

## Summary of the 73rd Meeting of the CITES Standing Committee: 5-7 May 2021

For the first time in its history, the Standing Committee of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES SC73) convened online. The meeting was originally scheduled for October 2020, but was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Standing Committee provides policy guidance to the Secretariat on the implementation of the Convention, oversees the management of the Secretariat's budget, and coordinates the work of the other committees and working groups. The work of SC73 will feed into the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties, which is expected to convene in 2022.

During the three-day meeting, SC73 considered:

- the Rules of Procedure in an online context;
- a language strategy for the Convention, with the consideration of including Arabic, Chinese, and Russian or the option to have an incremental language strategy that aims to identify, with the help of interested parties, those documents that should be translated as a priority;
- CITES input to the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, emphasizing that CITES views should be considered in the negotiations on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework;
- the African Carnivores Initiative and the linkages between CITES and the Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals, agreeing to establish an intersessional working group, aiming to make recommendations to the June 2021 meeting of the Animals Committee;
- implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of the Convention;
- a report by Madagascar on its implementation of Resolution Conf. 11.9 (Rev. CoP18) on conservation of and trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles, agreeing to recommendations directed to the Secretariat, Madagascar, parties, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations implementing programmes in Madagascar; and
- a risk analysis for future meetings of the Standing Committee and three different scenarios for its 74th meeting.

Due to time constraints, SC73 was not able to consider all agenda items. Standing Committee Chair Carolina Caceres proposed, and everyone agreed:

- the intersessional working group on stocks and stockpiles (elephant ivory), chaired by the European Union (EU), would continue its work and report back to SC74;
- the Secretariat would post the draft terms of reference and *modus operandi* for the Big Cats Task Force on the CITES website and provide an intersessional review with an updated document to be considered by the SC at a future point;
- the working group on annotations to the CITES Appendices would report to SC74; and
- the agenda item on the guidance for the publication of the Appendices would be deferred to SC74.

SC74 met daily from 12:30–3:30 pm CET (GMT+2) on the KUDO platform with interpretation in English, French and Spanish, and was streamed live in all three languages on the CITES YouTube Channel.

## A Brief History of CITES

CITES was established as a response to growing concerns that over-exploitation of wildlife through international trade was contributing to the rapid decline of many species of plants and animals around the world. The Convention was signed by

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representatives from 80 countries in Washington, DC, on 3 March 1973, and entered into force on 1 July 1975. There are currently 183 parties to the Convention.

The aim of CITES is to ensure that international trade of wild animal and plant species does not threaten their survival. CITES parties regulate wildlife trade through controls and regulations on species listed in three appendices. Appendix I lists species endangered due to international trade, permitting such trade only in exceptional circumstances. Appendix-II species are those that may become endangered if their trade is not regulated, thus they require controls aimed at preventing unsustainable use, maintaining ecosystems, and preventing species from entering Appendix I. Appendix-III species are those subject to domestic regulation by a party requesting the cooperation of other parties to control international trade in these species.

In order to list a species in Appendix I or II, a party needs to submit a proposal for approval by the Conference of the Parties (CoP), supported by scientific and biological data on population and trade trends. The proposal must be adopted by a two-thirds majority of parties present and voting. As the trade impact on a species increases or decreases, the CoP decides whether or not the species should be transferred or removed from the appendices.

There are approximately 5,800 fauna species and 30,000 flora species protected under the three CITES appendices. Parties regulate international trade of CITES species through a system of permits and certificates that are required before specimens listed in its appendices are imported, exported, or introduced from the sea. Each party is required to adopt national legislation and to designate two national authorities, namely, a Management Authority responsible for issuing permits and certificates based on the advice of a Scientific Authority. These two national authorities also assist with CITES enforcement through cooperation with customs, police, and other appropriate agencies. Parties maintain trade records that are forwarded annually to the CITES Secretariat, thus enabling the compilation of statistical information on the global volume of international trade in an appendix-listed species.

The operational bodies of CITES include the Standing Committee (SC) and two scientific committees: the Plants Committee (PC) and the Animals Committee (AC).

### ***Recent Meetings of the Conference of the Parties***

The first CoP was held in Bern, Switzerland, in November 1976, and subsequent CoPs have been held every two to three years. The CoP meets to, *inter alia*:

- review progress in the conservation of species included in the appendices;
- discuss and adopt proposals to amend the lists of species in Appendices I and II;
- consider recommendations and proposals from parties, the Secretariat, the SC, and the scientific committees; and
- recommend measures to improve the effectiveness of the Convention and the functioning of the Secretariat.

The CoP also periodically reviews the list of resolutions and decisions, as well as the species listed in its appendices.

**CITES CoP14:** CoP14 met in The Hague, the Netherlands, from 3-15 June 2007. Delegates addressed a range of topics, including: the CITES Strategic Vision 2008-2013; a guide on compliance with the Convention; management of annual export quotas; and species trade and conservation issues, including Asian big cats, sharks, and sturgeons. Delegates agreed that no cetacean species should be subject to periodic review while the International Whaling Commission moratorium is in place. CoP14 approved the listing of slender-horned and Cuvier's gazelles and slow loris on Appendix I and Brazil Wood, sawfish, and eel on Appendix II, and amended the annotation on African elephants to allow a one-off sale of ivory from Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe with a nine-year resting period for further ivory trade. The media spotlight was on negotiations on the future of ivory trade and African elephant conservation, with many highlighting the consensus by African range states as a major achievement of this meeting.

