



NOTIFICATION TO THE PARTIES

No. 2018/085

Geneva, 2 November 2018

CONCERNING:

Tortoises and freshwater turtles (Testudines spp.)
rapid-response identification network

1. At its 17th meeting (CoP17, Johannesburg, 2016), the Conference of the Parties adopted Decision 17.291, paragraph c), on *Tortoises and freshwater turtles (Testudines spp.)*, directing the Secretariat to, subject to available funding:
 - c) *in collaboration with ICCWC, relevant Parties and experts, establish a secure rapid-response identification network to connect inspecting officials to a network of verified specialists on species identification, with an initial pilot phase focusing on tortoises and freshwater turtles, that could be extended to other species, if appropriate.*
2. The purpose of the present Notification is to inform all Parties that, in accordance with Decision 17.291, paragraph c), a tortoise and freshwater turtle rapid-response identification network has been established under the auspices of the International Union for Conservation of Nature Species Survival Commission (IUCN-SSC) Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group. The purpose of the rapid-response identification network is to, at short notice, assist authorities responsible for wildlife law enforcement with the identification of tortoise or freshwater turtle specimens seized or confiscated, using photographs of the seized or confiscated specimens as the basis for identification.
3. The services of experts included in the rapid-response identification network are provided on a confidential basis and free of charge, and are available to authorities responsible for wildlife law enforcement only. Detailed information about the network and how to access its services, has been made available in the digital library of the Closed User Group for the CITES Tortoise and Freshwater Turtles Task Force, established on the World Customs Organization (WCO) CENComm platform.¹
4. Parties are reminded that requests for access to the CITES Tortoise and Freshwater Turtles Closed User Group should be communicated to the Secretariat, and are encouraged to, if not yet done, communicate the establishment of the Closed User Group to their relevant national authorities and encourage its use.
5. Parties are also reminded that all authorities responsible for wildlife and other environmental law enforcement, including customs, police and wildlife authorities, can request access to ENVIRONET, the WCO's secure global communication tool for information exchange and cooperation, managed and coordinated by the WCO Secretariat. More information on this can be found in Notification to the Parties No. 2015/039 of 25 June 2015.

¹ *The Closed User Group includes members of the Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles Task Force (or their representatives) that requested access to the Group, including law enforcement agencies, intergovernmental organizations, and non-governmental organizations. All members of the Closed User Group are able to, at their discretion, send secure messages and information to any other members of the Closed User Group. Closed User Group members also have access to a digital library of documents which includes alerts and other relevant materials and information. This digital library is however a restricted-access platform, and only members of the User Group representing customs, police and wildlife and forest authorities have full access.*

6. Any enquiries regarding the tortoise and freshwater turtle rapid-response identification network or its activities can be directed to the IUCN-SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group at ppvandijk@globalwildlife.org or the CITES Secretariat at info@cites.org.