

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



Sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties
Bangkok (Thailand), 3-14 March 2013

Interpretation and implementation of the Convention

Species trade and conservation

Sturgeons and paddlefish

REPORT OF THE ANIMALS COMMITTEE

1. This document has been submitted by the Animals Committee*.

Background

2. In Resolution Conf. 12.7 (Rev. CoP14) on *Conservation of and trade in sturgeons and paddlefish*, the Conference of the Parties:

DIRECTS the Animals Committee, in collaboration with the Secretariat, interested Parties, international organizations and relevant experts, to monitor progress on the relevant provisions of this Resolution and to carry out on a three-year cycle starting in 2008, and using information from preceding years, an evaluation of the assessment and the monitoring methodologies used for stocks of Acipenseriformes species subject to the provisions under RECOMMENDS further, paragraph a), above;

URGES range States to cooperate with the Animals Committee and the Secretariat with a view to implementing the provisions under RECOMMENDS further, paragraph a), and the paragraph DIRECTS the Animals Committee above;

DIRECTS the Animals Committee to provide to the Standing Committee its recommendations on actions to be taken based upon the above-mentioned monitoring of progress and three-year cycle evaluation;

CALLS UPON range States, importing countries and other experts and appropriate organizations, such as the IUCN/SSC Sturgeon Specialist Group, in consultation with the Secretariat and the Animals Committee, to continue to explore the development of a uniform DNA-based identification system for parts and derivatives and aquaculture stocks of Acipenseriformes species to assist in the subsequent identification of the origin of specimens in trade and the development and application of methods for differentiating wild from aquaculture origin caviar in cases where DNA-based methods are not useful;

3. The Animals Committee discussed the tasks directed to it in Resolution Conf. 12.7 (Rev. CoP14) at its 25th and 26th meetings (AC25 and AC26; Geneva, July 2011 and March 2012) on the basis of documents and studies from the Secretariat (see documents AC25 Doc. 16.1 and 16.2; and AC26 Doc. 15.1 and 15.2).

* *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.*

First DIRECTS in paragraph 2

4. Concerning the first DIRECTS mentioned in paragraph 2 above, the Animals Committee focused on the evaluation of the sturgeon stock assessment and Total Allowable Catch (TAC) determination methodology in the Caspian Sea range States. The evaluation of other stocks of *Acipenseriformes* that are shared between different range States was not initiated. In accordance with the Resolution, the Animals Committee should undertake its evaluations on a three-year cycle, and therefore conduct a second evaluation of the Caspian Sea sturgeon fishery by 2014. The timeframes for the evaluation of other stocks remain unclear.
5. Considerable external resources and efforts have been allocated to the assessment indicated in paragraph 4. These included: the implementation of a project entitled *Capacity building for the recovery and management of the sturgeon fisheries of the Caspian Sea*, through which the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) organized a *CITES/FAO Technical Workshop on Stock Assessment and TAC Methodologies* in Rome, Italy in November, 2008, and a *Technical Workshop on Survey-based Abundance Estimation Methods and Application of Modern Methods of Stock Assessment and Total Allowable Catch (TAC) Determination for Sturgeon Fisheries in the Caspian Sea* in Antalya, Turkey, in September 2009. The 58th meeting of the Standing Committee (Geneva, July 2009) had asked the Caspian range States *inter alia* to report to AC25 on progress made in improving the existing sturgeon stock assessment and Total Allowable Catch (TAC) determination methodology through a detailed report describing how the recommendations arising from the *CITES/FAO Technical Workshop on Stock Assessment and TAC Methodologies* had been implemented and whether they had been accepted by all range States. However, due to lack of cooperation and responses from some Caspian Sea range States, a general analysis of the stock assessment and Total Allowable Catch (TAC) determination for sturgeon species in the Caspian Sea was prepared under contract by the Secretariat. These inputs were extensively discussed at AC25, and recommendations for Caspian Sea range States formulated on actions to be taken based upon the above-mentioned monitoring of progress and three-year cycle evaluation (see document AC25 16.2 and the summary record of AC25).
6. The Chair of the Animals Committee provided the comprehensive recommendations to the Standing Committee at its 61st meeting of (SC61, Geneva, August 2011; see document SC61 Doc. 48.2). The Committee endorsed the recommendations and requested the Secretariat to facilitate their implementation. It noted the offer of the United States to provide funding if timelines were established for their implementation, and agreed to reconsider this matter at its 62nd meeting (SC62, Geneva, July 2012).
7. One of the recommendations endorsed by the Standing Committee was “to recommend to Caspian Sea range States to provide progress reports on an annual basis starting with the 26th Animals Committee meeting”. The Secretariat issued Notification to the Parties No. 2011/049 on 10 November 2011, reminding that Caspian range States should report on progress made in improving the existing sturgeon stock assessment and TAC determination methodology. It requested that these reports be submitted by January 2012. However, the Animals Committee established at AC26 that these range States had failed to respond to any of the Standing Committee’s recommendations.
8. At SC62, the Chair of the Animals Committee informed that limited progress has been reported since SC61 on the recommendations endorsed at that meeting, and that the Animals Committee continued to support these recommendations as important steps toward the conservation and management of sturgeon and paddlefish. The Animals Committee requested that the Standing Committee consider ways to facilitate their implementation. The Standing Committee noted the oral report of the Chair of the Animals Committee and regretted the lack of a document for this agenda item. The United States reiterated its offer expressed at SC61 to financially assist Caspian Sea range States in implementing the recommendations, provided a clear work plan and associated deadlines were established. At the time of writing of this report (September 2012), it did not seem that the Caspian Sea range States had responded positively to this invitation.
9. Concerning “monitoring of progress on the relevant provisions of the Resolution”, the Animals Committee noted that very few range States complied with the provisions to establish export quotas for caviar and meat of *Acipenseriformes* species from stocks shared between different range States, as provided in the second RECOMMENDS of Resolution Conf. 12.7 (Rev. CoP14). As a consequence, zero export quotas for meat and caviar from such stocks have been imposed in recent years. It furthermore agreed to propose the revision of some provisions in the Resolution (see ‘Recommendations’), and requested that the Secretariat continue to produce a written report at each meeting of the Animals Committee on its activities relating to the conservation of and trade in sturgeon and paddlefish.

