Eighteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties
Colombo (Sri Lanka), 23 May – 3 June 2019

Species specific matters
Sharks and rays (Elasmobranchii spp.)

REPORT OF THE ANIMALS COMMITTEE

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

Background

2. The operational part of Resolution Conf. 12.6 (Rev. CoP17) on Conservation and management of sharks (Class Chondrichthyes) provides the direction for work on sharks and rays undertaken by the Animals Committee since the 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP17, Johannesburg, 2016):

   To examine new information provided by range States on trade and other available relevant data and information, and report their analyses at meetings of the Conference of the Parties; […]

   To make species-specific recommendations at meetings of the Conference of the Parties if necessary on improving the conservation status of sharks;

   and

   To report progress on shark and ray activities at the meetings of the Conference of the Parties.

3. At its 17th meeting (CoP17, Johannesburg, 2016), the Conference of the Parties further adopted Decisions 17.209 to 17.216, of which Decision 17.211 was most relevant to the activities of the Animals Committee:

   17.211 Directed to the Secretariat

   The Secretariat shall:

   a) issue a notification, requesting Parties to provide new information on their shark and ray conservation and management activities, including legislation, and make the responses available to the Animals Committee for its consideration; and

   b) provide a summary of information in the CITES trade database on trade in CITES-listed sharks and rays since 2000 for consideration by the Animals Committee.
Implementation by the Animals Committee of relevant provisions of Resolution Conf. 12.6 (Rev. CoP17) and Decision 17.211


5. As directed by Decision 17.211 a), the Secretariat issued Notification to the Parties No. 2017/031 of 11 April 2017, requesting Parties to provide new information on their shark and ray conservation and management activities, including legislation.

6. Replies were received from Australia, Bahamas, Canada, China, Colombia, Croatia, European Union, France, Germany, Greece, Indonesia, Japan, Latvia, Mexico, Netherlands, Panama, Peru, Philippines, Slovenia, Spain, United Kingdom, United States of America, and Uruguay. These replies were collated by the Secretariat and presented to the Animals Committee in their original language in document AC29 Doc. 23 A1 (Rev. 1), with a useful concise summary of the information received presented in AC29 Inf 23.

7. As directed by Decision 17.211 b), the Secretariat also provided the Animals Committee with a summary of information in the CITES (UNEP-WCMC) trade database on trade in CITES-listed sharks and rays since 2000, in document AC29 Doc. 23 A2.

8. At AC29, the Animals Committee reviewed the replies to Notification 2017/031 and recent trade data, and discussed conservation and management of sharks based on documents AC29 Doc. 23, AC29 Doc. 23 A (Rev.1) and AC29 Doc. 23 A2. It adopted 14 recommendations contained in Annex 1 to this document.

9. As directed by Decision 17.211 a), and by Recommendation 6 from AC29 in Annex 1 to this document, the Secretariat issued Notification to the Parties No. 2018/041 on 24 April 2018, requesting Parties and other stakeholders to provide concise summaries of any new information on shark and ray conservation and management activities (including providing scientific information, examples of and guidance on non-detriment findings, challenges in implementing listings of sharks and rays adopted at CoP17, status of NPOA Sharks, issues regarding the reporting of trade, and new legislation). As directed by Recommendation 7 from AC29 in Annex 1 to this document, the Notification also requested Parties and other stakeholders to highlight any questions, concerns or difficulties they are having in writing or submitting export or import trade documentation for the CITES (UNEP-WCMC) trade database with a view to the Animals Committee developing recommendations at AC30 for how such data (e.g. units reported) and coherence between export and import records may be improved.

10. Replies were received from Australia, China, Colombia, European Union, Indonesia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Philippines, United States of America, Uruguay, Florida International University, Pew Charitable Trusts, and Wildlife Conservation Society. These replies were collated by the Secretariat and presented to the Animals Committee in document AC30 Doc. 20 A1.

11. As directed by Decision 17.211 b), the Secretariat provided the Animals Committee with a summary of information in the CITES (UNEP-WCMC) trade database on trade in CITES-listed sharks and rays since 2000, in document AC30 Doc. 20 A2.

