

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

Thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties
Bangkok (Thailand), 2-14 October 2004

Interpretation and implementation of the Convention

Species trade and conservation issues

CONSERVATION OF *SAIGA TATARICA*

1. This document has been submitted by Ireland (on behalf of the Member States of the European Community).

Species background

2. The saiga antelope (*Saiga tatarica*) was included in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) on 16 February 1995. The listing proposal had been adopted unanimously at the ninth Conference of the Parties (Fort Lauderdale, 1994).
3. Range States of the species are Kazakhstan, Mongolia, the Russian Federation, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. However, the numbers and the range of the saiga antelope have declined considerably in recent decades, and its unfavourable conservation status is of great concern in many parts of its current range. Saiga antelope populations numbered over one million as recently as the early 1990s, but have been reduced to only a small fraction of that number over the last four years. The total population estimate for 2000 was 178,000. In Kazakhstan alone, there has been a complete collapse of the saiga antelope population from about 800,000 in 1996 to about 25,000 in 2003. The decline in saiga antelope numbers in the Republic of Kalmykia in the Russian Federation has been even more dramatic – from around 220,000 in 1996 to only around 12,000 today. Population reductions have come about primarily as a result of excessive hunting. IUCN has recently determined that the species is critically endangered.
4. Poaching and illegal trade in horns and other products, uncontrolled hunting, destruction of habitats, and construction of irrigation channels, roads and other obstacles preventing natural dispersion and migration have all contributed to the recent declines of populations of the saiga antelope.
5. Economic hardship, impoverishment of local communities, and poor land use planning are root causes that need to be addressed to preserve the saiga antelope. Furthermore continuing impoverishment of the rural population on a large scale have led to extensive poaching, including of the saiga antelope for meat and horns. This unfavourable development has to some extent been facilitated by the breakdown of the governmental anti-poaching system.
6. To improve the protection of the saiga antelope and its habitat within each range State there is an urgent need of regional cooperation for its conservation, restoration and sustainable use, including international trade. Both Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation have already taken positive steps such as voluntarily suspending exports of specimens of the saiga antelope. Nevertheless, populations have continued to decline, in some areas precipitously.
7. Coordinated and concerted national and transboundary actions by the authorities of the range States responsible for conserving and managing saiga antelope populations, sub-regional, regional and international organizations such as the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), trade and business associations, local populations, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders, are all needed to enhance the conservation, recovery and sustainable use of the saiga antelope and of the

habitats and ecosystems that are important for the species' long-term survival. These actions are of conservation urgency if the species is to recover and avoid the otherwise inevitable inclusion in CITES Appendix I.

Multilateral actions

8. Due to excessive over-harvesting, poaching and illegal trade, the CITES Parties included the saiga antelope in the review of significant trade in specimens of Appendix-II species, which culminated in the recommendation at the 45th meeting of the Standing Committee (Paris, June 2001) that trade in the saiga antelope, including parts and derivatives thereof, from Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation should be suspended. Both countries had already voluntarily suspended legal exports.
9. To address this problem further, an international workshop on saiga conservation was convened in May 2002 in Elista, Russian Federation. The workshop was convened at the initiative of and was hosted by the Government of the Republic of Kalmykia of the Russian Federation. The Committee of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Ministry of Natural Resources of the Russian Federation assisted in bringing the workshop to fruition. The workshop was held under the auspices of both CMS and CITES, and was sponsored financially by a number of organizations, including Conservation Force, IUCN, WWF International, the Large Herbivore Initiative of WWF, the Safari Club of Houston and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
10. The workshop achieved excellent cooperation among the five range States. A Memorandum of Understanding among four of the range States was drafted, as was an Action Plan concerning conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of the saiga antelope. Many activities are listed in this Action Plan, of which some are relevant to CMS, some to CITES and some to domestic management. It is of utmost importance that the range States sign this Action Plan and implement it as a matter of urgency. A draft resolution of the International Workshop on Saiga Conservation was also produced by the participants in the workshop.
11. At the 12th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP12, Santiago, 2002), the United States of America distributed information document CoP12 Inf. 39 on *Saiga tatarica*: summary of the CITES-sponsored workshop in Kalmykia in May 2002 and presentation of the draft conservation action plan.
12. Document CoP12 Inf. 39 contained as annexes the three documents from the Elista Workshop (Annex 1: Resolution of the International Workshop on Saiga Conservation; Annex 2: Draft Action Plan concerning Conservation, Restoration, and Sustainable Use of the Saiga Antelope (*Saiga tatarica tatarica*); and Annex 3: Draft Memorandum of Understanding). The document was intended to inform CITES Parties of the favourable outcome of the May 2002 Workshop.
13. Since CoP12, the United States of America submitted document AC19 Doc. 8.6 at the 19th meeting of the Animals Committee (Geneva, August 2003) entitled Conservation of *Saiga tatarica*. That document included the aforementioned draft Action Plan and Memorandum of Understanding. The CITES Animals Committee discussed the issue at its 19th meeting in great detail, in particular the precipitous continuing declines in the species population, and agreed unanimously and among other things to the following:
 - a) The saiga antelope is a species of great conservation urgency.
 - b) The conservation crisis around the saiga antelope should be brought as a matter of urgency to the attention of the CITES Standing Committee, for action and follow-up.
 - c) Consumer countries, and issues of demand, markets and illegal trade, should be addressed by the Secretariat and the Standing Committee.
 - d) Range States should be encouraged to sign the saiga antelope MoU.
 - e) The Animals Committee Chairman and the Secretariat should evaluate those recommendations in the Action Plan that concern CITES, and send them to the Standing Committee as a matter of priority for action as appropriate.

