CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES
OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA
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Sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties
Bangkok (Thailand), 3-14 March 2013

Interpretation and implementation of the Convention

Trade control and marking

ELECTRONIC PERMITTING

1.   This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.

Background

2.   At its 15th meeting (CoP15, Doha, 2010), the Conference of the Parties adopted Decisions 15.54 to 15.56 on *Electronic permitting*. Decision 15.56 is directed to the Secretariat as follows:

> *In collaboration with the Working Group on Information Technologies and Electronic Systems, the Secretariat shall, subject to external funding:*
>
> *a)   update the CITES electronic toolkit according to new electronic permitting standards and norms;*
>
> *b)   work with relevant international organizations and initiatives related to electronic permitting systems to raise awareness of CITES business procedures and permitting requirements; and*
>
> *c)   organize capacity-building workshops to assist Parties in using the CITES electronic permitting toolkit to develop, implement or update electronic permitting systems.*

3.   Summaries of activities undertaken in support of Decisions 15.54 and 15.55, directed to Parties and to the Standing Committee respectively, are available in the reports of the Chair of the Working Group on Information Technologies and Electronic Systems in documents SC61 Doc. 33[1] and SC62 Doc. 32[2], submitted at the 61st and 62nd meetings of the Standing Committee (SC61, Geneva, August 2011, and SC62, Geneva, July 2012, respectively).

4.   In collaboration with this Working Group, the Secretariat hired a consultant to update the CITES electronic toolkit with electronic permitting standards and norms. The toolkit will be completed in November 2012 and will include standards related to UN/EDIFACT (the United Nations rules for Electronic Data Interchange for Administration, Commerce and Transport)[3]. Many Parties are using UN/EDIFACT, and the inclusion of this standard in the CITES e-permitting toolkit will facilitate development of e-permitting systems. The Secretariat is thankful to the European Commission for its financial contribution in support of this project.

5.   The new version of the toolkit will also be available in PDF and HTML formats to facilitate its use and dissemination.

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[1]   http://www.cites.org/eng/com/sc/61/E61-33.pdf.

[2]   http://www.cites.org/eng/com/SC/62/E62-32.pdf.

[3]   *UN/EDIFACT comprises a set of internationally agreed standards, directories and guidelines for the electronic interchange of structured data, and in particular that related to trade in goods and services between independent, computerized information systems. (http://www.unece.org/tradewelcome/areas-of-work/un-centre-for-trade-facilitation-and-e-business-uncefact/outputs/standards/unedifact/tradeedifactrules/tradeedifactrules.html).*

6. The Secretariat, with the assistance of the Working Group, submitted a Data Maintenance Request (DMR) to the World Customs Organization (WCO) with a view to integrating CITES e-permitting recommendations into the forthcoming WCO Data Model Version 3. It also discussed how WCO could assist with the participation of Customs in the joint project to exchange CITES export permit data electronically, and invited WCO to join the Working Group.

7. Submission of the DMR was successful and WCO accepted the invitation of the Chair to join the Working Group. Recommendations on standards related to the development of e-permitting systems in the CITES e-permitting toolkit will be included in the WCO Data Model Version 3, tentatively scheduled for release in October 2012. Inclusion of CITES e-permitting standards with the WCO model was described by the WCO as making it "easier for CITES Parties to develop e-permitting systems that are fully harmonized with international standards and to Single Windows. It also paves the way for other multilateral environmental agreements to make use of the framework provided by the WCO data model."[4]

8. With regard to work with relevant international organizations and initiatives related to electronic permitting, the Secretariat continues to work with WCO and with the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) to raise awareness of CITES business procedures and permitting requirements. In support of the above, and at the invitation of WCO, the Secretariat participated as a keynote speaker in the World Customs and Trade Forum, which was held in Guangzhou, China, from 24 to 25 November 2011.

9. The Secretariat has met frequently with staff of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and also attended meetings of UN/CEFACT working groups to discuss collaboration and to ensure that CITES e-permitting standards are aligned with UN/CEFACT recommendations. The Secretariat is also discussing with UNECE and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP) possible participation in the UNNExT (United Nations Network of Experts for Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific)[5] initiative.

10. UNNExT was established by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). It focuses on training, knowledge sharing and the application of international standards developed by UN/CEFACT, WCO and other relevant organizations.

11. The Secretariat is also working with regional organizations such as the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) to facilitate the development and use of CITES e-permitting system. Toward this end, the ACTO and the Secretariat developed a project to assist ACTO member countries to develop harmonized e-permitting systems that are harmonized with international standards and norms.

12. This project is aimed at assisting ACTO member States to develop electronic CITES permitting systems for the traceability of specimens of CITES-listed species in international trade. The exchange of technologies and expertise in the region is expected to enhance the ability of countries to reduce fraud and illegal international trade in wild animals and plants. The project is co-funded by the European Community and the Amazon Regional Program (DGIS/BMZ/GIZ) of Germany and the Netherlands.

