

CITES Technical Work Group Report



Report of the Eighteenth meeting of the CITES Conference of the Parties 17-28 August 2019 Geneva, Switzerland

INTRODUCTION:

The CITES Technical Work Group (Team) (Buddy Baker (Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries), Carolyn Caldwell (MAFWA CITES Technical Work Group Representative), Jim deVos (Arizona Game and Fish Department) and Deb Hahn (Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA)) represented the state fish and wildlife agencies and where applicable the Provinces and Territories at the 18th Conference of the Parties (CoP) in Geneva, Switzerland. AFWA International Relations Committee Co-chair Rick Jacobson (Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection) served as the state representative on the U.S. Delegation. The CITES Secretariat, because of a change in meeting venue, constrained participant registrations which resulted in Mike Bednarski (Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries) not being able to attend as the new Northeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies representative.

SUMMARY:

A record 140 documents proposing new measures and policies on international trade were submitted to the CoP for consideration. Fifty-seven proposals to amend the species listed in Appendix I and II were also considered. Issues included but were not limited to eels, coral, paddlefish, turtle, and sea cucumber conservation; captive bred and ranched specimens; traceability of wildlife; rural communities and livelihoods; and the 2021-2030 CITES Strategic Vision. One thousand seven hundred Party delegates, observers, and journalists attended including 169 member governments and the European Union as well as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) representing groups from the Humane Society International to the Wildlife Conservation Society to the Safari Club International Foundation. In her opening remarks, the new CITES Secretary-General Ivonne Higuero stated, "It is our opportunity to advance the role of CITES in the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity...As an environmental economist, I believe that creative ways need to be explored so that the costs of conservation and enforcement are recognized. Custodians of wildlife and local communities play a vital role in managing wildlife and deserve to be rewarded. The contribution of conservation and legal wildlife trade to sustainable development is evident. It provides for our food, our well-being, our jobs and economic development." Ms. Higuero is a Panama national who grew up in Missouri and received a Bachelors in Biology from the University of Missouri and a Masters in Natural Resource Economics and Policy from Duke University.

KEY OUTCOMES:

1. The 2021-2030 CITES Strategic Vision was approved with numerous references to supporting sustainable use and trade.
2. The document on traceability was approved with minor changes proposed by the U.S. to ensure that it was clear that the recommendations were voluntary, and that the definition was not an officially adopted CITES definition.
3. No decisions were agreed to that would impose new conservation or management requirements on the states, Provinces or Territories for American eel, coral, seahorses, turtles, or paddlefish conservation.
4. The Mexican population of *Crocodylus acutus* (American crocodile) was transferred from Appendix I to Appendix II. With the Teams urging, an intervention by the U.S. stated that Mexico has work to do in terms of a management plan which should include consultation with the range countries of which the U.S. is one.
5. Shortfin and longfin mako sharks were listed in Appendix II.
6. A proposal to list three species of teatfish (sea cucumber) in Appendix II was approved. Two of the species (*Holothuria (Microthele) whitmaei* (black teatfish) and *Holothuria (Microthele) fuscogilva* (white teatfish)) occur in U.S. waters. The listings should not impact their conservation and management by the states.
7. The proposal to list woolly mammoth in Appendix II was withdrawn .
8. The Team noted an increased number of overarching documents seeking actions related to non-CITES listing species such as those submitted for songbirds and amphibians. It remains to be seen whether this will continue and/or become a burden to CITES implementation at the domestic level.



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[Traceability of Wildlife in Trade](#) (CoP18 Doc. 42 (Rev.1)): Following efforts by an intersessional working group, the Standing Committee put forward a definition of Traceability. While our participation in the working group resulted in a proposed definition that was much less prescriptive than others, we felt that the proposed wording was still less than ideal. In support of the states, the U.S. Delegation proposed amendments to the draft decisions to ensure that the wording of the traceability definition and guidance is clearly non-binding and voluntary. The decisions were adopted with the U.S. amendments.

[CITES 2021-2030 Strategic Vision](#) (CoP18 Doc. 10): The Team participated on the Standing Committee Strategic Vision Working Group established in December 2017. The goal was to incorporate more sustainable-use friendly language into the 2021-2030 Strategic Vision at CoP18. The Team supported the document submitted to the CoP that supported sustainable use and trade. The Vision was further strengthened by edits made during the CoP and approved.

[Eels, Including the American Eel](#) (CoP18 Doc. 63): The document adopted included recommendations for non-CITES listed eels (e.g., American eel) that were voluntary and should be easy for the states to address over the next few years. The IUCN American eel assessment will likely occur in 2020. The Team will continue to engage with the European Union and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.



[Identification of Sturgeon and Paddlefish in Trade](#) (CoP18 Doc. 54.3): The document on sturgeon and paddlefish was approved and did not result in any new requirements. Moving forward the emphasis will be on looking at the challenges to implementing the universal labelling system for the trade in and identification of caviar of Resolution Conf. 12.7 (Rev. CoP17) considering the shift in source from wild to aquaculture.

