
- l) The name of the signatory and his/her handwritten signature for paper permits and certificates or its electronic equivalent for electronic permits and certificates taking into account the *Guidance on CITES electronic signatures*;
- i) Amend Annex 2, page 2, paragraph 4 as follows:
4. **Complete** name and address of the exporter/re-exporter. The name of the country must be stated. The absence of the signature of the applicant renders the permit or certificate invalid, if a place for the signature of the applicant is included.
- j) Amend Annex 3, page 2, paragraph 3 as follows:
3. Complete the full name, permanent address and country of the owner of the specimen covered by the certificate. Absence of the signature of the owner renders the certificate invalid, if a place for the signature of the owner is included.

DRAFT DECISIONS

Electronic systems

ELECTRONIC SYSTEMS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES

**19.AA Directed to the Parties**

Parties are invited to:

- a) use the eCITES Implementation Framework, the latest edition of the CITES electronic permitting toolkit, Guidelines and specifications for Electronic Permit Information eXchange (EPIX) of CITES permits and certificates, and the Guidance on CITES electronic signatures in planning and implementing electronic CITES systems;
- b) consider the implementation of electronic CITES systems in a manner designed to meet CITES requirements, including those provided in Resolution Conf. 12.3 (Rev. CoP18) on *Permits and certificates* to increase transparency and efficiency of the permit issuance and control process, to prevent use of fraudulent permits, and to provide quality data for reporting and improved sustainability assessment;
- c) work with the customs, National Plant Protection Organizations (NPPOs) and other relevant agencies to ensure that trade in CITES-listed specimens is in compliance with CITES requirements and, where appropriate, in line with, or integrated into, other relevant national cross-border trade systems and procedures;
- d) share experience, challenges and know-how with other Parties on the development and implementation of electronic CITES permit management systems and use of the electronic equivalent of paper-based permits and certificates, and provide inputs to the Secretariat for continuous improvement of eCITES reference materials;
- e) take note of the [eCITES BaseSolution](#) as an automated permit management system option that is now available to Parties for implementation;
- f) call upon donor countries and agencies to provide financial support towards the implementation of electronic CITES permit management systems in developing countries; and
- g) submit to the Secretariat information on the use of HS codes for risk-based control procedures.

**19.BB Directed to the Standing Committee**

The Standing Committee shall, in consultation with the Secretariat, undertake the following tasks:

- a) work with the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the International Trade Centre (ITC), the World Bank, the World Customs Organization (WCO), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Secretariat of the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), and other relevant partners, to continue the exchange of information and the development and implementation of joint projects that would facilitate Parties' access to electronic permitting systems that comply with CITES requirements and where appropriate are aligned with international trade standards and norms;
- b) work with relevant partners on the further development of standards and solutions for Electronic Permit Information eXchange (EPIX) for the exchange of CITES permit and certificate data and the improvement of the validation of CITES permit data by CITES Management Authorities and customs officials;



- c) recognizing the importance of the requirement for endorsement of permits and certificates at export, explore possible alternatives to the physical endorsement;
- d) monitor and advise on Parties' work related to the development of traceability systems for specimens of CITES-listed species to facilitate their harmonization with CITES permits and certificates;
- e) monitor the use of HS codes in implementing risk-based control procedures in different countries;
- f) support the development of the capacity of Management Authorities, especially those with the greatest needs, to electronically collect, secure, maintain, and transmit data using systems compatible with those of the Secretariat and other Management Authorities; and
- g) submit reports on activities undertaken under Decision 19.BB, paragraphs a) to f) and make recommendations to the Conference of the Parties at its 20th meeting.

**19.CC Directed to the Secretariat**

The Secretariat shall, subject to the availability of external funding:

- a) undertake a study on the information used by different Parties in a risk-based approach for CITES trade controls;
- b) collect information from Parties on any issues encountered with regard to the application of national data protection laws that affect implementation of Electronic Permit Information eXchange (EPIX) for the exchange of CITES permits and certificates;
- c) support the work of the Standing Committee under Decision 19.BB through the organization of workshops, consultations, preparation of studies and guidance materials on relevant topics as identified by the Standing Committee; and
- d) provide capacity-building and advisory services to support Parties interested in implementing electronic solutions for the management and control of CITES permits and certificates and support Parties in establishing electronic permit systems and information exchanges.