12. At AC30, the Animals Committee reviewed the replies to Notification 2018/041 and recent trade data, and discussed conservation and management of sharks based on documents AC30 Doc. 20, AC30 Doc. 20 A and AC30 Doc. 20 A2. It adopted 16 recommendations, contained in Annex 2 to this document.

Cooperation between CITES and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), Regional Fisheries Bodies (RFBs) and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)

13. The Animals Committee noted the ongoing valuable collaborations with FAO, RFBs and CMS

14. Early in 2017, with resources remaining from the 2013-2016 EU-CITES project, the CITES Secretariat commissioned FAO to produce an updated capacity needs study, based on the study “Assessment of the capacity of selected countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America to implement the new CITES listings of Sharks and Manta Rays”, prepared in 2014.

15. Under the EU-CITES Marine Species Project, a series of factsheets have been produced on the Sharks and Rays Portal on the implementation of the new sharks and rays listings. The topics covered are: sustainability,
traceability, legality, partnerships, cooperation with FAO, with James Cook University, with ICCAT, with SEAFDEC and with IOTC.

16. The CITES Secretariat organised a workshop with participants from FAO, selected Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) and Regional Fisheries Bodies (RFBs) to provide an opportunity to exchange views on successes, lessons learned and future opportunities for cooperation on the implementation of CITES for marine species, and agree on common approaches to implement the measures agreed at CoP17 concerning sharks and rays. The outputs of the workshop have been used to further inform capacity building activities pursuant to Decision 17.212.

17. The CITES Secretariat has continued to urge Parties and all relevant stakeholders to provide clear imagery of wet and dried unprocessed shark fins (particularly but not exclusively those from CITES-listed species) along with related species level taxonomic information to FAO to help them refine the machine learning software behind the iSharkFin shark identification guide.

18. The CITES Secretariat’s work with South East Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC) under the 2013-2016 EU-CITES project, resulted in an FAO-led assessment of the impact of CITES on South East Asian shark fisheries which found that CITES had a small, but measurable, impact in improving several aspects of these fisheries, in particular governance.

19. The CITES Secretariat worked with SEAFDEC to support four Parties (Cambodia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Viet Nam) in setting up data collection systems for shark and ray catches at the species level, and supporting three Parties (Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand) in the development of non-detriment findings for sharks.

20. The Secretariat has also concluded an agreement with FAO under the same umbrella project. The activities to be conducted by FAO pursuant to this agreement will, among other things, support the implementation of Decisions 17.210, paragraph b) regarding the consideration of artisanal fishing in the NDF process, and 17.213, paragraphs a), d) and e) regarding iSharkFin, improving the database on measures on conservation and management of sharks, and continuing to develop guidance and capacity-building for the NDF process.

New information on the implementation of NPOA Sharks and the recent CITES Appendix II listings

21. By 2018, a total of 43 countries had adopted an NPOA Sharks or had one in advanced draft, including new plans adopted since 2015 for Belize, Cuba, Indonesia, Japan, Kenya, Maldives, Mauritius, and Uruguay. The conservation and management of sharks of many other countries are supported by Regional Action Plans, especially in the Mediterranean Sea, in Europe more generally, in west Africa, and in the Pacific Ocean.

22. An FAO review of the implementation of IPOA-Sharks in 2012 showed that 16 of the top 26 shark-fishing countries had an NPOA-Sharks in place. These 26 countries, areas and territories were responsible for 84% of the global shark catches reported to FAO from 2000 to 2009. Since then, six of the other top shark-fishing countries have adopted an NPOA Sharks or have one in advanced draft: Sri Lanka (2013), Peru (2014), India (2015 draft), Japan (2016), Indonesia (2017), Pakistan (2017 draft), leaving just four major shark-fishing countries without a shark conservation and management plan in place.

23. The Animals Committee noted that good progress had been made to implement the new sharks and rays listings, and especially noted the continuing development of the Sharks and Rays Portal on the CITES website as a place where Parties can share information on sharks and rays. The site includes guidance material for the identification of species in the form of photographic and/or biometric guides and from DNA techniques; allows Parties to share their NDFs and inform others of future workshops and capacity-building opportunities.

