Governments to Consider New CITES Trade Controls

News

Posted by: niccosan

Posted on : 2007/2/28 1:50:00

New rules also proposed for elephant ivory and dozens of threatened plants and animals

The Secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) has published a provisional scientific and technical assessment of some 40 new government proposals for amending wildlife trade rules. Governments will accept or reject these proposals at the next triennial CITES conference, to be held in The Hague from 3 to 15 June.

Many of the proposals reflect growing international concern about the accelerating destruction of the world's marine and forest resources through overfishing and excessive logging. Others seek to advance the protection or sustainable use of diverse plants, reptiles, birds and mammals. Still others aim to recognize conservation successes by removing from the CITES Appendices species that are no longer endangered.

Biological diversity faces many threats, ranging from habitat destruction to climate change to unrestrained commercial harvesting for trade. By ensuring that the international trade in wildlife is carefully managed, CITES seeks to reward people engaged in sustainable trade while protecting the world's biological diversity, said Executive Director Achim Steiner of the United Nations Environment Programme, which administers the CITES secretariat.

This year's CITES conference will consider an increased number of proposals for high-value species from the oceans and forests. This confirms that many governments increasingly view CITES as a vital tool for safeguarding the ecological and commercial future of key fisheries and timber-producing forests, said CITES Secretary-General Willem Wijnstekers.

Marine Species

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in 2002 the world's capture (non-aquaculture) fisheries produced 93.2 million tonnes of fish, of which 84.5 million came from the sea. The value of the total marine and freshwater catch at the first point of sale was around USD 78 billion. As a result, it is estimated that some 47 % of marine fish stocks or species groups are fully exploited, 18 % overexploited and 10 % significantly depleted or recovering from depletion. (See www.fao.org/docrep/007/y5600e/y5600e04.htm)

A growing number of commercially exploited fish have come under CITES controls in recent years, for example the basking and whale sharks were included in Appendix II in 2002 and the great white shark and the humphead wrasse in 2004. This year's proposals (see www.cites.org/eng/cop/14/prop/index.shtml) seek to expand CITES coverage of marine species to two other sharks, the European eel, pink coral, sawfishes, a type of cardinelfish popular in the aquarium trade and finally two species of lobsters.

The spiny dogfish (Proposal no. 16) is a small shark that was once abundant in temperate waters. It is now overexploited for its meat, which is highly valued in Europe (often featuring in British fish and

chips shops) and elsewhere. Like many other sharks, it is particularly vulnerable to excessive fishing because of its slow reproductive rate. It also tends to travel in large schools of hundreds or thousands, which are easier for fishing boats to track. Germany on behalf of the European Community (EC) proposes listing the dogfish in Appendix II (which manages trade through a permit system) and establishing a sustainable fishery management programme for the species.
The porbeagle shark (Prop. 15) has also experienced population declines, notably in the northern Atlantic and the Mediterranean, owing to unsustainable fishing for its high-value meat and fins. The proposal by Germany on behalf of the EC notes the lack of consistent data on the global catch of this species. It argues that requiring CITES export permits would ensure that international markets are supplied by fish from sustainably managed fisheries that keep accurate records.
The European eel (Prop. 18) spawns in the Sargasso Sea in the eastern Atlantic. The larvae then ride the Gulf Stream on a three-year migration towards Europe, where they enter estuaries and metamorphose into young fish. A popular food, eels live in coastal and freshwater ecosystems throughout Europe and the Mediterranean. Noting that stocks have declined dramatically over the past several decades owing to overfishing and other causes, Germany on behalf of the EC is proposing to require export permits by listing the eel on Appendix II.
The most valuable of all the precious corals, pink coral (Prop. 21) has been fished for over 5,000 years and used for jewellery and other decorative items. These tiny marine animals (known as polyps) build vast colonies throughout the tropical, subtropical and temperate oceans. The resulting reefs and colonies create extremely valuable habitat for innumerable other species. But overharvesting and the destruction of entire colonies by bottom trawls and dredges have led to dramatic population declines. The United States proposes adding the pink coral to Appendix II to control the trade therein.

Once widespread from the tropics to the temperate latitudes, and living mostly in coastal areas, sawfishes (Prop. 17) have seen their numbers decline by over 90 % throughout their range. Their rostral saws, teeth, fins and another body parts bring high prices and are used in traditional medicine and as curios, while live specimens are sought for aquaria. If agreed in The Hague, the proposal by Kenya, Nicaragua and the United States would add sawfishes to Appendix I, which would forbid all international commercial trade.