URGES in paragraph 2

10. Concerning the URGES in paragraph 2 above, the Animals Committee regrets the overall lack of cooperation from many relevant range States with the Animals Committee and the Secretariat, as illustrated by the absence of responses or contributions in recent years from Caspian Sea range States during consultations initiated by the Animals Committee.

Second DIRECTS in paragraph 2

11. Concerning the second DIRECTS in paragraph 2, the Animals Committee submitted a report with recommendations to SC61. The Animals Committee did not provide a contribution or recommendations in writing to SC62, which was noted with regret by the Standing Committee.

CALLS UPON in paragraph 2

12. Concerning the CALLS UPON in paragraph 2, the Animals Committee did not undertake work and was not consulted about the development of a uniform DNA-based identification system for parts and derivatives and aquaculture stocks of Acipenseriformes species to assist in the subsequent identification of the origin of specimens in trade and the development and application of methods for differentiating wild from aquaculture origin caviar in cases where DNA-based methods are not useful.

Recommendations

13. At AC26, the Animals Committee agreed to a few amendments to Resolution Conf. 12.7 (Rev. CoP14), which it invites the Conference of the Parties to adopt as follows:

- In paragraph "g" under first RECOMMENDS, to delete the first sentence and three words of the second sentence for paragraph "g" to read as:

"All caviar from shared stocks subject to export quotas should be exported before the end of the quota year (1 March – last day of February) in which it was harvested and processed. For this purpose the export permits for such caviar should be valid until the last day of the quota year at the latest. Parties should not import caviar harvested or processed in the preceding quota years".

- In Annex 1, in paragraph b: the definition of non-reusable label should read as:

"Non-reusable label: any label or mark that cannot be removed or transferred undamaged to another primary container, which may seal the primary container. If the non-reusable label does not seal the primary container, caviar should be packaged in a manner that permits visual evidence of any opening of the primary container".

- The definition of secondary container should read as:

Secondary container: receptacle into which primary containers or groups of primary containers are placed.

The Animals Committee agreed that the word "non-reusable" was not correctly translated in the French version of the Resolution and recommended that this be corrected. The correct word should be "**non réutilisable**".