24. The Animals Committee noted that several useful shark and ray identification guides were now available, and progress was being made to use machine learning to further refine FAO’s iSharkFin identification tool from photographs of wet shark fins (particularly, but not exclusively those from CITES-listed species) along with information on the identity of the species concerned. Photographs of unprocessed dried shark fins of known shark species will be used to extend the tool to from wet fins to all unprocessed fins.

25. The Animals Committee noted that some look-alike and identification issues still need to be resolved, especially with hammerhead sharks, and with processed products such as shark liver oil and fish meal which may include a combination of different shark species.
26. At AC29, the Animals Committee urged Parties and all relevant stakeholders to collaborate in developing techniques and opportunities for the rapid and cost-effective DNA testing of shark and ray commodities and derivatives in trade, including testing in the field or testing processed shark and ray products at borders, and share that knowledge. At AC30, the Animals Committee was encouraged to hear that Florida International University had recently developed an accurate, rapid and cost-effective genetic tool to assist Parties with the identification of shark and ray products in trade at all stages from the ocean to the table.

Non-Detriment Findings (NDFs)

27. The Animals Committee notes that many national and regional workshops have been held around the globe to increase the capacity of Parties to conduct non-detriment findings for sharks and rays (see map on the front page of the CITES Sharks and Rays Portal). The CITES Secretariat and many Parties and organisations have assisted other Parties to hold these workshops through sharing expertise and/or with financial support.

28. RFBs, Parties, scientific organisations and others have made good progress in developing species-specific data collection programmes for shark and ray fisheries (including bycatch and release) and for trade. The Animals Committee has urged Parties to formulate strategies to establish and maintain good data collection, analysis and presentation systems. These will help inform the NDF process for national and shared stocks, as well as helping Parties to make legal acquisition findings.

29. At AC30, the Animals Committee was encouraged to learn that more than 20 NDFs for sharks and rays have now been shared on the CITES Sharks and Rays Portal. These NDFs cover a variety of scenarios, including different levels of knowledge, different groupings of species, and positive NDFs, negative NDFs, as well as positive NDFs with conditions.

30. There are still some outstanding issues that the Animals Committee has urged Parties to share their experiences with, especially dealing with data-poor and multi-species situations where historical catch data has generally not been recorded at the species level, and in dealing with small-scale/artisanal fisheries and non-target (bycatch) situations.

Trade data

31. The Animals Committee’s analysis of the data on trade in CITES-listed sharks and rays since 2000 showed that the actual trade in CITES-listed shark products recorded in the CITES (UNEP-WCMC) database appear to be lower than what was expected from knowledge available on catches of listed species. This could be due to delayed reporting by some Parties of trade in CITES-listed species to the CITES (UNEP-WCMC) trade database, and potential stockpiling of CITES-listed shark products due to some Parties having not yet completed an NDF. The Animals Committee’s analysis was also hampered by variability in the reported units of products in trade. The Animals Committee encourages Parties to report to the Secretariat their trade records of CITES-listed shark and ray products by weight and product form (e.g. “dried fin” or “frozen fin”) rather than by numbers of items and/or under broad headings such as “fins”, except for the trade of live or whole specimens, in which case number of animals is more useful than weight.

32. The Animals Committee noted large fluctuations in the levels of trade reported for non-fin products such as meat, and so encouraged Parties to alert the CITES Secretariat of substantial changes in their trade on non-fin products, and encouraged FAO to continue its analysis of the non-fin (e.g. skin, cartilage, oil) shark and ray trade.

Enforcement issues

33. At AC30, the Animals Committee learned that some Parties had undertaken assessments of stockpiles of commercial and/or pre-Convention shark fins of CITES Appendix-II species, and so encouraged those Parties to share their experiences of recording these stockpiles and how they managed to control and monitor the entry of these stocks into trade.

