

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



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ANNUAL ILLEGAL TRADE REPORT DATA STORAGE AND DATABASE MANAGEMENT

This document has been submitted by the Secretariat and prepared by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in relation to agenda item 36.¹

The purpose of the present document is to provide supplementary information to complement document CoP18 Doc. 36 on *Storage and Management of Illegal Trade Data Collected Through the Parties' Annual Illegal Trade Reports*.

As described in the detailed proposal in Annex 1 to document CoP18 Doc. 36, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) can provide a long-term and sustainable framework to collect, process, store, and analyse data collected through CITES Annual Illegal Trade Reports (AITRs). The proposal builds upon the long-standing experience of UNODC in collecting, processing and analysing data on illegal activities and trafficking.

Should the Conference of the Parties to CITES agree to the proposal alongside sustainable funding for its implementation, this will enable establishing and maintaining this database in accordance with the requirements set by CITES Parties concerning the storage and the management of illegal trade data collected through the CITES AITRs, as outlined in the proposal, with the following objectives:

- Regular collection, processing, and validation of AITRs, secure storage of data collected, and processing this data to make it suitable for the production of analytical reports;
- Developing a data dissemination platform that will allow password-protected direct access to selected users, including the CITES Secretariat, CITES Parties and the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC) partner agencies; and
- Gradually improving the quality of CITES annual illegal trade report data and to increase the response rate by CITES Parties.

UNODC has significant experience in maintaining data collected across the years, ensuring the production of consistent time series and consolidated national data into regional and global aggregates with appropriate statistical procedures. Considerable experience also exists in managing official and technical communication with Member States throughout the phases of collection, processing, and validation of data to ensure the highest possible quality of data and a transparent link with national data producers.

The outputs, deliverables and activities to be undertaken by UNODC to assure the regular maintenance of the database and how these would fit the requirements set by CITES Conference of the Parties, are described in detail in the proposal.

¹ *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.*

The CITES AITRs are mandated by paragraph 3 in Resolution Conf. 11.17 (Rev. CoP17) on National reports. As a temporary measure and until a more permanent solution for the management and storage of CITES annual illegal trade data is agreed, UNODC is currently within the limits of its resources supporting the CITES Secretariat on a pro bono basis to compile CITES AITRs in a secure database for use in global research and trend analysis studies on wildlife and forest crime by the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC). In doing this, UNODC has been cleaning, standardising, validating, and storing these data and has made refined data available to the CITES Secretariat whenever requested. UNODC also provided updates to CITES Parties on the state of the data through interventions it made at CITES Standing Committee meetings.

Data collected through CITES AITRs included in the database maintained by UNODC currently amount to roughly 42,500 seizure records covering the period 2013-2018,² involving about 1900 species in various product formats, from live animals to medicinal products containing animal parts. At the time of writing (end of July 2019), 72 Parties submitted AITRs that were included in the database (see map below). Although, at face value, this number of reporting Parties may seem low, it represents most of the main source and destination countries for the most valuable and commonly trafficked wildlife, and therefore already provides a robust and representative picture of global wildlife trafficking trends.