[Precious Corals](#) (CoP18 Doc. 64): The document was approved without changes. The decisions request the Animals Committee to analyze the outcomes of the precious coral survey and the FAO study and prepare recommendations, as appropriate, on actions needed to enhance the conservation and sustainable harvest and use of all precious corals in international trade. The Team will work with the impacted states to review the report to make sure it is accurate and acceptable for the state agencies.



Photo by IISD/Kiara Worth

[Proposals to Amend the Appendices](#) (CoP18 Doc. 105): There were a record 57 proposals to increase or decrease controls on international trade of species in the CITES Appendices. While no proposals were highly controversial or concerning to the state, Provinces, and Territories, there appears to be a movement away from science-based decision making for listing species in the Appendices. Some have suggested the goal may be to list as many taxa as possible in Appendix I, irrespective of whether the listing criteria are satisfied, in the mistaken belief that Appendix I listing and the attendant prohibition of trade will solve conservation problems.

[Conservation of Amphibians](#) (CoP18 Doc. 62 (Rev.1)): Costa Rica submitted a document on amphibian conservation. The document recommended general actions that included many non-CITES listed species. A working group was created to reduce the scope of the draft decisions. The updated draft decisions include identifying amphibians in trade, evaluating whether current levels are sustainable, gathering harvest information, and examining current enforcement efforts in an effort to advance recommendations to the next CoP.

[Songbird Trade and Conservation Management](#) (CoP18 Doc. 79): The U.S. and Sri Lanka submitted a document on the songbird trade that recommended the examination of the conservation implications of the songbird trade. A working group was created to clarify the draft decisions. The updated draft decisions recommend an analysis of the scale and scope of the songbird trade and a development of a workshop to provide information to the next Animals Committee for potential action.



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Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles (CoP18 Doc. 88): The document submitted to the CoP contained edits to a resolution on tortoise and freshwater turtle conservation which the Team supported. The document was approved. Future discussions will focus on the development of a guide on categories of turtle parts and derivatives in trade and arranging an enforcement meeting.

Guidance for Making Legal Acquisition Findings (CoP18 Doc. 39): The Parties have spent considerable time developing guidance to Parties on how to make a legal acquisition finding. A draft resolution that is non-binding guidance was developed and submitted to the CoP. With a few edits that improve the draft resolution, it was approved. The Team will monitor its implementation and potential implications for chain of custody and traceability of CITES-listed species and therefore their management.

Rural Communities/Livelihoods (CoP18 Docs. 17.1 and 18.1 (Rev.1)): CITES Parties continue to struggle to find a path forward to engage rural, indigenous, and local communities in CITES. An in-meeting working group was formed to consider developing a working group that would recommend a strategy on engaging rural, indigenous, and local communities to the next CoP.



American Crocodile Proposal (CoP18 Prop. 22): Mexico submitted a proposal to transfer the Mexican population of American crocodile from Appendix I to Appendix II. The Mexican down listing proposal for *C. acutus* passed without opposition. As promised, Mexico added an amendment from the floor for a zero quota for wild specimens. IUCN supported as did several countries. The U.S. intervened to support. At our request, the U.S. intervention also included a caution that before any quotas are considered, Mexico has work to do in terms of a management plan which should include consultation with the range states of which U.S. is one.

Woolly Mammoth Proposal (CoP18 Prop. 13): Israel submitted a proposal to list woolly mammoth in Appendix II. In the end, the proposal was withdrawn and a new decision was submitted that directs the CITES Secretariat, subject to external funding, to conduct a study concerning trade of mammoth ivory and what impact that has on illegal trade of elephant ivory. They are to report findings to the Standing Committee. The proposed decisions were accepted by consensus.

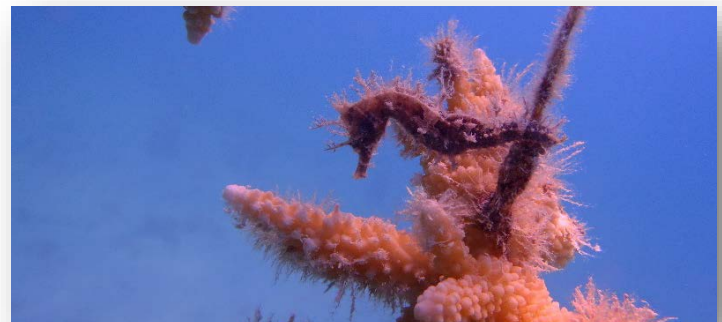


Small-clawed Otter and the Smooth-coated Otter Proposal (CoP18 Props. 6 & 7): The Team was interested in these proposals as they might relate to or impact river otter an Appendix II listed species. The proposals recommended transferring the two species from Appendix II to Appendix I. Both proposals highlighted an undefined increase in trade for the pet market with some information on population declines in the wild. Both proposals were approved. The U.S. voted yes.

