



NOTIFICATION TO THE PARTIES

No. 2021/0042

Geneva, 25 June 2021

CONCERNING:

CITES BIG CATS TASK FORCE

1. At its 18th meeting (CoP18, Geneva, 2019), the Conference of the Parties adopted, *inter alia*, Decisions 18.245 and 18.248, paragraph a) on *African lions* (*Panthera leo*) and the *CITES Big Cats Task Force*, as follows:

18.245 Directed to the Secretariat

The Secretariat shall:

- a) *draft terms of reference and a modus operandi for the CITES Bigs Cat Task Force prior to convening its first meeting and submit it to the 73rd Standing Committee for review and adoption, and*

subject to external resources:

- b) *establish and convene, in consultation with the Standing Committee, a CITES Big Cats Task Force (Task Force), focusing on big cat species from Africa, Asia and Latin America, and consisting of representatives from Parties most affected by the illegal trade in big cats, the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime partner organizations, other Parties and organizations, as appropriate, and experts who the Secretariat determines may contribute to the Task Force;*
- c) *provide support to the Task Force allowing it, inter alia, to:*
 - i) *discuss enforcement and implementation issues related to the illegal trade in specimens of big cats;*
 - ii) *as deemed appropriate, exchange intelligence and other information on the illegal trade in big cats; and*
 - iii) *develop strategies and make recommendations to improve international cooperation regarding the enforcement of CITES concerning illegal trade in specimens of big cats; and*
- d) *report the findings and recommendations of the Task Force to the 74th meeting of the Standing Committee for its consideration, and for making its own recommendations as appropriate.*

18.248 Directed to the Standing Committee

The Standing Committee shall:

- a) *review and adopt the draft terms of reference, membership and modus operandi for the CITES Big Cat Task Force submitted by the Secretariat as per Decision 18.245, paragraphs a) and b) prior to convening the first meeting of the Task Force;*
2. To implement Decision 18.245, paragraph a), the Secretariat presented in the Annex to document [SC73 Doc. 23](#) draft terms of reference and a *modus operandi* for the CITES Big Cats Task Force, for consideration by the Standing Committee at its 73rd meeting (SC73, online, 5-7 May 2021).
3. The Committee did not have time to discuss this agenda item at SC73 and requested the Secretariat to publish the Terms of Reference and *modus operandi* for the CITES Big Cat Task Force in a Notification to the Parties. The Committee invited Parties and observers to send comments to the Secretariat and requested the Secretariat to revise the draft terms of reference and *modus operandi* based on those comments and to report back to the Standing Committee.
4. The Terms of Reference and *modus operandi* for the CITES Big Cat Task Force are presented in the Annex to the present Notification. Parties and observers are invited to send their comments to the Secretariat no later than 25 August 2021.

Terms of reference and *modus operandi* for the CITES Big Cat Task Force

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Task Force activities

1. The Task Force will:
 - a) discuss enforcement and implementation challenges and similarities between illegal trade in different species of big cats;
 - b) identify opportunities and prioritize actions to better address this illegal trade;
 - c) share information about the nature and scale of the illegal international trade in specimens of CITES listed big cats, and identify knowledge gaps;
 - d) provide a platform for the exchange of intelligence and other information relating to illegal trade in big cats, and explore mechanisms to do so on a regular basis;
 - e) share information about techniques and tools for identifying big cat specimens in trade, and identify needs and knowledge gaps;
 - f) consider in its deliberations the findings of available studies, such as those conducted in accordance with Decision [18.246, paragraph a\) on African lions and other big cats](#), and Decision 18.251 on jaguars;
 - g) consider best practices to prevent and detect attempts to launder illegal specimens through legal trade; and
 - h) develop strategies and propose actions to improve international cooperation regarding the enforcement of CITES for addressing illegal trade in specimens of big cats, to be presented to the Standing Committee in accordance with Decision 18.245, paragraph d), for its consideration.

Outcomes

2. The Task Force will generate the following outcomes:
 - a) a better understanding of enforcement priorities relating to illegal trade in specimens of big cats;
 - b) improved understanding of tools and techniques to identify big cat specimens in trade; their use for enforcement purposes to address illegal trade; and better knowledge of relevant forensic facilities, research institutions, and developments; and
 - c) enhanced exchange of intelligence and other information on illegal trade in big cats.

Outputs

3. The Task Force will generate the following outputs:
 - a) proposals for strengthened collaboration and targeted activities to more effectively enforce the Convention in response to this illegal trade; and
 - b) strategies and proposed actions providing a strong basis for Parties to take concrete actions to respond to illegal trade in big cat species, to be presented to the Standing Committee in accordance with Decision 18.245 paragraph d) for its consideration.