34. Between CoP16 and CoP17, the Animals Committee recommended that the Standing Committee consider various compliance issues raised by Parties as a result of listing commercially-important sharks and rays in the CITES appendices. Among the issues passed to the Standing Committee to consider since CoP17 were how accurate species identification at capture/landing can assist traceability through the supply chain, look-alike issues for hammerhead sharks, and the need for guidance to Parties when issuing permits for products
(e.g. shark liver oil and fish meal) that are composed of multiple species, which can include listed and non-listed species. The Standing Committee will report on their deliberations through the Secretariat.

Species-specific recommendations

35. The Animals Committee decided that its priority was to assist with the implementation of the CITES Appendix II listings of commercially-exploited sharks and rays following CoP16 and CoP17 rather than make any species-specific recommendations at the 18th Conference of the Parties.

Summary

36. The Animals Committee congratulates the CITES Secretariat for the very hard work put in since CoP16 to assist with the implementation of the CITES Appendix II listings of commercially-exploited sharks and rays. Five species of shark and the 2 *Manta* rays were added to the Appendices following CoP16, and a further 4 species of shark and 9 species of *Mobula* rays were added following CoP17. The Secretariat’s cooperation with FAO and CMS, liaison with RFBs, handling and disbursement of the European Union’s generous grants to support CITES marine species capacity, their organisation and attendance at regional workshops, and their development and maintenance of the Sharks and Rays Portal on the CITES website has helped the CITES community to steer a course through these uncharted waters. One of the benefits of the recent listings is a new level of regional cooperation within CITES, and between CITES authorities, Customs authorities, and fisheries agencies and scientists.

37. Huge progress has been made on many fronts in implementing these new listings, but challenges still lie ahead in the identification of shark and ray products; assessing the sustainability of harvest, especially for highly migratory, data-poor, and non-target (bycatch) species; and, the traceability of shark and ray products along the supply chain from ocean to consumer.

38. The Animals Committee invites the Conference of the Parties to note this report.

COMMENTS OF THE SECRETARIAT

A. The Secretariat notes the important role that the Animals Committee has played in reviewing the implementation of the shark listings adopted at CoP16 and CoP17 as part of its mandate under Resolution Conf. 12.6 (Rev. CoP17) and is grateful for the guidance it has given to the Secretariat and the CITES community through its recommendations.

B. Pursuant to the invitation by the Animals Committee, the Secretariat has taken into account both the recommendations adopted at AC29 and AC30 for the development of the amendments to Resolution Conf. 12.6 (Rev. CoP17) and the draft decisions contained in document CoP18 Doc. 68.2 for consideration at CoP18.

C. The Secretariat would like to express its gratitude to the Parties whose generous support has made the activities described above possible, in particular the European Union, Germany, Switzerland and Turkey.
Recommendations from AC29, Geneva, July 2017

1. The Animals Committee urges Parties and other organizations to collaborate in developing techniques and opportunities for rapid and cost-effective DNA testing of shark and ray products, including in the field, and to share that knowledge.

2. The Animals Committee recommends that the CITES Secretariat request Parties and other organizations to share protocols for the collection and curation of tissue material and product samples derived from CITES listed species, for the development and testing of genetic identification procedures and other forensic approaches (e.g. isotope analyses).

3. The Animals Committee urges Parties and other organizations to develop robust, low-cost tools and systems, where not already existing, to ensure that CITES species are identified accurately at the first point of capture/landing. This will facilitate the implementation of traceability systems for international trade. The Animals Committee asks the Secretariat to bring this matter to the attention to the Standing Committee for its consideration of the issues identified in Decision 17.216.

4. The Animals Committee urges Parties and all relevant stakeholders to provide clear imagery of wet and dried unprocessed shark fins (particularly but not exclusively those from CITES-listed species) along with related species level taxonomic information to FAO to facilitate refinement of iSharkFin software using machine learning.

5. The Animals Committee urges Parties and all relevant stakeholders to develop and share tools for the identification of other shark and ray commodities and derivatives in trade.

6. The Animals Committee directs the Secretariat to issue a notification to Parties, requesting that they provide concise summaries of any new information on their shark and ray conservation and management activities, and that the Secretariat collate these for consideration of the 30th meeting of the Animals Committee (AC30).

