

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



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

Species specific matters

QUEEN CONCH (*STROMBUS GIGAS*)

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.
2. At its 17th meeting (CoP17, Johannesburg, 2016), the Conference of the Parties adopted Decisions 17.285 to 17.290 on Queen Conch (*Strombus gigas*) as follows:

Directed to the range States of Strombus gigas

17.285 *The range States of Strombus gigas shall:*

- a) *following the endorsement of the Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan by all range States, collaborate to implement the Regional Plan, and develop national Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plans as appropriate;*
- b) *organize national level consultations to discuss the Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan, build awareness, increase buy-in of all stakeholders for implementing the measures, and contribute to future national, subregional and regional compliance;*
- c) *continue to collect data on weight of S. gigas by processing grade in order to update and improve the agreed regional conversion factors, and develop additional national conversion factors, taking into account the spatial variability and characteristics of the species;* d) *continue to collaborate in exploring ways to enhance the traceability of specimens of S. gigas in international trade, including, but not limited to, catch certificates, labelling systems and the application of genetic techniques, and consider sharing relevant experiences with the Secretariat, Parties and the Standing Committee, as appropriate, in the context of discussions on traceability systems for trade in CITES-listed species;*
- e) *collaborate in developing and implementing joint research programmes at subregional or regional level to support the making of non-detriment findings, and promote relevant research and capacity building activities through regional fisheries management bodies;*
- f) *promote and collaborate in developing and implementing public education and awareness programmes regarding the conservation and sustainable use of S.gigas; and*
- g) *provide information to the Secretariat on the implementation of this decision to allow it to report at the 18th meeting of the Conference of the Parties in accordance with Decision 17.290 and, as appropriate, report to the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission on the implementation of the regional plan or national plans.*

Directed to the Standing Committee

17.286 *On the basis of reporting by the Secretariat in compliance with Decision 17.289, the Standing Committee shall review enforcement and traceability issues concerning international trade in queen conch, and make recommendations as appropriate.*

Directed to the Animals Committee

17.287 *If requested by range States of *S. gigas*, the Animals Committee shall provide advice regarding the making of non-detriment findings for trade in *S. gigas*, research in support of sustainable queen conch fishery and trade, and other technical matters.*

17.288 *The Animals Committee shall review the process for the setting of scientific quotas for queen conch, in particular where scientific quotas make up a large portion of the overall export quota.*

Directed to the Secretariat

17.289 *The Secretariat shall, pending the availability of external funding,*

- a) *continue to collaborate with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Working Group on Queen Conch composed of the Caribbean Fisheries Management Council (CFMC), the Organización del Sector Pesquero y Acuicola del Istmo Centroamericano (OSPESCA, Organization for the Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector of the Central American Isthmus), the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC) and the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM), WECAFC and other relevant international and regional bodies to provide assistance to range States of *S. gigas* in order to enhance the capacity of their CITES Management and Scientific Authorities, fisheries authorities and other stakeholders to implement the Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan and apply the NDF guidance;*
- b) *monitor the development of traceability systems for queen conch; provide assistance, as appropriate, to FAO, the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM Working Group on Queen Conch and others in reviewing options for the development of an auditable "chain of custody" procedure; and report relevant developments to the Standing Committee; and*
- c) *continue to provide assistance to range States of *S. gigas* on relevant enforcement issues, and report new developments in this regard to the Standing Committee, as appropriate.*

17.290 *On the basis of the information provided in accordance with Decision 17.285 g), and in consultation with the range States of *S. gigas*, the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM Working Group on Queen Conch and FAO, the Secretariat shall report on the progress in the implementation of these Decisions at the 18th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.*

Background

3. The 2nd meeting of the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM/CITES working group on queen conch took place in November 2014 in response to a recommendation adopted at the 15th session of the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC – Panama City, November 2014), which called for the development of a regional plan for the conservation and management of queen conch (*Strombus gigas*). The recommendation built on the Decisions on queen conch that had been adopted at the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (CoP16, Bangkok, 2013). At the working group meeting in 2014, a draft version of the management and conservation plan was reviewed, and a set of 14 management measures was proposed that would contribute most to the sustainability of the queen conch fisheries in the region. It was recommended that measures suitable for regional level harmonization be discussed in 2015 with all relevant stakeholders at national level in the queen conch range States. The working group also reached agreement on the use of regional harmonized conversion factors for the processing of conch meat and a format for non-detriment findings (NDFs). Terms of reference and a work plan for the working group for the period 2015 – 2018 were also agreed. At the 16th meeting of the WECAFC (Guadeloupe, June 2016), these terms of reference were endorsed and recommendation WECAFC/16/2016/1 on the regional plan for the management and conservation of queen conch in the WECAFC area was adopted, calling on WECAFC members to implement the [Regional Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan](#). The recommendation also called for actions to harmonize and improve trade statistics, implementation of NDF guidance to help ensure sustainable trade, and collaboration in assessment methodologies for queen conch.