The Banggai cardinelfish (Prop. 19) has been popular in the aquarium trade since 1995, with some 700,000 to 900,000 fish now being collected every year. Its limited geographic range, small population and particular reproductive habits render it particularly vulnerable to overexploitation. The proposal of the United States calls for managing this species through the CITES permit system. It also argues that existing captive-breeding facilities could meet much of the demand.
Finally, Brazil proposes a CITES Appendix-II listing for the Brazilian populations of the Caribbean spiny lobster and the smoothtail spiny lobster (Prop. 20). It states that after 50 years of intense commercial exploitation, these two species have been overfished for export to international food markets. The lobsters live in coastal waters, including reefs and seaweed banks, and take some four years to reach full maturity.

Timber species
It is widely recognized that tropical forests are under severe pressure from logging and land conversion. FAO estimates that the world lost over 0.8 % of its tropical forests every year between 1980 and 1990. From 1990 to 2000, the annual loss of forest cover in many tropical countries continued to be significant, in many cases over 1 % per year.
Timber trees, like fishery species, have only recently started to be covered by CITES. However, as loggers scour the remaining tracts of forest and selectively remove high-value timbers, concern has

grown over the need for better controls. The CITES member States have already agreed to include Latin America's bigleaf mahogany and Southeast Asia's ramin and agarwood trees in Appendix II. Germany on behalf of the EC is proposing an Appendix-II listing for three species of rosewood (Props. 31 and 32). This species grows only in the swamp forests of southern Belize and nearby regions of Guatemala and Mexico. The proposal argues that this species is threatened by increasing deforestation in the region and that it is very much sought after as tonewood for musical instruments. Easier access to its habitat and declining stocks of other rosewoods may boost trade levels.

The cedar (Prop. 33) of Central and South America, once a common tree, has been selectively cut for at least 250 years for its timber. This timber is valued locally for its resistance to rotting and insects and internationally as a precious wood. The cedar also suffers from extensive deforestation. To protect the species from being further reduced throughout its natural range, Germany on behalf of the EC proposes listing it on Appendix II and requiring trade permits.

Ivory

The long-running global debate over the African elephant has focused on the benefits that income from ivory sales may bring to conservation and to local communities living side by side with these large and potentially dangerous animals versus concerns that such sales may encourage poaching. This year's proposals (Props. 4 to 7) again reflect opposing views on how best to improve the conservation and sustainable use of the world's largest land animal.

CITES banned the international commercial ivory trade in 1989. Then, in 1997, recognizing that some southern African elephant populations were healthy and well managed, it permitted Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe to make a one-time sale of ivory to Japan totalling 50 tonnes. The sales took place in 1999 and earned some USD 5 million.

In 2002, CITES agreed in principle to allow a second sale from Botswana (20 tonnes), Namibia (10 tonnes) and South Africa (30 tonnes). (In 2004 a request that CITES authorize annual quotas was not agreed.) The one-time sales were made conditional on the ability of the MIKE programme (Monitoring of Illegal Killing of Elephants) to establish up-to-date and comprehensive baseline data on elephant poaching and population levels. MIKE was established to provide an objective assessment of what impact future ivory sales may have on elephant populations and poaching.

In October 2006, however, the CITES Standing Committee, which oversees the implementation of CITES decisions when the Conference of the Parties to CITES (COP) is not in session, determined that the MIKE baseline data was not yet sufficiently complete and so the sales could not go forward. This issue will be revisited when the Standing Committee meets again in The Hague just before the June COP.

For this year's conference, Botswana and Namibia have jointly submitted a new proposal to maintain the elephant populations of Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe in Appendix II while easing the conditions for permitting future sales. In addition, Botswana is requesting authorization for a one-off sale of 40 tonnes of existing ivory stocks followed by an annual export quota of up to eight tonnes of ivory per year from its national population.

Meanwhile, the United Republic of Tanzania is for the first time recommending that its elephant populations be transferred from Appendix I to Appendix II, with no immediate quota, thus also opening up the possibility for future sales. It argues that trade in ivory would be sustainable and a valuable instrument of conservation.

Taking the opposing view, Kenya and Mali are proposing a trade ban in raw or worked ivory from all range States be imposed for a period of 20 years. They argue that allowing any trade in ivory will increase the poaching of elephants.

