

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

Eleventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties
Gigiri (Kenya), 10-20 April 2000

Interpretation and implementation of the Convention

CITES INFORMATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Background

1. Decision 10.99 indicates that further work to develop electronically accessible information shall be undertaken as part of the Information Management Strategy (IMS).
2. At the 10th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP10) a CITES Information Management Strategy (MS) was approved. This establishes a framework for information management for the entire CITES community.
3. After CoP10, the Secretariat started implementing the IMS using feedback from the Parties. The estimated budget for Phase I at CoP10 was USD 128,000. Towards this cost, the Government of Japan made a generous contribution of USD 50,000 in September 1999.
4. At CoP10 the implementation of the IMS in two phases was presented:
 - a) in Phase I, a pilot study is to be conducted, involving a single CITES region: Africa. For the selected sub-region, a pilot study should involve:
 - i) needs assessment through a workshop on information management needs and associated training requirements; and
 - ii) analysis of Parties' needs across a range of issues (standard CITES software, permit-data sharing system, identification support system, needs for scientific data and CITES information materials); and
 - iii) identification of standard products that should be included in a CITES personal computer (e.g. Annotated Appendices and Reservations, Checklist of CITES Species, Decisions and Resolutions, permit-processing functions, annual report production functions, etc.); and
 - b) the commencement of Phase II was to be dependent on the successful implementation of the pilot study.
5. The activities currently being implemented are:
 - a) development of the CITES World Wide Web site;
 - b) a study of Internet connectivity in Africa;
 - c) a study of various initiatives to improve telecommunications in Africa;
 - d) an IMS needs-assessment workshop for West Africa was implemented in Accra, Ghana, in December 1999; and
 - e) WCMC has prepared a report on the various functions and associated data products required in a simple personal computer (PC). The report also presents the suggested PC configuration.

CITES Web site

Progress to date

6. The CITES Web site became operational in 1997 and is at the URL address: <http://www.cites.org>. The site offers a large variety of CITES standard documents including the text of the Convention, the CITES appendices, Checklist of CITES species and the Annotated Appendices and Reservations, the CITES Directory, CITES Decisions and Resolutions, etc.
7. The site is frequently updated with the text of CITES Notifications to the Parties and the documents of CITES meetings. The most recent additions of this type have been the official documents of the 42nd Meeting of the Standing Committee, the Proceedings of the ninth meeting of the Plants Committee, the CITES Newsletter, a training package, information about MIKE and, since November 1999, all documentation related to CoP11.
8. The Secretariat has striven to ensure that all the information presented is available in English, French and Spanish wherever possible.
9. Clearly the CITES Web site is becoming the central core for CITES data and information transfer, and its evolution will continue. The CITES Internet services are now completely integrated within the IMS.

Future developments

10. The proposed activities listed below indicate the next steps to be taken in the implementation of the CITES IMS. Parties are invited to agree to this list and to assist the Secretariat to further improve the CITES Web site. It is expected that the current core funding to maintain the CITES Web site will continue. If the activities below are endorsed by the Conference of the Parties, they will be implemented only when external funds are found.
11. A CITES Web site that services all Parties: Whilst the long-term vision is to make extensive use of the Internet for the management of information in support of CITES, the Secretariat needs to recognize and overcome the current barriers to full Internet use by all the Parties. These include:
 - a) the wide variety of telecommunication infrastructures – availability, reliability and quality of connection;
 - b) the range of computer systems in use and their availability in the field;
 - c) the cost of Internet access; and
 - d) the sustainability of the mechanism for providing telecommunication connections.
12. The CITES IMS takes into consideration the needs of all Parties, in particular those having the greatest need for CITES data and information.
13. While the main strategy is focused on making the CITES Web site the primary resource for information and data dissemination, such a strategy must facilitate the extraction of data from the site and its transmission by mail or electronic media to support those Parties not having access to the Internet.
14. On a regular basis 'mirror copies' of the CITES Web site will be made available on CD to provide support to those Parties having the facilities to be able to manage data and information in that format.
15. The Secretariat also intends to continue providing information in printed form or via e-mail, to ensure that no Party is excluded from the dissemination of information.
16. Through the CITES Web site, additional CITES information e.g. 'The Evolution of CITES' will also be made available.