7. The Animals Committee directs the Secretariat to at the same time request CITES Parties to highlight any questions, concerns or difficulties they are having in writing or submitting export or import trade documentation for the CITES (UNEP-WCMC) trade database, with a view to the Animals Committee developing recommendations at its 30th meeting for how such data (e.g. units reported) and coherence between exports and imports may be improved.

8. The Animals Committee directs the Secretariat to provide information from the CITES Trade Database on commercial trade in CITES-listed sharks and rays since 2000, sorted by species and if possible by product, for consideration by its 30th meeting.

9. The Animals Committee recommends that Parties and regions share their experiences of developing non-detriment findings (NDFs) for sharks and rays, share these NDFs via the CITES Sharks and Rays Portal, identify gaps in capacity, and develop advice and recommendations on formulating NDFs for sharks and rays, taking into consideration:

   i) strategies for the establishment and maintenance of data collection systems and data analysis and presentation;

   ii) dealing with data-poor, multi-species, small-scale/artisanal, and non-target (bycatch) situations;

   iii) addressing look-alike issues and NDFs for trade in non-fin commodities;

   iv) cooperating with regional fisheries bodies;

   v) introductions from the Sea issues;

   vi) processes for adopting, evaluating and revising precautionary interim NDFs with conditions;
vii) opportunities for providing training for trainers;

and report back to AC30.

10. The Animals Committee urges the Secretariat to continue its valuable collaborations with FAO, Regional Fisheries Bodies, CMS and other relevant actors regarding marine issues including but not restricted to those identified in paragraph 9 of document AC29 Doc. 23.

11. The Animals Committee reminds Parties that FAO has developed a shark measures database and they are encouraged to consult it regularly to ensure that their measures are well reflected.

12. The Animals Committee urges Parties to recognise the value that the FAO Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA) offers in compliance of CITES provisions for listed shark and rays species.

13. The Animals Committee recognises that utilisation of and trade in shark and ray meat and other products (skin, cartilage, oil) is poorly understood, and recommends the development of case studies by FAO and others into international trade and markets for these products.

14. The Animals Committee urges Parties and other stakeholders to support the establishment and maintenance of fundamental long-term data collection programmes on the status of shark and ray stocks.

15. The Animals Committee requests the Secretariat to bring to the attention of the Standing Committee the need for guidance to Parties when issuing permits for products that are composed of multiple species, which can include listed and non-listed species.
**Recommendations from AC30. Geneva, July 2018**

**Directed to the Secretariat**

1. The Animals Committee recommends that Resolution Conf 12.6 (Rev. CoP17) on Conservation and management of sharks be updated and reviewed, and invites the Secretariat to propose amendments to this Resolution for consideration by the Conference of the Parties at its 18th meeting (CoP18), also taking into account any discussions or recommendations in the Standing Committee. The Animals Committee recommends that the amendments should in particular include provisions designed to guide Parties in their implementation of the Convention for CITES-listed shark species especially on:
   
   i) The making of NDFs and the sharing of information on NDFs;
   
   ii) Improving reporting on trade in shark products; and
   
   iii) Ways to ensure better traceability of shark products in trade.

2. The Animals Committee recommends that the Secretariat take note of recommendations from both AC29 and AC30 when preparing draft Decisions and revisions of Resolution Conf. 12.6 (Rev. CoP17) for the consideration of the 18th meeting of the Conference of Parties.

3. The Animals Committee invites the Secretariat for its 31st meeting (AC31) to:

   i) issue a notification to Parties, requesting that they provide concise summaries of new information on their shark and ray conservation and management activities;

   ii) highlight any questions, concerns or difficulties they are having in writing or submitting export or import trade documentation for the CITES trade database maintained by the United Nations Environment Programme – World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC), with a view to the Animals Committee developing recommendations;

   iii) provide information from the CITES trade database on commercial trade in CITES-listed sharks and rays since 2000, sorted by species and if possible by product,

And the Secretariat collate these for consideration of the 31st meeting of the Animals Committee.

**Non-Detriment Findings (NDFs)**

4. The Animals Committee urges Parties to help increase the capacity of other Parties, particularly in assessing the status of CITES-listed species and other relevant information that will assist in the development of NDFs.