The CITES Secretariat believes that all of this year?s elephant proposals contain technical problems and a meeting of the African range States is scheduled to take place in advance of the conference.

Other proposals

The slow loris (Prop. 1) is a small, nocturnal primate that is native to South and Southeast Asia. The proposal states that the two species of slow loris are threatened by high and growing demand in Asian countries for traditional medicines and pets. They also suffer from escalating habitat destruction. Cambodia contends that transferring these species from Appendix II to Appendix I, thereby forbidding all commercial trade, would help raise public awareness of the need to protect it and would boost national conservation measures.

Algeria proposes adding several gazelle species (Props. 10 to 12) to Appendix I. Guatemala seeks to transfer the beaded lizard (Prop. 14) from Appendix II to I. Uganda would like to transfer the population of Ugandanleopards (Prop. 3) from Appendix I to Appendix II to allow limited trade in sports trophies. Brazil proposes moving the Brazilian population of the black caiman (Prop. 13) from Appendix I to Appendix II. Other proposals call for removing species altogether from CITES on the grounds that they no longer require such protection. These include a type of agave (Prop. 22), a succulent plant, the North American bobcat or lynx (Prop. 2), the ornamental plant oconee bells (Prop. 28) and several cactus species (Props. 24 and 25).

Backgrounder: Understanding CITES

Thousands of species around the world are endangered or at risk as a result of human activities such as habitat destruction, overharvesting and pollution. CITES was adopted in 1973 to address the threat posed by just one of these activities: unsustainable international trade. With some 169 Parties, CITES is one of the world's most important agreements on species conservation and the non-detrimental use of wildlife.

Even after commercial fishing and the timber industry are set aside, the international trade in wildlife is big business, estimated to be worth billions of dollars annually and to involve more than 350 million plant and animal specimens every year. Unregulated international trade can push threatened and endangered species over the brink, especially when combined with habitat loss and other pressures.

CITES provides three regulatory options in the form of Appendices. Animals and plants listed in Appendix I are excluded from international commercial trade except in very special circumstances. Appendix I contains about 530 animal species and a little more than 300 plant species, including all the great apes; various big cats such as cheetahs, the snow leopard and the tiger; numerous birds of prey, cranes, and pheasants; all sea turtles; many species of crocodiles, tortoises and snakes; and some cacti and orchids.

Commercial international trade is permitted for species listed in Appendix II, but it is strictly controlled on the basis of CITES permits. This Appendix II covers over 4,460 animal species and 28,000 plant species, including all those primates, cats, cetaceans, parrots, crocodiles and orchids not listed in Appendix I.

Finally, Appendix III includes species that are protected within the borders of a member country. An Appendix-III listing allows a country to call on others to help it regulate trade in the listed species. This Appendix lists over 290 species.

CITES, then, does much more than regulate trade in large charismatic mammals. It sets up a green certification system for non-detrimental wildlife trade (based on CITES permits and certificates), combats illegal trade and related wildlife offences, promotes international cooperation, and helps to establish management plans so that range States can monitor and sustainably manage CITES-listed species.

CITES requires each member State to adopt the necessary national legislation and officially

designate a Management Authority that issues trade permits. Governments must also designate a Scientific Authority to provide scientific advice on imports and exports. These national authorities are responsible for implementing CITES in close cooperation with Customs, wildlife enforcement, police or similar agencies.
As the impact of trade on a population or a species increases or decreases, the species can be added to the CITES Appendices, removed from them, or transferred from one Appendix to another. These decisions are to be based on the best biological information available and an analysis of how different types of protection can affect specific populations.
It is worth noting that when a species is transferred from Appendix I to Appendix II, its protection has not necessarily been downgraded. Rather, it can be a sign of success that a species population has grown to the point where well-regulated trade may be possible. In addition, by allowing a species to be commercially traded at sustainable levels, an Appendix-II listing can actually improve protection by giving local people a greater stake in the species' survival.
The preliminary review by the CITES Secretariat described above focused on whether the proposals from governments have sufficiently addressed the various listing criteria. These criteria relate to trade (is the species being actively traded? is trade really the problem rather than, say, habitat destruction?); biology (what is the scientific evidence that populations are declining or increasing?); and other technical matters (e.g. has the proponent consulted thoroughly with other range states?).

The proposals are posted at www.cites.org/eng/cop/14/prop/index.shtml
The Secretariat's technical review is also posted at www.cites.org