17. Estimated external funding required: CHF 20,000 (yearly).
18. A continuous evolution using latest technology: Since 1997, when the CITES Web site was initiated, Internet has evolved significantly. New techniques are now available that greatly simplify the presentation of information and the search for it.
19. Up to now the CITES Web site has presented all the information only in simple text format. It is intended to enhance this presentation by greater use of colours, images and other graphics without compromising the current high speed under which the current site operates. There is an important reason behind the current design: a significant number of CITES authorities only have limited access to the Internet, which restricts their ability to view complex Internet pages with sophisticated graphics.
20. Jointly with the Secretariat, WCMC is developing and testing a 'new look' for the CITES Web site. The new look will allow the user to choose the appropriate level of sophistication adapted to their situation. For Parties with high speed connections to the Internet, this will allow the Party to see all the CITES Web site with full colours, graphics, images and icons. The Secretariat encourages Parties to provide continuous feedback about the presentation and content of the CITES Web site.
21. Estimated external funding required: CHF 30,000 (yearly).
22. Servicing a wider audience of users: Up to now most of the information contained within the site has been targeted at CITES authorities and produced by the Secretariat.
23. The IMS needs to support the Parties in distributing information that they possess as well as the information held by the Secretariat.
24. Similarly the IMS should examine and support the development of local copies of the CITES Web site in each region to enable easier, quicker access. Based on the current design, it is entirely feasible, for example, for a country to implement its own mirror of the CITES Web site. This may provide quicker access and help to avoid expensive telecommunication costs that exist in some regions.
25. Reflecting the success of the Internet, a wide audience of users visit the CITES site. Journalists, researchers, teachers and students from universities, NGOs, school children and the general public are now frequent visitors. In order to respond to Decision 10.95, to enhance the public understanding of various CITES issues, the CITES Web site will be extended to cover the common needs of all these new audiences. Easy-to-read sections with illustrative images about the main CITES goals, emphasising the objectives of conservation, and sustainable use should be developed and made available. The need to provide general information on CITES to improve public awareness will also be taken into consideration.
26. CITES Parties that already have relevant materials are encouraged to work with the Secretariat in the development of these sections for the CITES Web site.
27. Estimated external funding required: CHF 40,000 (yearly).
28. CITES toolkits and other material: Until now little of the CITES information has been presented in a user-friendly and attractive format. It is therefore proposed to create and make available on the CITES Web site, simple toolkits. These will include a CITES presentation, information on CITES implementation, the role of the Management Authority, the role of the Scientific Authority, non detriment findings, basic CITES legislation, the Conference of the Parties, the Standing Committee, the appendices, etc. Parties already having this material are encouraged to work jointly with the Secretariat in order to update and disseminate it.
29. Estimated external funding required: CHF 50,000.
30. Sharing information and expertise among Parties: One important element of the CITES IMS is the provision of access to all relevant information. The CITES Web site will provide the necessary infrastructure for Parties to include their own relevant information e.g. stricter domestic measures, CITES-related workshops, possibilities to obtain grants for CITES-related projects, illegal trade and

seizures, etc. In addition the CITES Web site will provide the platform for the CITES regions to share information. Certain countries already have computerized applications available to support CITES implementation (e.g. for issuing CITES permits, managing databases on CITES-listed species, etc.). Parties are encouraged to assist other Parties that wish to start using such applications.

31. Accessing other sources of information: One of the major advantages of the Internet is the possibility to direct visitors to other sources of information (e.g. other Web sites). Currently the CITES Web site points to a number of relevant sites (e.g. TRAFFIC, WCO, Interpol, IUCN, etc.). Parties wishing to share their Internet resources and information are encouraged to work with the Secretariat.
32. Estimated external funding required: none (included in the maintenance costs).
33. The harmonization among biodiversity related Conventions, a continuous process: The CITES Web site has been designed in such a way that it complies with the harmonization process between the biodiversity-related conventions. Currently the CITES site shares common information pages. The process of sharing data and information between UNEP and the biodiversity-related conventions will continue and be strengthened.
34. Estimated external funding required: CHF 20,000 (yearly).
35. Provision to Parties of the necessary computer equipment: There are many potential donors of computer equipment. Parties are encouraged to approach them with solid project proposals. Should the Secretariat become aware of any initiatives that may potentially assist CITES Parties with the acquisition of computer equipment, it will inform all interested Parties.
36. Assisting Parties to acquire the information management skills: The Secretariat and WCMC will jointly seek external funding to enable the organization of a series of workshops. These workshops on information management will be implemented under the leadership of WCMC. They will include the dissemination of relevant training material. Feedback from these workshops on the needs of Parties will be communicated to the Secretariat.
37. No estimate can be provided since the costs will depend on the number of participants, travel allowance, material costs, etc.
38. A process for all Parties: A successful IMS must involve all Parties. In order to become a useful and powerful tool, it must have wide participation and close co-ordination. The IMS has the potential to create enormous savings in efficiency as well as to improve the effectiveness of the Convention. Parties having the necessary expertise are encouraged to share their knowledge with other Parties by working in close contact with the Secretariat.
39. The CITES IMS is not a centralized mechanism, it should be seen as an enabling framework within which the Parties share their expertise, their lessons learnt and their data and information with the purpose of improving their own efficiency and effectiveness in implementing CITES.
40. The securing of the financial resources to implement not only the activities mentioned herein but also future improvements, remains a challenge. As mentioned in this document, if the maintenance of the CITES Web site is secured, all other activities are foreseen to be implemented when external funding is secured. The CITES IMS brings additional work to the Secretariat that, if implemented correctly, will bring immediate benefit to all Parties. The minimum additional human resources required are being requested in the budget document through the appointment of an Information Officer.