Implementation of Decision 17.285

4. Thanks to generous financial support from the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries of the European Commission, the Caribbean Fishery Management Council (CFMC) and the US National Marine Fisheries Service, the 3rd meeting of the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM/CITES working group on queen conch was held in Panama City (30 October – 1 November 2018) at the invitation of Panama.
5. The objectives of the meeting were to:
 - a) present and discuss the status of queen conch fisheries and management and implementation of the Regional Queen Conch Fisheries and Conservation Plan at the national level;
 - b) identify challenges and actions needed to advance the implementation of the *Regional Queen Conch Fisheries and Conservation Plan* and strengthen regional conservation and management of queen conch;
 - c) learn of developments and possible tools to improve the traceability of queen conch;
 - d) review the status of development and application of conversion factors for standardized data reporting;
 - e) gain an understanding of scientific developments related to queen conch to identify potential emerging threats and future research needs;
 - f) assess research programmes in support of making NDFs;
 - g) exchange information on enforcement issues and regional/bilateral collaboration in fighting Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing of queen conch; and
 - h) reach agreement on new terms of reference (2019 – 2021) and a revised work plan to guide future activities of the working group.
6. The meeting was attended by participants from WECAFC, the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) and the Central American Fisheries and Aquaculture Organization (OSPESCA) member countries that engage in the harvest of, management of, and/or trade in queen conch, including from national institutions, entities and authorities responsible for implementation of policy, legal and operational aspects of fisheries management and/or implementation of CITES. Presentations were given by Parties present, including Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Colombia, Cuba, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Martinique and Guadeloupe and the United States of America. Each presentation provided an update on the status of implementation of the *Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan* (nationally and regionally); highlighted any accomplishments and challenges and how to address them; indicated any specific needs and concerns; and outlined the status of non-detriment findings. In addition, there were focused discussions on CITES, conversion factors, new research on queen conch, highlighting new and emerging threats, and the problem of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU). The meeting also presented an opportunity for the Secretariat to collect information on the implementation of Decision 17.285 paragraph g).
7. The final report from the 3rd meeting of the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM/CITES working group on queen conch will be made available as an information document at this meeting, with the outputs from the meeting including the following:
 - a) new terms of reference for the working group to advance implementation of the *Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan* and enhance regional collaboration to ensure the sustainable harvest and trade on queen conch for the period 2019 – 2021;
 - b) an updated workplan outlining actions to conserve and manage queen conch, promote legal and sustainable trade, and improve knowledge of the species' ecology, including the establishment of a "scientific and statistical" subgroup, which will provide advice on technical matters including conversion factors and non-detriment findings; and
 - c) a series of recommendations on queen conch trade, IUU in queen conch fisheries and conversion factors.

