



NOTIFICATION TO THE PARTIES

No. 2016/004

Geneva, 5 February 2016

CONCERNING:

Guidelines for improving species-specific reporting requests
by CITES working groups

1. At its 66th meeting (Geneva, January 2016), the Standing Committee adopted *Guidelines for improving species-specific reporting requests by CITES working groups*. At the request of the Standing Committee, the Secretariat is making these guidelines more widely available in the Annex to this Notification.

**Guidelines for improving species-specific reporting requests
by CITES working groups**

1. The CITES Online Reporting System should be used as much as possible, as the data captured through this system can be stored easily for future reference, analysis of the results should be simpler, and adapting existing questionnaires would be quicker and easier than starting anew each time.
2. Species-specific reporting provides a useful opportunity to make the Convention a living mechanism to evaluate implementation intersessionally and respond to emerging issues. Working groups should however consider carefully what information is already available – e.g. through the annual report, the biennial/implementation report, existing CITES processes such as the National Legislation Project, or other reliable sources such as peer-reviewed literature. It should not be necessary to ask for this information separately.
3. Working groups should also consider if a Notification to the Parties is the most effective way of gathering the information needed. In some cases a focussed piece of desk-work, a meeting (either electronic or face-to-face) or some analysis of existing data may be more appropriate. While that might require resources for the work to be found, it will reduce the burden of information requests on Parties.
4. Care is needed to avoid asking for information about ongoing enforcement cases that could affect national level prosecutions – some information can only be exchanged via secure law-enforcement channels.
5. In formulating questionnaires to Parties, working groups should strive to ask for just the information they really need, and resist the temptation to expand the remit they have been given. Working groups should be careful to explain why particular information is needed, so Parties can see the use to which it will be put, and thereby evaluate whether they wish to make the effort to respond.
6. Different information is likely to be available from different stakeholders. This could be different institutions within a Party, or even different organisations – such as regional or global intergovernmental organisations, non-governmental organisations working in-country, or other non-State actors at various levels. Management Authorities that are not in a position to provide all the information requested in a questionnaire independently are encouraged to consult appropriate relevant national authorities to obtain the required information.
7. Consideration should be given to how information will be integrated and analysed at the point the data request is made – to avoid asking for something that will not be possible to use, and to make sure that the resources needed for such syntheses are available.
8. There are likely to be some differences between questionnaires, as they are often about different species or commodities or addressed to different users. Similarly there are likely to be different issues in each of the CITES geographic regions, leading to different perspectives or levels of information available. However these differences should not be overemphasised.
9. Working groups should also aim to learn from previous questionnaires – if some questions are not answered by the majority of Parties responding, it may be that the question is either worded inappropriately, or in a confusing manner. Or it may just be a not very good question that should not be asked in future. The Secretariat should provide guidance and learning from previous questionnaires.
10. Working groups should note that it is more efficient for reporting requirements to be extended than for open ended requirements to be established. At the 16th Conference of the Parties, Resolution Conf. 11.17 (Rev CoP16) was amended, inter alia to include the following text:

RECOGNIZES that the Conference of the Parties, when requesting special reports, should give consideration to making those special reports time-limited, where this is appropriate, to avoid the potential for unnecessarily increasing reporting burdens;

11. Reporting against species-specific Resolutions should aim to assist in the making of non-detriment or legal acquisition findings and the monitoring of recommendations made under the Review of Significant Trade process.
12. Testing draft questionnaires with a small number of Parties, preferably from different regions, may help to make sure that questions are clear and that the questions will elicit the information desired.
13. In using the draft format, working groups should critically review if all of the questions are needed, and if any are not needed they should be removed for a particular questionnaire. If information beyond the proposed format is to be requested, this should be kept to the minimum necessary to implement a working group's mandate – the temptation to request information that would be 'nice to have', or 'interesting' should be resisted.
14. Provision of a draft completed report or 'model answers' might help Parties to be clear about the sort of information that is sought through specific questions.