

NOTIFICATION TO THE PARTIES

No. 2023/123

Geneva, 2 November 2023

CONCERNING:

Range States of queen conch (*Strombus gigas*):
Invitation to participate in a genetics project

1. At its 19th meeting (CoP19; Panama City, 2022), the Conference of the Parties adopted Decisions 19.233 to 19.236 on *Queen conch* (*Strombus gigas*), including Decision 19.234, which reads as follows:

Directed to the Secretariat

19.234 *The Secretariat shall continue to collaborate with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM/CITES working group on queen conch, WECAFC, UNCTAD, OECS and other relevant international organizations, and, subject to external funding:*

[...]

- b) *provide assistance to range States of *S. gigas* on relevant enforcement issues and report new developments in this regard to the Standing Committee, as appropriate.*

[...]

2. In document [SC77 Doc. 68](#), the Secretariat referred to a project on queen conch genetics to address illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, involving the University of Rhode Island and the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI) that will look at genetic variation as a way to identify illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing with steps geared towards:
 - a) identifying genetic discontinuities across populations/stocks in different islands or nations;
 - b) finding the molecular markers that allow distinction of the different populations/stocks; and
 - c) developing a molecular assay that uses the molecular markers to identify products caught by IUU fishing.

3. This approach has been supported by the CFMC¹/OSPESCA²/WECAFC³/CRFM⁴/CITES Queen Conch Working Group and the WECAFC. Through this pilot phase, which is partly funded by the Netherlands through the CITES Secretariat, the connectivity among conch populations using high-resolution genetic data will be explored, thereby identifying the unique genetic profile of each population. Importantly, this approach will provide the baseline information to trace the international trade in queen conch products, thus identifying those originating from IUU activities.
4. Range States of queen conch are invited to participate in this project. Participating range States will be responsible for obtaining the required permits, which may include, among others, a CITES export certificate for scientific purposes (it is not a commercial certification) and a research permit, if needed.
5. A standardized procedure guide for tissue-sample collection will be provided to ensure consistency and reliability of data. A hard and digital copy of the detailed methodological procedures will be provided. Online training will be provided on the correct procedure for tissue collection. The deadline to send all samples is **15 December 2023**.
6. A sample will consist of a small portion of queen conch meat (2 cm³) from 35 individuals gathered at processing plants or donated by fishers that originated solely from known locations within your jurisdictional waters. Ideally, samples will consist of fresh meat, but they may come from frozen landings extracted within one month of collection. Collected samples will then be preserved in a provided preservation solution. All necessary materials for sampling will be provided to countries at no cost.
7. The project may cover costs associated with the international shipping of the samples to the US (University of Rhode Island) for a subset of the countries. Details will be agreed on a one-to-one basis. A system for tracking and managing the collected samples and associated data on a document and digital form that records all information from each sample will be established.
8. Requests for further information on the project and expressions of interest should be directed to info@cites.org, with “Queen conch” in the subject line; and copy to karen.gaynor@cites.org at the CITES Secretariat and dbeltran@uri.edu at Rhode Island University.

¹ *Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism*

² *Central American Fisheries and Aquaculture Organization*

³ *Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission*

⁴ *Caribbean Fishery Management Council*