14. The CITES Secretariat provided an oral update at the 50th meeting of the CITES Standing Committee (Geneva, March 2004). However, the Standing Committee did not take any specific action.

Recommendation

15. The issue of the conservation of the saiga antelope is a matter of urgent concern. The population decline is an ongoing process despite the fact that the species has been listed in Appendix II of CITES since the beginning of 1995. Therefore the conservation efforts cannot be limited to the CITES Animals Committee's significant trade review, which deals with the appropriate issuance of non-detriment findings. It is rather a serious matter of enforcement, regional conservation and urgent conservation interventions. Only urgent action will prevent the species from being included in CITES Appendix I, or from declining further towards extinction.
16. Therefore it is recommended that the Conference of the Parties adopt the draft decisions outlined in the Annex.

COMMENTS FROM THE SECRETARIAT

- A. The Secretariat concurs with the view expressed in this document that the conservation status of *Saiga tatarica* is of urgent concern owing to overexploitation for domestic and international trade and habitat degradation, and that the CITES community should act collectively and decisively to improve the situation.
- B. The Standing Committee recommended in June 2001 to all Parties to suspend all imports of specimens of *Saiga tatarica* from the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan until these two range States had complied with certain recommendations, including the implementation of a regional conservation strategy for the species. However, these two Parties have still not complied with these recommendations. Moreover China seems to have continued to import large quantities of saiga horn from Kazakhstan after the recommended trade suspension: UNEP-WCMC data show that Kazakhstan reported the export of 19,000 kg to China in 2001; Hong Kong (China) reported the importation of 3,000 kg from Kazakhstan in 2002; and Kazakhstan reported the export of 9,500 kg to China in 2003. These transactions call into question the commitment of Kazakhstan to suspend exports of specimens of the saiga antelope (referred to in paragraph 6 of this document), and the ability of China to comply with the Standing Committee's recommendations. The Secretariat recommends that CITES efforts to conserve the saiga antelope focus on the three Parties mentioned above.
- C. The Secretariat generally agrees with the recommendations presented in the Annex to the document, but they may need to be strengthened and reworded to make them clearer.
- D. The draft decision directed to the range States does not seem to take into consideration that the MoU and Action Plan mentioned in paragraph a) concern *Saiga tatarica tatarica* and its range States Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, but excludes Mongolia where the subspecies *Saiga tatarica mongolica* occurs. It would be advisable to reword the draft decision to urge Mongolia to participate in the implementation of those elements in the Action Plan that are relevant to its population of saiga antelope. The Secretariat furthermore recommends to include time-frames in paragraph b) and to clarify the purpose of and actions required by range States in paragraphs c) and d).
- E. As explained above, Mongolia should be referred to in the draft decision directed to the Secretariat. In addition, the Secretariat is of the opinion that the assistance and assessment it is called to provide should include missions to key Parties *inter alia* to: verify species conservation and management efforts, enforcement actions and stocks of specimens of saiga; enhance implementation of the Action Plan and compliance with recommendations of the Standing Committee; and generate national and regional support.
- F. The Secretariat suggests the establishment of a working group at CoP13, comprising the authors of the document, representatives of range States of the saiga antelope and key importing Parties, that should review the draft decisions in the Annex to this document.

DRAFT DECISIONS OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES

Directed to all range States of *Saiga tatarica*

- 13.xx a) All range States are urged to sign immediately the Memorandum of Understanding drafted at the workshop in Elista, Kalmykia in May 2002 and to implement the saiga antelope Action Plan in order to restore the habitat and populations of the antelope, and enhance transboundary and international cooperation through *inter alia* a regional conservation and management strategy.
- b) Furthermore range States are requested to report about their actions and the results which were reached to the Secretariat and the Standing Committee.
- c) All range States are urged to provide and circulate incentives about the legal use of the saiga antelope and parts and derivatives thereof.
- d) Range States are requested to solve their implementation problems in close cooperation with the Secretariat, other competent Management Authorities and non-governmental organizations.

Directed to the Secretariat

- 13.xx The Secretariat shall:
- a) address the CITES-relevant aspects of the Action Plan and of the Memorandum of Understanding;
- b) regularly assist with the assessment of the implementation of the Action Plan and Memorandum of Understanding;
- c) provide, as required, assistance to the saiga antelope range States as a matter of priority;
- d) intensify the cooperation with the Secretariat of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), on issues pertaining to the saiga antelope, including but not limited to the implementation of the saiga antelope Action Plan and Memorandum of Understanding between the two conventions; and
- e) report at the subsequent meetings of the CITES Standing Committee and the 14th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

Directed to the Standing Committee

- 13.xx The Standing Committee shall discuss the issue and recommend appropriate action at its meetings between the 13th and the 14th meetings of the Conference of the Parties.

Directed to the Parties

- 13.xx Importing Parties with high volumes of trade in traditional medicine should provide in their biennial reports specific information on steps they are taking to control illegal trade in parts and derivatives of the saiga antelope.
- 13.xx Donor Parties, aid agencies and non-governmental organizations are urged to assist range States in any way possible with the conservation of this species, including the provision of:
- a) funding;
- b) enforcement and anti-poaching assistance;

- c) training and capacity building;
- d) equipment, particularly for anti-poaching activities;
- e) assistance with education and public awareness;
- f) assistance with population monitoring; and
- g) gathering and exchange of scientific, technical, and legal information and expertise.