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Guest Articles

Featured Guest Article #18: CITES at 40 Marks a Major Decision Point for Sharks, Trees, Snakes, Turtles and other Wildlife Species

by:
John E. Scanlon, Secretary-General,
Convention on International Trade in
Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and
Flora (CITES)

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Guest Article #18

CITES at 40 Marks a Major Decision Point for Sharks, Trees, Snakes, Turtles and other Wildlife Species

posted on: *Thursday, May 9th, 2013*

by: John E. Scanlon, Secretary-General, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)

CITES at 40 Marks a Major Decision Point for Sharks, Trees, Snakes, Turtles and other Wildlife Species: Guidelines, toolkits, standards and action plans fostering capacity, financing, law enforcement, livelihoods, science, sustainability, traceability and synergies also adopted

The 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES CoP16) held March 2013 in Bangkok, will be remembered as a defining moment in the 40 year history of the Convention.

It takes enormous effort to negotiate treaties and then make them work, and at CoP16, the 178 Parties to CITES turned to the Convention to ensure the legal, sustainable and traceable trade in their precious wildlife, timber and other forest products. The Conference unanimously brought hundreds of new timber species under CITES controls, along with a number of tortoises and turtles and a wide range of other plant and animal species. Significantly, five shark species and all manta rays were also brought under the CITES trade regulation regime following a vote supported by more than the required two thirds majority. The international community made the best use of this pragmatic and effective agreement to help ensure a sustainable path for our oceans and forests.

Parties also heeded the call from the Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD, or Rio+20) and recognized the important role of CITES as an international agreement standing at the intersection between trade, the environment and development[1].

Financing

The Asian and African Development Banks, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the World Bank and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) all attended CoP16 in recognition of the need to scale up investment in the implementation of CITES. The World Bank also participated through its Global Tiger Initiative, which showcased its business model for tackling illegal trade in tigers.

CITES member States decided to further explore the possibility of making the GEF a financial mechanism for the Convention. Parties also requested the CITES Secretariat to continue to work with the GEF Secretariat and the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to enhance the GEF biodiversity strategy in GEF-6 by strengthening the species-based component, and to convey CITES priorities for the GEF to take into account when developing the strategy. The CITES Secretary-General has written to both the GEF Chief Executive Officer and the Executive Secretary of the CBD to follow through on this critical CoP decision.

Parties will consider the results of this cooperation and the most appropriate way forward at their 17th meeting in 2016 (CoP17).

Better Standards, Clearer Rules and Practical Guidance

CoP16 adopted historic provisions to: provide guidance for establishing scientifically robust criteria for sustainable trade (known in CITES as 'non-detriment findings'); determine the state responsible for issuing documentation for marine species harvested in international waters (known in CITES as 'introduction from the sea'); assess the impact of CITES decisions on the livelihoods of rural communities; further advance electronic permitting; enhance capacity-building, including through the CITES Virtual College; ensure the safe non-air transport of live, wild animals and plants; and strengthen the conservation and management of a range of species, including snakes, turtles/tortoises, sturgeons, saiga antelopes, and agarwood-producing species.

On an issue that drew quite a lot of attention from Parties, as well as the NGO community, there were also decisions on means to address potential conflicts of interest that could significantly impair the impartiality, objectivity or independence of members of the CITES Animals and Plants Committees.

Synergies

Party-led programmatic synergies were progressed in multiple pragmatic ways. First and foremost, the CITES Strategic Vision was extended from 2013 to 2020. It was also amended to include references to the contribution that CITES will make towards the implementation of the relevant outcomes of Rio+20 and achievement of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2010-2020, including making a "significant contribution towards achieving the relevant Aichi Biodiversity Targets (adopted at CoP10 of the Convention

Guest Author



John E. Scanlon
Secretary-General,
Convention on
International Trade in
Endangered Species of
Wild Fauna and Flora
(CITES)

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Significance of Marine Science and Technology and Importance of Capacity Building and Marine Technology Transfer to SIDS <i>New York, United States of America</i>
65th Session of the WMO Executive Council Session <i>Geneva, Switzerland</i>
Leadership Summit for the Caribbean Challenge Initiative (CCI) <i>British Virgin Islands, United Kingdom</i>
Twelfth Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues <i>New York, United States of America</i>
International Day for Biological Diversity 2013 <i>worldwide</i>
Semantics for Biodiversity – International Workshop <i>Montpellier, France</i>
81st General Session of the World Organization on Animal Health <i>Paris, France</i>
International Conference for International Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities Land and Sea Managers Network <i>Darwin, Australia</i>
Trondheim Conference on Biodiversity: Ecology and Economy for a Sustainable Society <i>Trondheim, Norway</i>
IPBES First Full MEP and Bureau Meeting <i>Bergen, Norway</i>

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Reporting
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(CRS)

on Biological Diversity (CBD). Such a reference to global targets set by another multilateral environment agreement is a first for CITES.

Synergies were also advanced through decisions taken on the GEF, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), and the CBD's Global Strategy for Plant Conservation.

Furthermore, a resolution proposed by Switzerland was adopted and encourages Parties to strengthen the cooperation, coordination and synergies among the national focal points for the biodiversity-related conventions and other partners to enhance coherent implementation of the Convention at the national level. A process was also initiated whereby the CITES Standing Committee will explore further options to strengthen cooperation, collaboration and synergies between CITES and other biodiversity-related conventions and report back to CoP17 – thereby advancing paragraph 89 of 'The Future We Want.'

Finally, very strong support was given to the work of the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC) - a joint initiative of CITES, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the World Bank and the World Customs Organization^[2].