8. Concerning improved regulation of trade in queen conch, the working group recommended that members of WECAFC adopt the January 2017 version of the World Customs Organization's Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System and provide suitable training to customs officers to facilitate a greater control of trade in conch and identification of conch products. Countries were encouraged to incorporate suitable technology (such as customs-related technology that will draw attention to importation/exportation of specific products) to enable the detection and enhanced control of trade in conch products. Furthermore, participants were reminded to be cognizant that CITES Management Authorities are required to make a legal acquisition finding before issuing an export permit for queen conch, and it was noted that there will be a proposal to adopt a resolution that will provide guidance to CITES Parties on making legal acquisition findings considered at this meeting of the Conference of the Parties.
9. In relation to conversion factors, the working group recommended that, for stock assessment purposes, each WECAFC member country should determine the number of individual queen conch harvested. For the different processing levels (e.g. dirty, semi-clean, clean/fillet) used within a country, the working group recommended that conversion factors should be used to determine the total weight of the animal removed from the shell with all the parts intact without considering the weight of the empty shell, by carrying out a back calculation. Parties are then urged to report their total conch production and exports as the whole animal weight extracted from the shell to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and CITES. Furthermore, Parties are strongly encouraged to define the various processing levels as soon as possible and determine the associated conversion factors to back calculate how many whole animals this represents. It was recommended that for those countries that do not have their own national conversion factor, they should either continue using the FAO 7.5 conversion factor to estimate the total weight of the animal removed from the shell with all the parts intact without considering the weight of the empty shell, or they should desist from using the FAO conversion factor but clearly define the level of processing for the conch production. Finally, it was recommended that a compendium of processing levels, their definitions and associated conversion factors, be prepared by each Party.
10. Concerning control of IUU in queen conch fisheries and fostering improved regional cooperation, the working group recommended that members of WECAFC establish a register of queen conch fishing vessels of each country consistent with the FAO Global Record of Fishing Vessels. It was also recommended that countries initiate the development of arrangements, including binding agreements if possible, for an effective system for enhanced surveillance and enforcement, which may include, for example, data sharing. Parties were also encouraged to sign and implement the Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter, and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing. Finally, it was recommended that Parties establish a mechanism for focal points in countries for the purposes of compiling and sharing with requesting entities information on all aspects of the queen conch fishery (e.g., enforcement, data collection, regulatory framework, capacity-building). The list of focal points and other relevant information should be made available on a dedicated webpage.
11. The recommendations outlined in paragraphs 8 to 10 above on queen conch trade (Recommendation WECAFC/17/2019/7), conversion factors (Recommendation WECAFC/17/2019/8) and IUU in queen conch fisheries (Recommendation WECAFC/17/2019/9) were reviewed by the WECAFC Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) on 19-20 November 2018. Based on the discussions at SAG, not all elements of the recommendations were accepted, and revised versions of these recommendations will now be submitted for discussion and endorsement to the 17th session of the WECAFC, which is scheduled to take place in April/May 2019. These revised recommendations are included in an information document. An update on the outcome of the 17th session of the WECAFC will be provided to this meeting.

Implementation of Decision 17.286

12. The Secretariat reported to the Standing Committee at its 69th and 70th meetings (SC69, Geneva, November 2017; SC70, Sochi, October 2018) that no funding had been made available for the implementation of Decision 17.289, but that FAO had recently secured funding for the 3rd meeting of the working group on queen conch in Panama in November 2018 (see documents [SC69 Doc. 63](#) and [SC70 Doc. 60](#)).

Implementation of Decision 17.287

13. The implementation of Decision 17.287 was dependent on range States requesting advice from the Animals Committee on the making of NDFs for queen conch, research in support of sustainable fishing and trade and other technical matters. No such request for advice was received by the Animals Committee.

14. At the 29th meeting of the Animals Committee (AC29, Geneva, July 2017), the Secretariat drew attention to the adoption of the NDF guideline format for trade in Caribbean Queen Conch, developed by FAO/WECAFC in collaboration with CITES and agreed by WECAFC at its 16th meeting (Guadeloupe, June 2016). The NDF guideline format was developed as one of the outputs of the joint FAO/WECAFC capacity-building project on queen conch (*Strombus gigas*) in the Caribbean region implemented after CoP16 and were discussed and revised at the second meeting of the joint CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM working group on queen conch (November 2014). They are also published on the queen conch page of the CITES website.
15. At the 3rd meeting of the working group (October-November 2018), concerns were raised that the current NDF guidance was overly complicated and there was a desire to develop a more condensed and user-friendly version. The new subgroup referred to in paragraph 7 above was tasked with reviewing the currently available NDFs on queen conch and guidance in order to develop a simplified template that would be reviewed by the Animals Committee as envisaged under Decision 17.287. At the time of writing (December 2018), a request for the Animals Committee to review such a revised template had not been received. It is therefore suggested to renew this Decision in order to allow for such a review.