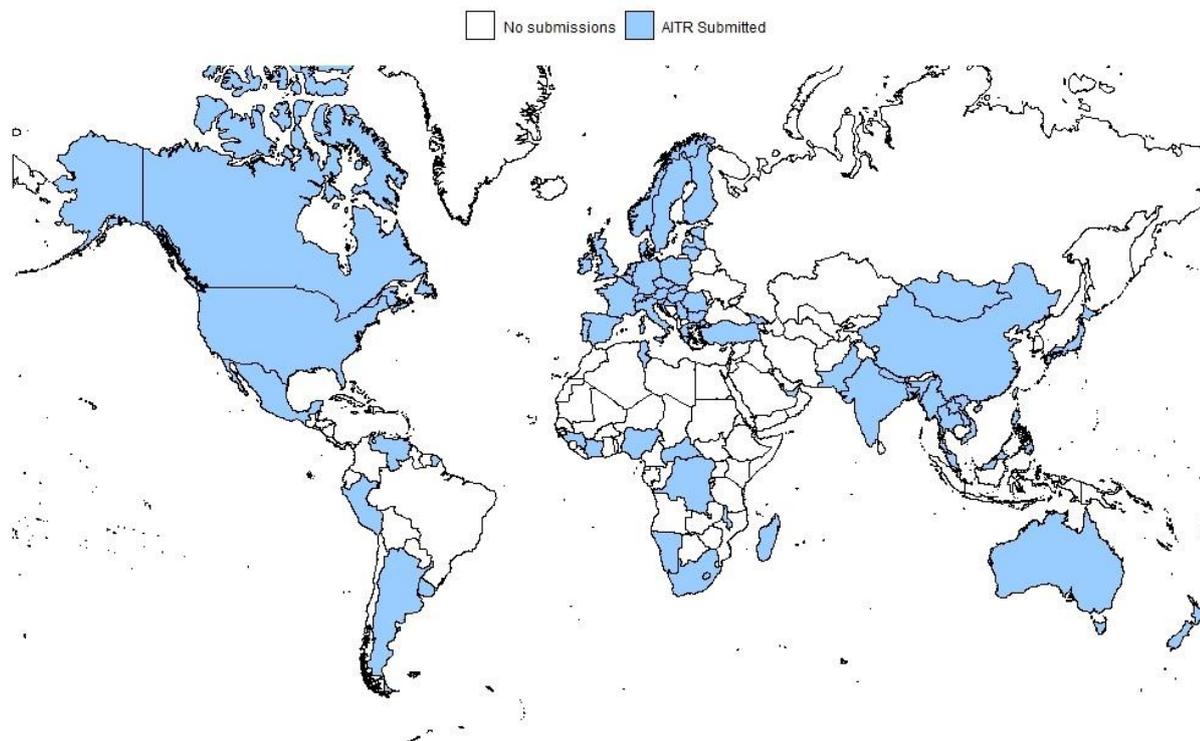


Figure: Map of the CITES Parties that provided annual illegal trade reports from 2016-2018

The investment required to establish a database with all functionalities and meeting the requirements agreed by CITES Parties as outlined in the detailed proposal, will only be justified if there is certainty that this will be a long-term undertaking. Also, the services of a full-time statistical assistant are indispensable and required to manage the flow of data, clean it, process it, integrate it into the database, and conduct data quality checks to weed out errors and duplicates. This statistical assistant can also answer specific data requests from the CITES Secretariat and respond to CITES Parties' inputs and questions about the data. It is important to note that a sustainable source of funding for database management costs is essential if maximum benefit is to be derived from it, and that an absence of such funding will jeopardize the integrity of the database and the outputs generated. At present, the lack of funding has made it impossible to develop a data dissemination platform that would allow customized password-protected access to CITES Parties, and other selected users like ICWC partner agencies, to access the AITR data directly.³ A lack of sustainable funding will also jeopardize the long-term production of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) indicator "Proportion of traded wildlife that was poached or trafficked" (Target 15.7), for which CITES and UNODC are the custodian agencies.

² The AITR requirement was introduced at CoP17, and to date reports covering data for 2016 and 2017 were due. Some Parties however also provided data from previous years in their submissions.

³ The availability of this data would be customized based on the user and would not include any data Parties have requested not be shared with anyone other than the CITES Secretariat.

Consequently, for CITES Parties, ICCWC partners and other role players to derive maximum benefit from annual illegal trade reporting, a sustainable funding source through core budget funding for the management of the CITES Illegal Trade Report Database and its data seems essential (see Annex 1 in CoP18 Doc. 36 for additional information on the proposed costs for managing this database and data).

Currently, the UNODC statistical assistant for the World Wildlife Crime Report (WWCR) is performing the function to be performed by the full-time statistical assistant dedicated to managing the CITES AITRs, but the funding flow for the WWCR is not secure or consistent, and a gap in funding was for example experienced between the first (2016) and second (2019) WWCR reports. During this time, the CITES Illegal Trade Database was left unmanaged because of a lack of funds, and considerable effort was required to revivify it. This undermines the time and investment required from Parties to compile the data for the AITRs and prevents effective use of the data. Without sustainable funding, UNODC cannot guarantee that it will be able to consistently manage and maintain updated data for the Illegal Trade Report Database; nor develop the suggested data dissemination platform for direct use of the data by the Parties. Given that this platform could be accessible as a powerful tool to inform the Parties, the CITES Secretariat, and law enforcement agencies' decision making and enable them to follow illegal wildlife trafficking trends and support the development of appropriate law enforcement responses to wildlife crime, it will be unfortunate if it cannot be established and maintained. In addition, a lack of sustainable funding will likely also significantly impede the ability of the CITES Secretariat to implement paragraph 14 in Resolution Conf. 11.3 (Rev. CoP17) on *Compliance and enforcement*.

In addition, UNODC will only be able to recruit and retain the services of a well-qualified expert for this work, if sustainable funding is available. In the absence of such funding staff turnaround and investment in re-training new staff will likely impede deriving maximum benefit. Having to rehire new staff every time after funding was lost and when new funding is secured, will result in institutional memory being lost and impact negatively on the services that could be delivered to the Parties based on the AITR data.

The CITES Legal Trade Database is an excellent example of the sustainable and solid infrastructure that can be achieved with core budget funding. UNODC is already working in parallel with the legal trade database curators, UNEP-WCMC, to align the data collection and formatting and learn from their experience curating legal trade data. However, with limited funding to support this work these efforts are hampered. With the required sustainable funding UNODC will be able to expand its activities to improve data quality and ensure good alignment between data capture formats for both databases. Ideally, the CITES Annual Illegal Trade Database maintained by UNODC will become a parallel product to the CITES Legal Trade Database. These two databases will allow CITES Parties to rely on the best available data to not only monitor legal trade, but also to respond to illegal trade. It would therefore be highly beneficial for the CITES Annual Illegal Trade Database to be supported as a core funded activity, similar to the core budget funding that is currently provided for the maintenance of the CITES Legal Trade Database.