5. The Animals Committee urges Parties, regional fisheries bodies, and organizations to support the development of long-term fisheries (including bycatch and release) and trade species-specific data collection programs for CITES-listed shark and ray species to assist CITES Parties in the development of NDFs.

6. The Animals Committee encourages Parties to continue to cooperate regionally, including through Regional Fisheries Bodies, on research, stock assessments, data sharing and analysis to help Parties making legal acquisition findings and NDFs for shared stocks.

7. The Animals Committee recommends that Parties and regions continue sharing their experiences of developing non-detriment findings (NDFs) for sharks and rays, share these NDFs via the CITES sharks and rays portal, for the benefit of other CITES Parties, identify gaps in capacity, and develop advice and recommendations on formulating NDFs for sharks and rays, taking into consideration:

   i) strategies for the establishment and maintenance of data collection systems and data analysis and presentation;
ii) dealing with data-poor, multi-species, small-scale/artisanal, and non-target (bycatch) situations;

iii) addressing look-alike issues and NDFs for trade in non-fin commodities;

iv) cooperating with regional fisheries bodies;

v) Introduction from the Sea issues;

vi) processes for adopting, evaluating and revising precautionary interim NDFs with conditions;

vii) opportunities for providing training for trainers; and

viii) report back to AC31.

Trade

8. The Animals Committee encourages Parties to report to the Secretariat their trade records of CITES-listed elasmobranch products by weight and product form (e.g. dried fin or frozen fin, live specimens) rather than number of items, and requests the Secretariat to liaise with UNEP-WCMC regarding amending the description of trade terms in the database to differentiate between these fin products.

9. The Animals Committee requests Parties to alert the CITES Secretariat of institutional arrangements that disallow commercial exports from their country of CITES Appendix II elasmobranch products (e.g. fins, meat, live specimens) and reminds Parties that they have the option of announcing zero quotas or negative NDFs if they wish to inform other Parties that they have decided not to allow exports, and can ask the Secretariat to publish this information on the sharks and rays portal, and if possible through the Database of Measures of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

10. The Animals Committee requests Parties to alert the Secretariat of changes in trade of non-fin products, such as meat, from CITES-listed species, in recognition of the fluctuating levels of trade reports for different products.

11. The Animals Committee supports and encourages FAO to continue its analysis of the non-fin shark and ray trade to assist CITES Parties in gaining a better understanding of the trade and trends in shark and ray products, including to inform the development of NDFs.

Identification

12. The Animals Committee urges Parties and organizations to continue:

   i) the provision of training in the identification of shark fin and other products to improve their detection in trade; and

   ii) collaboration, advancement, and dissemination of the development of rapid and cost-effective genetic tools to assist Parties with the identification of shark and ray products in trade.

13. The Animals Committee urges Parties and relevant stakeholders to provide imagery of fresh shark fins to FAO to assist in further development of the iSharkFin software tool.

Enforcement

14. The Animals Committee request Parties to alert the CITES Secretariat of issues related to suspected increasing illegal trade in products of CITES Appendix-II elasmobranch species, for example discrepancies between reported or observed landings and international trade.

15. The Animals Committee congratulates Parties that have undertaken assessments of stockpiles of commercial and/or pre-Convention shark fins for CITES Appendix-II elasmobranch species, and encourages them to share their experiences of recording these stockpiles and controlling and monitoring the entry of these stocks into trade.
Look-alike issues

16. The Animals Committee requests the Standing Committee to consider look-alike issues for hammerhead species and make recommendations to CoP18.
TENTATIVE BUDGET AND SOURCE OF FUNDING
FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DRAFT RESOLUTIONS OR DECISIONS

According to Resolution Conf. 4.6 (Rev. CoP16) on Submission of draft resolutions, draft decisions and other documents for meetings of the Conference of the Parties, the Conference of the Parties decided that any draft resolutions or decisions submitted for consideration at a meeting of the Conference of the Parties that have budgetary and workload implications for the Secretariat or permanent committees must contain or be accompanied by a budget for the work involved and an indication of the source of funding. The authors of this document propose the following tentative budget and source of funding.