The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is an international agreement signed by 178 nations designed to ensure that international trade in animals and plants does not threaten their survival in the wild. CITES-listed animals or plants taken from the high seas—defined as “the marine environment not under the jurisdiction of any State”—are subject to CITES trade provisions. Parties must implement these provisions whenever an Appendix-I or -II specimen is taken from the high seas and transported into a State. The trade in these specimens is referred to as “introduction from the sea.”

A Framework for Implementation

At the most recent CITES meeting (CoP16, in March 2013), the Parties reached agreement on a new framework for implementation of CITES introduction-from-the-sea provisions. This new framework will provide certainty and consistency regarding which CITES documents are issued and which Party is responsible for issuing those documents. It is a pragmatic and effective permitting scheme for CITES specimens taken on the high seas. The new framework is contained in CITES Resolution Conf. 14.6 (Rev. CoP16), which addresses introduction-from-the-sea.

Within the new framework, if a vessel harvests CITES-listed specimens on the high seas and delivers them to the same country in which it is flagged, Parties will treat the transaction as an introduction from the sea and issue an introduction-from-the-sea certificate. Under this scenario, there is only one country involved in the trade (see Scenario 1).

If there is more than one country involved in the trade (the vessel that harvests the specimens delivers them to a country other than the country to which it is flagged), CITES Parties will treat the transaction as an export and require the issuance of an export permit by the country to which the harvesting vessel is flagged (see Scenario 2).

Provisions for Chartered Vessels

Some Parties expressed the desire for an exception to this permitting scheme when specimens are harvested by chartered vessels. A narrow exception, to accommodate some chartering arrangements, was incorporated into the new framework. Under the exception, when one country charters a vessel flagged to another country and that vessel harvests CITES-listed specimens on the high seas, the two countries involved could reach an agreement to allow the country that chartered the vessel to issue an introduction-from-the-sea certificate (instead of having the country to which the vessel is flagged issue an export permit). This narrow exception will only be allowed for chartering arrangements under specific conditions, including being consistent with the framework for chartering of a relevant Regional Fisheries Management Organization/Arrangement (see Scenario 3).
CITES: Introduction from the Sea

Introduction from the Sea Framework Scenarios

Scenario 1: Ship registered in country A transports CITES specimen into country A

Ship registered in country A takes CITES Appendix-II specimen from the high seas

Transport specimen into country A

Action Needed
Introduction from the sea - IFS certificate issued by country A

Scenario 2: Ship registered in country A transports CITES specimen into country B

Ship registered in country A takes CITES Appendix-II specimen from the high seas

Transport specimen into country B

Action Needed
Export by country A - export permit issued by country A
Import by country B - export permit issued by country A presented to AND accepted by country B

Scenario 3: Country A charters a vessel registered in country B and that vessel transports CITES specimen into country A

Country A charters a vessel registered in country B that takes CITES Appendix-II specimen from the high seas

Transport specimen into country A

Action Needed
Country A and country B agree to allow country A to issue the CITES IFS certificate*

* Chartering arrangement must be consistent with the framework for chartering of a relevant Regional Fisheries Management Organization/Arrangement and the CITES Secretariat and CITES Parties must be informed in advance.