MODUS OPERANDI

Prioritization of Parties and big cat species

4. To make the Task Force meeting as practical and constructive as possible, the Secretariat has initiated a process of prioritization to identify Parties for participation in the Task Force, and to determine the big cat species most affected by illegal trade for the Task Force to focus on. Following matters have been taken into consideration:
 - a) big cat species most significantly affected by illegal trade, based on available illegal trade data (seizure data from annual illegal trade reports);
 - b) Parties identified in document [SC70 Doc. 51](#) and in Annex 4 to document [CoP18 Doc. 71.1](#) on *Asian big cats*, and concerned by [Decisions 18.100 to 18.102, and 18.105](#);
 - c) information on source, transit and destination countries most affected by illegal trade in specimens of big cat species, based on available documentation, studies and reports, for example documents [SC65 Doc. 39 \(Rev. 2\)](#), [SC66 Doc. 32.5A1](#), [SC70 Doc. 43](#) and [CoP18 Doc. 60](#) on illegal trade in cheetahs; the Annex to document [SC70 54.1 on African lion](#); paragraph 47 in document CoP18 Doc. 71.1 concerning illegal trade in jaguars; and the [2020 World Wildlife Crime Report](#) (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime);
 - d) subject to their availability, the results of studies that the Secretariat is instructed to produce on legal and illegal trade in African lions and other big cats as per Decision [18.246, paragraph a\)](#), and on Jaguars (*Panthera onca*) in accordance with Decision [18.251; and](#)
 - e) any information that may be presented in accordance with [Decision 18.246, paragraph e\)](#) on *African lions (Panthera leo) and the CITES Big Cats Task Force*.
5. Analysis of data and information from sources mentioned in paragraph 4 above indicates that the following key big cat species are of priority concern: cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*), clouded leopard (*Neofelis nebulosa*), lion (*Panthera leo*), jaguar (*Panthera onca*), leopard (*Panthera pardus*), tiger (*Panthera tigris*) and snow leopard (*Panthera uncia*).
6. Analysis of data and information from sources mentioned in paragraph 4 above identified the following Parties as Parties affected by illegal trade in big cats: Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Botswana, Cambodia, China, Czech Republic, Ethiopia, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Mexico, Mongolia, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Peru, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, South Africa, Spain, Suriname, Thailand, Yemen, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, United Republic of Tanzania, Viet Nam, and Zambia. Some of the Parties included in the list were identified through analysis of illegal trade data and are included because they have made large numbers of big cat seizures, suggesting efficiency in their detection of illegal trade in big cat specimens. Participation of these Parties in the Task Force could facilitate and promote exchanges concerning possible best practices and solutions.
7. Based on the findings of ongoing studies on jaguars, lions and other big cats still to be completed and any new illegal trade data that may become available, additional Parties and big cat species may be added.

Membership of the Task Force

8. In accordance with the provisions of Decision 18.245 paragraph b), the Task Force will include representatives from:
 - Parties most affected by illegal trade in big cats;

- representatives from the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC) partner organizations;
 - other Parties and organizations, as appropriate; and
 - experts who the Secretariat determines may contribute to the Task Force.
9. The Secretariat has limited funding available to support the participation of up to two representatives from eligible key Parties identified as affected by illegal trade in big cats, who are not in the position to cover their costs. These Parties may wish to nominate additional representatives at their own expense. Subject to the availability of funds, the Secretariat may on a case-by-case basis consider supporting the participation of a third representative. To ensure multi-disciplinary representation, the representatives that these Parties nominate should be from CITES authorities, police, customs, wildlife agencies or prosecutorial authorities. The nominated representatives should have relevant expertise on the subject matter and be able to contribute to the activities and outputs of the Task Force.
10. As indicated in paragraph 8 above, other Parties, organizations and experts with relevant experience or knowledge, or that work actively on big cat related matters will be identified and engaged. This could for example include Parties that have shown a long-standing interest in big cat issues, civil society organizations and individual experts, and entities such as the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), referenced in the Decisions on *African lions* (*Panthera leo*) and the *CITES Big Cats Task Force*, and associated with the implementation of key aspects of these Decisions. They will be encouraged to fund their own participation. Subject to the availability of funds, the Secretariat may be able to support the participation of one representative from some of these entities on a case-by-case basis.
11. Parties and organizations are encouraged to take into consideration gender diversity in the nomination of representatives.

Meeting agenda

12. The meeting agenda will be developed by the Secretariat.

Format and conduct of the Task Force

13. Ideally, the Task Force meeting should take place in a face-to-face setting. This will however be influenced by the developments concerning the COVID-19 pandemic and the related restrictive measures in place. If a face-to-face meeting will not be possible, online meetings, possibly at regional levels to accommodate for significant time differences, may have to be contemplated.