Inclusion of Species in Appendix III (CoP18 Doc. 100): The Team was satisfied with the draft decisions and the edits to Resolution 9.25 (Rev. CoP17) in the document submitted to the CoP. The discussion of the document in plenary was brief with minor changes to its content before being adopted. The Team will continue to monitor this issue.

Sea Cucumber Proposal (CoP18 Prop. 45): The European Union's (EU) proposal to list three species of sea cucumber in Appendix II was adopted. Hawaii and the U.S. Pacific territories are included in two species' ranges. However, the states are at the edge of the species range, there is no international trade, and, in some cases, harvest is banned. The Team has spoken with the EU in the past and reminded them that the state agencies manage the species. This listing should not impact their conservation and management.

Mako Shark Proposal (CoP18 Prop. 42): There was considerable discussion around the proposal from Mexico to list these shark species on Appendix II. There were many interventions, both for and against including a debate on population trends. A vote by secret ballot was requested by Japan. The proposal was adopted with the support of 71% of the Parties. The U.S. voted against the proposal.



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Additional Meetings, Discussions, and Side Events of Note

- **Electronic permitting:** The Team continues to have discussions with USFWS, the wood products and musical instrument industry, and others to determine how we can support and guide USFWS efforts to advance development of both interim and long-term improvements to permitting, with the ultimate goal of online application, processing, and permit issuance.
- **American Alligator:** Outside of the context of CITES, some of the Team met with alligator farmers from Louisiana and members of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Crocodile Specialist Group to discuss trade and policy issues in the U.S. In addition, our Team met with the Ireland delegation to address their concerns about levels of “wild” American alligator products on the world market. They indicated that they were satisfied following the discussion.
- **Meeting with the CITES Secretary-General Ivonne Higuero:** The Team met with the new CITES Secretary-General. Ms. Higuero shared some perspectives on sustainable use and livelihoods that were positive. We discussed ways the states might assist with sustainable use issues in CITES.
- **Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Side Events:** There were two side events that promoted sustainable use and community livelihoods. They highlighted examples of community-based conservation efforts that include trade and support both species conservation and livelihoods. Examples included polar bear conservation in Canada, crocodile conservation in Kenya and Australia, etc. More information and fact sheets are located [here](#).
- **Sustainable Harvest and Trade of Wild Meat:** The side event included presentations from the Collaborative Partnership on Sustainable Wildlife Management (CPW), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), IUCN, and TRAFFIC. They discussed several aspects of the sustainable use and trade of wild meat and provided examples of its use from around the world including in Canada through the Wild Harvest Initiative.
- **International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC) Dinner:** The CIC hosted a dinner for numerous organizations and entities that support the sustainable use of wildlife. It was a good opportunity for some Team members to engage with sustainable use partners across the globe.
- **CBD and CITES:** A panel discussed how sustainable trade and sustainable use could be integrated into the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework being developed by the Convention on Biological Diversity. They proposed some interesting options that will assist the states in considering their comments on the Framework.
- **Polar Bear and CITES:** The international branch of the German Naturschutzbund (NABU) hosted the side event and called for a renewed effort to uplist polar bear at the next CoP. They presented information from a report they have published (*Sold Out. Polar Bears: Caught Between Skin Trade, Climate Change and Guns*). They stated that the report has evidence that there is insufficient control of trade in polar bear skins and that trade in polar bears is not sustainable.
- **Southeast Asian Reptile Conservation Alliance (SARCA):** SARCA provided an overview of the reptile skin trade (snakes & lizards) in southeastern Asian countries and the structure and mission of SARCA. The SARCA’s work is helping ensure sustainable trade, reducing incentives for illegal trade, and promoting animal welfare strategies. SARCA includes partners from the luxury products industry, government (i.e., Malaysian CITES Authority), intergovernmental, and non-governmental members. The presenters demonstrated how sustainable use of wild caught specimens can be a tool for species conservation and provide social, cultural, and economic benefits to local communities.
- **Small-clawed Otter in the Pet Trade:** This side event was an emotion-based presentation on the ills of keeping live otters as pets with a plea to support an Appendix I listing for the small-clawed otter. While we were unable to get an explanation about the relevance to CITES and trade data on the species, the question we raised effectively reminded the attendees that CITES is a scientific-based trade treaty and not an emotionally-based animal rights treaty.
- **Non-CITES Listed Trade Enforcement:** A meeting with members of the U.S. Delegation, including Rick Jacobson, was held with members of the Republic of Korean Delegation to begin exploration of opportunities to enhance trade enforcement in non-CITES listed species. Follow up discussions are planned for fall 2019.
- **Seahorse Conservation:** Project Seahorse and the IUCN have developed a web-based tool kit that provides relevant information related to management of seahorses. It can be found at www.iucn-seahorse.org/cites-toolkit.

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Jim deVos: WAFWA CITES Representative
Staff: Deb Hahn: Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies
Rick Jacobson: U.S. CITES Delegate for State Fish & Wildlife Agencies



To learn more about the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, visit the CITES website at: <http://www.cites.org/>