13. Collaboration continues with the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) on enhancement of the Electronic Permit Information eXchange (EPIX)[6]. The Working Group is examining the possibility of expanding EPIX to provide Management Authorities and Customs officials with a clearing-house of CITES e-permits and certificates. In this manner, they would have access to CITES documentation, thereby facilitating the authentication and revision of the document.

14. The Secretariat continues to assist the Czech Republic, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in the project to exchange CITES export permit data electronically. The project became operational in May 2010 and continues to progress, with discussions with Customs authorities regarding their possible participation. Guatemala and Thailand have expressed interest in joining the project, and the Working Group is examining how to facilitate participation. However, lack of funding to attend meetings of the Working Group where project activities are discussed has prevented full participation by these countries.

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4   *http://www.cites.org/eng/news/pr/2012/20120514_e-permitting-meet.php.*

5   *http://www.unescap.org/unnext/unnext.asp.*

6   *http://epix.unep-wcmc.org/.*

15. Special focus was placed on efforts to enhance the capacities of developing countries to use CITES e-permitting systems. The Secretariat and UNEP-WCMC have drafted a project concept note to use EPIX as an out-of-the-box virtual CITES e-permitting system for least developed countries. The system could be customized to a country's need and offer a fully functioning CITES e-permitting system that is harmonized with international standards and norms. Countries in Africa and Asia have expressed interest in participating in a pilot project using a virtual e-permitting system based on EPIX.

16. In collaboration with ACTO, the Secretariat participated in a capacity-building workshop on CITES e-permitting systems in Brasilia, Brazil, from 26 to 28 October 2011. Participation by the Secretariat was made possible through the generous support of the European Commission. During this meeting, Brazil offered to share its expertise and technology with countries in the region. Ecuador and Colombia also offered to share their expertise with current projects related to the establishment of Single Windows. A joint ACTO-Secretariat project to develop CITES e-permitting systems for member countries and emphasizing South-South collaboration is one of the outcomes of this meeting and is described in paragraph 11 above.

17. The Secretariat and China organized a meeting on the development of e-permitting systems for countries targeted under the European Commission capacity-building project on *Strengthening the CITES implementation capacity of developing countries to ensure sustainable wildlife management and non-detrimental trade*. The meeting was made possible through the generous financial contribution of China and the European Commission. Brazil and Namibia participated in the meeting with a view to discussing the possibility of implementing a project based on South-South cooperation. The Chair of the Working Group, UNEP-WCMC and WCO also participated in this meeting.

18. The Working Group met several times, with support from the Secretariat, to discuss the implementation of activities and to plan new activities, particularly through the establishment of partnerships. The Working Group, as stated by the Chair in its report for SC62, believes that the advent of CITES e-permitting systems will impact positively on enforcement of and compliance with the Convention by making CITES permits easier to authenticate by relevant authorities and harder to forge. Furthermore, the data provided by e-permits will allow for better monitoring of the levels of international trade in CITES-listed species and so assist with non-detriment findings and the Review of Significant Trade. The issue of enhancement of capacities in developing countries was discussed at length by the Working Group and the Secretariat. Agreement was reached to submit capacity-building projects to funding agencies, such as the Inter-American Development Bank and the Asian Development Bank, as well as the private sector.

19. The CITES Secretariat met with the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity to discuss lessons learned in the development and implementation of CITES e-permitting systems and the use of an internationally recognized certificate of compliance, in accordance with Article 17 (*Monitoring the Utilization of Genetic Resources*), paragraph 3, of the *Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization to the Convention on Biological Diversity*. During the same mission, the Secretariat also made a presentation on CITES e-permitting systems, the WCO data model and lessons learned to participants in the ninth meeting of the Compliance Committee under the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (Montreal, May 2012).

20. At its 62nd meeting, the Standing Committee noted the report from the Chair of the Working group and agreed to invite the Conference of the Parties at the present meeting to extend the mandate of the Working Group.

Recommendation

21. The Conference of the Parties is invited adopt the draft decision presented in the Annex in order to enable Parties to develop CITES electronic permitting systems that are interoperable and compliant with international standards and norms.

22. The Secretariat is of the opinion that Decisions 15.54 and 15.55 have been implemented and can be deleted.

DRAFT DECISION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES

Electronic permitting

Directed to the Standing Committee

16.XX   The Standing Committee shall extend the mandate of its Working Group on Information Technologies and Electronic Systems in order for it to perform the following tasks:

a) collaborate with the CITES Secretariat in the drafting of funding proposals related to the development of CITES e-permitting systems;

b) work with the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business, the World Customs Organization and other relevant organizations to ensure that CITES e-permits are aligned with international trade standards and norms;

c) collaborate with the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre to further develop the Electronic Permit Information eXchange to act as a clearing-house of CITES e-permits and certificates and to offer Parties in developing regions a ready-to-use electronic CITES permitting system;

d) work with the CITES Secretariat to ensure that the CITES toolkit is updated as necessary; and,

e) support the participation in the Working Group of developing countries party to CITES.