COMMENTS FROM THE SECRETARIAT

- A. The Secretariat agrees with the general self-assessment that the Animals Committee has made of the implementation of the provisions of Resolution Conf. 12.7 (Rev. CoP14) that are assigned to it.
- B. The observation in paragraph 12 of the present document indicates that the Animals Committee has not been consulted about DNA-based and other identification systems or methods to differentiate wild from aquacultured sturgeon specimens in trade. The Secretariat believes that this work remains relevant, particularly in view of the observed shift of trade in sturgeon specimens from wild sources to specimens

originating from captive-breeding or aquaculture operations (see also document CoP16 Doc. 60.2, *Sturgeons and paddlefish: Report of the Secretariat*). It might be useful to review identification techniques for sturgeon specimens in trade to examine how they can be applied by the Parties. However, the wording of the paragraph under 'CALLS UPON' in Resolution Conf. 12.7 (Rev. CoP14) has prompted very little action on this subject.

- C. If the Parties consider it appropriate to address the identification of sturgeon specimens, the Animals Committee, in collaboration with and assisted by the Secretariat, could be asked to examine existing DNA-based and forensic identification techniques for sturgeon specimens in trade; review relevant developments; and advise about methods that could be of use to CITES Parties. Its findings could be presented to the Standing Committee for review and communication to the Parties. In this regard, the Secretariat recommends that the Conference of the Parties adopt the following draft decisions:

Directed to the Secretariat

16.A The Secretariat shall:

- a) subject to external funding and in consultation with the Animals Committee, organize a study to:
 - (i) provide an overview of molecular, DNA-based and other forensic methods that could assist in identifying the species and populations of Acipenseriformes specimens in trade, determining the origin or age of specimens, and differentiating wild from captive-bred or aquacultured specimens;
 - (ii) review relevant developments in this area, including the availability and reliability of uniform identification systems;
 - (iii) evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of the different methods (including practicality, costs, time-efficiency, reliability, technical requirements, etc.); and
 - (iv) formulate relevant guidance for CITES Parties, enforcement agencies, the private sector and other stakeholders;
- b) ensure consultation with Parties that authorize trade in specimens of sturgeons and paddlefish, appropriate experts, institutions and organizations, and the private sector in the conduct of the study;
- c) make the results of the study available to the Animals Committee at its 27th or 28th meeting for its consideration; and
- d) disseminate the recommendations formulated by the Standing Committee pursuant to Decision 16.C in a Notification to the Parties.

Directed to the Animals Committee

- 16.B** The Animals Committee should assist the Secretariat in determining the specifications for the study referred to in decision 16.A and monitoring its conduct. It should review the report of the study at its 27th or 28th meeting, and make recommendations as appropriate for consideration by the Standing Committee.

Directed to the Standing Committee

- 16.C** The Standing Committee should review the study undertaken in accordance with Decision 16.A and the recommendations that the Animals Committee formulated in compliance with Decision 16.B, and make its own recommendations, as appropriate, for communication to Parties concerned or for consideration at the 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

- D. The Secretariat recommends that the Conference of the Parties adopt the amendments to Resolution Conf. 12.7 (Rev. CoP14) that the Animals Committee proposes in paragraph 13 of the present document. They are compatible with and complement further amendments to Resolution Conf. 12.7 (Rev. CoP14) that the Secretariat proposes in document CoP16 Doc. 60.2.

E. Recently, the Secretariat has been made aware by a Party of difficulties in applying the guidance in Annex 2 of Resolution Conf. 12.7 (Rev. CoP14) (*Identification of Acipenseriformes species, hybrids and mixed species*) for a mixture of high-quality caviar from different species of sturgeon (i.e. not 'pressed' caviar). The code 'MIX' is currently defined as "Mixed species (for 'pressed' caviar exclusively)", while 'pressed caviar' is defined as "caviar composed of unfertilized eggs (roe) of one or more sturgeon or paddlefish species, remaining after the processing and preparation of higher quality caviar" [see Resolution Conf. 12.7 (Rev. CoP14) Annex 1 *CITES guidelines for universal labelling system for the trade in and identification of caviar*]. When the definition of 'MIX' was discussed and agreed upon by the Conference of the Parties in 2002 (see document CoP12 Doc. 42.2), 'pressed caviar' was the only known product in trade that included roe from different species. The Secretariat believes that it was not the intention to ban any particular sturgeon or paddlefish specimen or type of caviar from international trade, and that solutions must be found for new products in trade. A manner to resolve this matter might be to amend Annex 2 of Resolution Conf. 12.7 (Rev. CoP14) as follows (text to be deleted is ~~crossed out~~; proposed new text is underlined):

Mixed species (including for 'pressed' caviar exclusively) MIX