Enforcement

Guest Article 17^[3] addressed the unprecedented levels of international cooperation to combat serious wildlife crime, an outcome that saw past differences set aside to stop the poaching of elephants for their ivory and the rhinoceroses for their horns. These international commitments are now being translated into national actions, with the CITES Standing Committee to review progress between now and the next meeting of the CoP in 2016. Full implementation of these decisions is key to winning the fight against illicit wildlife trade.

Several events of the ICWC that were held in conjunction with CoP16 brought together government ministers to discuss transboundary wildlife crime^[4] and, for the first time, the world's Wildlife Enforcement Networks to help scale up regional enforcement capacity and coordination^[5]. On the sidelines of CoP16, the Asian Development Bank convened chief justices, attorneys general, senior police, customs and other enforcement officers from Asian countries to raise awareness of, and provide training on combating transboundary wildlife crime.

Precious Timber

International trade in a range of rosewoods and ebonies from Asia, Central America and Africa (Madagascar) will now be regulated by the Convention. Rapidly rising demand for precious tropical hardwoods has led to serious concerns that unregulated logging is depleting populations of already rare species. Range States, including the host country, Thailand, believed that legally-binding regulation under CITES would help them manage these valuable resources more sustainably. All these proposals on timber species were adopted by consensus after very intense and long negotiations. An action plan for Madagascar was adopted to implement national activities that support its new listings. Other decisions further direct the Parties to pursue certain activities that will ensure a transparent and robust implementation of the new listings.

The joint programme between CITES and the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO)^[6] will continue to support the efforts of the countries concerned to strengthen their capacities to implement the Convention for listed tree species. A side event was held by ITTO and CITES on the achievements under and future plans for this joint programme. Germany announced that it would contribute more funding to the EUR 7.5 million that has already been generously made available for a second phase of the programme, mainly by the European Union, together with other Parties and the private sector. Both the CITES and the ITTO Secretariats will continue working together over the next four years to facilitate the implementation of CITES for the most valuable CITES-listed tree species (including not only timber species, but also agarwood-producing and medicinal tree species).

Means for facilitating the cross-border movement of wooden musical instruments were also addressed during CoP16. Special procedures under CITES were agreed for musicians and institutions traveling with musical instruments that contain precious woods (such as Brazilian rosewood), and other products of species listed by the Convention, thereby avoiding the need to obtain permits for every international trip.

Sharks and Manta Rays

The meeting reached a climax on its final day after a request in the closing Plenary, to reopen the debate on four shark species, failed to obtain the required support from one third of the Parties.

With this and other actions, CITES Parties confirmed decisions made earlier in the week by the Conference's Committee I (that deals with scientific matters) to include five commercially valuable shark species in Appendix II. The oceanic whitetip (*Carcharhinus longimanus*), scalloped hammerhead (*Sphyrna lewini*), great hammerhead shark (*Sphyrna mokarran*), smooth hammerhead shark (*Sphyrna zigaena*) and the porbeagle shark (*Lamna nasus*) are harvested in huge numbers for their valuable fins and, in some cases, meat.

There were broad alliances forged in support of proposals to list the sharks and the manta ray from across multiple regions and in taking their decisions, Parties had the benefit of technical and scientific advice provided by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) Advisory Expert Panel, the CITES Secretariat, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)/TRAFFIC and others.

Recognizing that implementation of these decisions will take some preparation time, Parties decided that the entry into force of the inclusion in Appendix II should be delayed by 18 months, until 14 September 2014. From that time forward, international trade in products from these species will need to be accompanied by CITES permits confirming that they are harvested sustainably and legally and the trade will also need to be reported to the CITES Secretariat.

Brazil announced its intention to host a regional meeting of Parties from the Caribbean and South America to address implementation issues prior to the listings entering into force, and the Secretariat has met with relevant Brazilian agencies since that time to support Brazil in its planning for the meeting.

Ireland, on behalf of the European Union Member States and Croatia, announced an implementation package of EUR 1.2 million to be given to the CITES Secretariat to assist developing countries with implementation of CITES controls for newly-listed sharks and manta rays, and other marine species. Discussions are already underway with the European Commission regarding how to best deploy these funds.

These listings mark a milestone in the involvement of CITES in marine species, which will enable the Convention to serve as a complementary instrument to fishery agreements and bodies at the global and regional levels, national fishery legislation and authorities and relevant codes, programmes or action plans.

World Wildlife Day and CoP17 in South Africa

Parties unanimously declared the 3rd of March (the date on which CITES was signed in 1973) as World Wildlife Day and the UN General Assembly will be requested to declare it as a UN Day. As its final formal act, the Parties accepted by acclamation South Africa's offer to host the 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to be held in 2016.

An Extraordinarily Generous Host

The member States, observers and the CITES Secretariat thanked the Kingdom of Thailand and its people for their extraordinary hospitality and exemplary arrangements in hosting CoP16, which were recognized as major contributors towards the meeting's success.

[1] [IISD Guest Article 13: CITES: From Stockholm in '72 to Rio+20 - Back to the future: 6 July 2012.](#)

[2] [CITES Information Note: The International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime: April 2011.](#)

[3] [IISD Guest Article 17: CITES CoP16, Bangkok 2013: A 'Watershed Moment' for Combating Wildlife Crime: 15 April 2013.](#)

[4] [CITES COP16: Chair's Summary of Roundtable on Combating Transnational Organized Wildlife and Forest Crime for Ministers and High-Level Representatives: 3-14 March 2013.](#)

[5] [CITES Press Release: First global meeting of wildlife enforcement networks highlights importance of cross-border cooperation to combat transnational organized wildlife and forest crime: 7 March 2013.](#)

[6] [ITTO-CITES Programme on Tree Species.](#)

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