Implementation of Decision 17.288

16. At AC29, Honduras and Nicaragua were identified as Parties making use of scientific quotas for queen conch (see document [AC29 Doc. 26](#)). The Secretariat concluded that the use and scope of the term “scientific quota for queen conch” was not entirely clear as it could be used to describe a commercial export quota to finance scientific activities but could also refer to an export quota limited to trade transactions with a scientific purpose (Purpose code “S” in the CITES trade database). However, Resolution Conf. 14.7 (Rev. CoP15) and the Guidelines contained in the annex to the Resolution do not include guidance related to the setting of quotas for a specific purpose, e.g. scientific. “Scientific quotas” are not mentioned or defined as such in the Resolution, which consequently does not provide any specific guidance in this regard. The Secretariat reminded Parties that, whether the quota concerned a commercial quota to fund scientific activities or was a trade transaction for scientific purposes, the provisions of Article IV, including the necessity to make non-detriment findings, would apply.
17. To assist in the fulfillment of Decision 17.288, the Animals Committee developed a Notification to the Parties, which was subsequently published by the Secretariat (see Notification to the Parties [No. 2018/035](#) of 18 April 2018). The notification reminded Parties of the requirement to carry out a non-detriment finding and requested the following information:
 - a) the extent to which they use scientific research in the making of non-detriment findings;
 - b) their process for establishing levels of export for specimens of queen conch;
 - c) the process for, and the objectives of setting “scientific quotas”, if any for queen conch; and
 - d) whether the catch from scientific surveys contributes to their overall exports.
18. The Secretariat analyzed the responses that were received from seven Parties (Belize, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America), and presented the results to the Animals Committee at its 30th meeting (AC30, Geneva, July 2018) in document [AC30 Doc. 22](#). Honduras was the only Party to report the use of “scientific quotas”, stating that this stemmed from commitments it had made at the 22nd meeting of the Animals Committee (AC22, Lima, July 2006) in order to exit the Review of Significant Trade process. Honduras further clarified that the objectives of its scientific export quota were two-fold: (1) the collection of scientific information to establish scientifically justified annual harvest and export quotas and (2) ensure that annual harvest and export quotas are ecologically possible and economically profitable without causing damage to the stock. Honduras responded that the scientific quota makes up 100% of the exports, representing approximately 85% of the total catch, with the remaining 15% allocated for domestic consumption.
19. At AC30, the Committee noted document AC30 Doc. 22 and the progress that Honduras had made in implementing its commitments regarding the management of and trade in queen conch. The Committee considered that Honduras had fulfilled the commitments made at AC22.
20. In fulfillment of Decision 17.288, the Committee further noted that the term “scientific quotas” is not recognized by CITES and that all exports for wild specimens of Appendix II species (as is the case of *Strombus gigas*) are to be supported by a non-detriment finding formulated by the Scientific Authority of the

exporting range State, based on the best technical and scientific information available, regardless of the purpose of the transaction (whether scientific “S”, commercial “T”, medical “M”, educational “E”, or any other purpose code defined in Resolution Conf. 12.3 (Rev. CoP17) on *Permits and certificates*).

Implementation of Decision 17.289

21. In documents SC69 Doc. 63 and SC70 Doc. 60, the Secretariat reported to the Standing Committee that no external funding had been made available for the implementation of Decision 17.289.
22. At SC70, the Secretariat reported that it had worked with FAO on a funding proposal to support activities in Decision 17.289, which had been submitted to the European Commission for consideration, but at the time of writing of this document, this request was in progress and no funding had been secured.
23. The Standing Committee’s working group on traceability developed a number of guiding documents to support Parties in the implementation of traceability systems including a working definition for traceability in the CITES context and technical and managerial guidelines to plan and implement traceability systems. These issues and documents are discussed in document CoP18 Doc. 42. The Secretariat is preparing to provide Parties in the Caribbean region with access to a cloud-based electronic Permit system (UNCTAD e-CITES). Such a system, if implemented, could provide a mechanism to capture and exchange data on queen conch harvest and trade, if Parties in the region agree to do so.

Implementation of Decision 17.290

24. In document SC69 Doc. 63, the Secretariat noted that its report under Decision 17.290 was linked to assistance that the Secretariat should provide to range States of *Strombus gigas* under Decision 17.289, for which no external funding had been made available. With regard to Decision 17.285, the Secretariat had further noted that the 3rd meeting of the joint CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM working group on queen conch could provide good opportunities to gather relevant information.
25. The 3rd meeting of the working group was attended by the Secretariat. The meeting provided an opportunity for the Secretariat to undertake the activities set out in Decision 17.289 and to assess what activities have been undertaken in the context of the management of and trade in queen conch in the context of implementing Decision 17.285 paragraph b).

Conclusions

26. Based on the outcome of the 3rd meeting of the queen conch working group, the Secretariat is of the view that while the *Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan* has now been endorsed by all range States, there has been limited progress in terms of its implementation. As a result, many of the activities outlined in Decisions 17.285 to 17.290 are either ongoing or remain valid for future implementation. The Secretariat is of the view that it is important for this work to continue and for the Conference of the Parties to monitor its progress. The Secretariat has developed a revised set of draft decisions to this effect that is presented in Annex 1 to this document. A cost estimate for the implementation of the proposed decisions is provided in Annex 2 to this document.

