

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

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THE ROLE OF CITES IN THE CONSERVATION OF MARINE FISHES  
SUBJECT TO INTERNATIONAL TRADE

1. This document has been submitted by the United States, in relation to the amendment proposals to include marine fish species in Appendix II of CITES.
2. CITES Parties are invited to consider the attached summary of a scholarly paper recently accepted for publication in the scientific journal *Fish and Fisheries*. The full paper may be accessed at <http://seahorse.fisheries.ubc.ca/CITES-Marine-Fishes>.

## **The role of CITES in the conservation of marine fishes subject to international trade**

*This document represents an executive summary of the following scholarly paper:*

Vincent, A.C.J., Y.J. Sadovy. S.L. Fowler & S. Lieberman. In press. The role of CITES in the conservation of marine fishes subject to international trade. *Fish and Fisheries*. Accepted 1 March 2013.

*The full paper can be found at <http://seahorse.fisheries.ubc.ca/CITES-Marine-Fishes>. The authors hope this summary may contribute to the discussion on marine fish issues at CoP16.*

The scale and urgency of the crisis in marine biodiversity and food security argues that the global community should use CITES effectively, while also drawing on all other possible tools at its disposal.

CITES currently regulates the international trade of very few marine fish species, by listing them in its Appendices. After CoP1 in 1976, no new fully marine fish taxa were added to the CITES Appendices until CoP12 in 2002, when Parties placed seahorses (*Hippocampus* spp), whale shark (*Rhincodon typus*) and basking shark (*Cetorhinus maximus*) on Appendix II. Progress has continued haltingly, adding only the white shark (*Carcharodon carcharias*), humphead wrasse (*Cheilinus undulatus*), and sawfishes (family Pristidae) by 2012. Most of the listing proposals for marine fishes rejected in Committee achieved at least a simple majority (50% of all votes plus one vote), even where they did not get the necessary two-thirds majority.

There is clearly a need to understand why CITES regulates the international trade of so few marine species. Therefore, we assessed the relevance and applicability of CITES as a complementary tool for fisheries management. Our analysis of the history of CITES involvement with marine fishes indicated that Parties may wish to consider the following information in making their decisions about CITES action for marine fishes:

### **Analysis of common CoP discussion points about relevance of CITES for marine fishes**

- While many marine fish species are quite resilient to over-fishing, others – the ones CITES is most likely to consider – have life histories and behaviours that carry a higher risk of declines to population collapse and extirpation. Sharks, in particular, are easily depleted and are slow to recover from the effects of overfishing.
- We cannot assume that fisheries will automatically reduce their effort as a fish species of concern become rarer. Fisheries may continue (and even intensify) when numbers are very low because there are subsidies to keep fishing, few economic options to leave fishing, the fish become more valuable as they get rarer, many people are racing to fish, and the fish is caught with other species that are more abundant.
- The quantity and quality of data required by CITES is no greater than that required for national or regional fisheries management or for contributions to FAO record keeping.
- The data, funding and attention to capacity building (and identification guides) that can follow CITES listings aid in reporting and stock assessments.
- Performance analyses have shown that both CITES and IUCN criteria are well-aligned with fisheries reference points, with all agreeing in signaling concern
- National fisheries agencies responsible for sustainable use could be greatly assisted by the additional oversight – and complementary support – brought by a CITES listing.
- CITES action and implementation complements the work done by Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs).
- RFMOs are generally limited to certain species, fewer Parties than CITES, and a subset of vessels that fish in that region – and do not cover the entire global ocean.

- FAO serves a vital role in capacity building and technical support but it is not a management body and there are no plans to direct it to engage in the management of marine fishes of conservation concern.
- The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the CITES Secretariat and FAO (signed in 2006) provides for dialogue and consultation on commercially-exploited aquatic species (CITES 2006)

### **Analysis of common discussion points about implementation of CITES for marine fishes**

- Parties may often have a greater capacity and information base for implementing CITES listings for marine fishes than for many terrestrial species, because they are already required to have protocols for tracking and controlling fish landings and trades as part of their national fisheries management and reporting, and to implement RFMO agreements and various FAO Plans of Action.
- CITES non-detriment findings can be developed for marine fishes by application of existing fishery sciences methods and approaches
- CITES Authorities may defer to any other expert as a named Authority, so can certainly include fisheries experts in their assessments and permitting procedures.
- Problems of identification have long beset CITES for all taxa, and Parties are experienced in dealing with these issues, with identification guides and other tools.
- Dealing with bycatch is problematic, in all fisheries management. By itself, a quota for export (one approach to making NDFs) is unlikely to relieve pressure on species taken as bycatch. An integrated approach will be needed.

Although implementation of fish listings is still relatively new and the anticipated benefits to follow are still largely untested, there are already indications that CITES' involvement – even in the form of a discussion about listing – may help to alleviate some of the pressure on wild populations of anadromous fish, marine fish and marine invertebrates. As CITES engages with more marine fish listings, there will be more scope to analyse its effectiveness in supporting different taxa in different contexts.

The tendency of some Parties to place full responsibility for marine fishes within other international or RFMO agreements misses the opportunities presented by using CITES. CITES has the legal remit and competence to manage international trade, while RFMOs manage the fisheries themselves. Such complementarity is important because Parties that cannot make NDFs for Appendix II-listed species will also need help in managing their fisheries for sustainability.

In summary, CITES action can support other international fisheries management measures. Given the crises in marine fish conservation and fisheries, CITES' further engagement with these animals should not wait for long-term analysis of current listings.

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