Recommendations

27. The Conference of the Parties is invited to:
 - a) agree that Decisions 17.288 and 17.290 have been fully implemented and can be deleted; and
 - b) replace the remaining Decisions on queen conch (Decisions 17.285 to 17.287 and 17.289) with the set of draft decisions presented in Annex 1 to this document.

Draft decisions on queen conch (*Strombus gigas*)

Directed to the range States of *Strombus gigas*

18.AA The range States of *Strombus gigas* shall:

- a) collaborate to implement the *Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan*, and develop national Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plans as appropriate;
- b) continue to collect data on weight of *S. gigas* by processing grade in order to update and improve the agreed regional conversion factors, and develop national conversion factors, taking into account the spatial variability and characteristics of the species;
- c) collaborate in developing and implementing joint research programmes at sub-regional or regional level to support the making of non-detriment findings, and promote relevant research and capacity-building activities through regional fisheries management bodies;
- d) promote and collaborate in developing and implementing public education and awareness programmes regarding the conservation and sustainable use of *S.gigas*;
- e) continue to collaborate in exploring ways to enhance the traceability of specimens of *S. gigas* in international trade, including, but not limited to, catch certificates, labelling systems and the application of genetic techniques, and consider sharing relevant experiences with the Secretariat, Parties and the Standing Committee, as appropriate, in the context of discussions on traceability systems for trade in CITES-listed species;
- f) make available to the Standing Committee, through the Secretariat, information concerning illegal trade in queen conch, including surveillance and enforcement activities, as appropriate; and
- g) provide information to the Secretariat on the implementation of paragraphs a) to d) of this decision to allow it to report at the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties in accordance with Decision 18.FF, as appropriate.

Directed to the Animals Committee

18.BB If requested by range States of *S. gigas* or the working group on queen conch composed of the Caribbean Fishery Management Council (CFMC), the Central American Fisheries and Aquaculture Organization (OSPESCA), the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC), the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) and CITES, the Animals Committee shall provide advice regarding the making of non-detriment findings for trade in *S. gigas*, research in support of sustainable queen conch fishery and trade, and other technical matters.

Directed to the Standing Committee

18.CC On the basis of reporting by the Secretariat in compliance with Decision 18.AA paragraphs e) and f), the Standing Committee shall review traceability and enforcement issues concerning international trade in queen conch, and make recommendations as appropriate.

Directed to the Secretariat

18.DD The Secretariat shall continue to collaborate with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM/CITES working group on queen conch, WECAFC and other relevant international organizations, and, subject to external funding,

- a) provide assistance to range States of *S. gigas* in order to enhance the capacity of their CITES Management and Scientific Authorities, fisheries authorities and other stakeholders to implement

the *Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan* and make scientifically robust non-detriment findings; and

b) provide assistance to range States of *S. gigas* on relevant enforcement issues and report new developments in this regard to the Standing Committee, as appropriate.

18.EE The Secretariat shall monitor the development of traceability systems for queen conch and report relevant developments to the Standing Committee, as appropriate.

18.FF The Secretariat shall collate the information provided in accordance with Decision 18.AA g), and report on the progress in the implementation of these Decisions at the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

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 Secretariat proposes the following tentative budget and source of funding:

The decisions in Annex 1, directed to the Secretariat, would be implemented in close collaboration with FAO over the period 2019-2021, subject to external funding. The activities will focus on:

- a) supporting the CFMC/OSPESCA/COPACO/CRFM/CITES Working Group on Queen Conch to complete its remaining tasks that are pertinent to CITES;
- b) supporting the implementation of the *Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan*, and assisting in applying the agreed regional conversion factors;
- c) enhancing capacity of queen conch range States for the making of NDFs; and
- d) assisting range States in the enforcement of provisions relevant to the international trade in *S. gigas*, including through capacity-building for law enforcement, customs and fisheries officials.

The costs of undertaking the work indicated above are estimated to be 300,000 USD for three years (2019-2021) broken down into the task outlined in the table below. This work is to be financed by extra-budgetary resources and no source of funding has been identified at this stage.

Task	Estimated costs (USD)
Support to the working group on queen conch (including attendance at meetings) (2-3 meetings)	30,000
Support the implementation of the <i>Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan</i> , including traceability work (3-4 Parties for targeted support)	40,000 for assistance 20,000 for traceability work
NDF capacity-building activities	120,000
Enforcement assistance	100,000
Total	310,000