**CITES CoP15:** CoP15 met in Doha, Qatar, from 13-25 March 2010. The meeting considered 68 agenda items and 42 proposals to amend the CITES appendices. CoP15 adopted resolutions and decisions directed to parties, the Secretariat, and Convention bodies on a wide range of topics including: electronic permitting; Asian big cats; rhinos; bigleaf mahogany; and Madagascar plant species. Regarding species listings, CoP15 decided to list, among others: Kaiser's spotted newt; five species of tree frogs; the unicorn beetle; rosewood; holywood; and several Madagascar plant species.

**CITES CoP16:** CoP16 met in Bangkok, Thailand, from 3-14 March 2013. The meeting adopted 55 new listing proposals, including on sharks, manta rays, turtles, and timber. Nine proposals were rejected (Caspian snowcock, Tibetan snowcock, saltwater crocodile, Siamese crocodile, South American freshwater stingray, Rosette river stingray, blood pheasant, and two species of freshwater turtles). Three proposals were withdrawn: on Southern white rhino and two African elephants, and three were not considered: on Indochinese box turtle, Ryukyu black-breasted leaf turtle, and Annam leaf turtle. The CoP also adopted strong enforcement measures to address wildlife crime.

**CITES CoP17:** CoP17 convened from 24 September to 4 October 2016 in Johannesburg, South Africa. CoP17 was the largest CITES meeting to date, with more than 3,500 participants representing 152 governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and media. Delegates considered 90 agenda items and 62 species-listing proposals submitted by 64 countries. Resolutions and decisions were adopted on, *inter alia*: actions to combat wildlife trafficking; demand reduction strategies to combat illegal trade in CITES-listed species; provisions on international trade in hunting trophies of species listed in Appendix I or II aimed at enabling better controls of the sustainable and legal origin of those specimens; illegal trade in cheetahs; elephants and trade in ivory; agarwood-producing taxa; and ebonies.

**CITES CoP18:** CoP18 convened from 17-28 August 2019 in Geneva, Switzerland. CoP18 was attended by 169 member governments and the European Union, including 1,700 delegates, observers, and journalists. CITES delegates addressed 57 proposals to increase or decrease controls on international trade in wildlife and wildlife products, submitted by 90 parties. In addition, a record 140 documents proposing new measures and policies on international

trade in wild fauna and flora were submitted for consideration by the Conference. CoP18 added 18 more shark species to Appendix II. In response to the increasing exotic pet trade, many species of turtle, lizard, and gecko were also granted protections. CoP18 also established the CITES Big Cat Task Force.

### SC73 Report

On Wednesday, 5 May, Standing Committee Chair Carolina Caceres (Canada) welcomed all participants to the online 73rd meeting of the CITES Standing Committee. She thanked participants for attending under such unusual circumstances and across all time zones, and expressed gratitude to the Secretariat for finding options to move the SC mandate forward. Chair Caceres extended condolences to those who had lost loved ones to the pandemic. In wishing everyone a good morning, afternoon and evening, she called for short and focused interventions, delivered slowly and clearly.

CITES Secretary-General Ivonne Higuero commended participants' diligent work through challenging times, particularly those who worked from home while managing to maintain team cohesion. She noted early indications of some 800 participants from 97 parties had registered for this meeting, the largest participation in the history of the SC. She drew attention to the well-attended regional briefings and asked for feedback on these new work modalities.

### Administrative and Financial Matters

**Agenda and working programme:** On Wednesday, SC73 adopted the meeting's agenda (SC73 Doc.1.1) and working programme (SC73 Doc.2), and took note of the annotated agenda (SC73 Doc.1.2).

**Rules of Procedure:** Secretary-General Higuero drew attention to SC73 Doc.3 and SC73 INF.1, noting the latter provides guidance on the application of the Rules of Procedure in an online context. Israel asked for clarification on live interventions, with Chair Caceres noting she had not provided precise constraints in terms of duration and number of interventions.

**Outcome:** SC73 agreed to the Rules of Procedure, which among others, state that:

- parties that are not members of the Committee will be entitled to participate in the online meeting with a maximum of four connections per party;
- if a motion for a closed session is carried, the Committee shall postpone the discussion of the item to a later session that will be closed, as described in Rule 16; and
- SC may establish such intersessional and in-session working groups, as necessary.

**Admission of observers:** The SC noted the list of organizations invited to attend the meeting, as contained in document SC73 Doc.5 (Rev.1).

**Financial matters: Report of the Finance and Budget Subcommittee:** On Wednesday, Switzerland introduced the oral report, noting the contributions of Switzerland to cover participants' expenses for the online SC and Scientific Committees meetings in 2021, highlighting that only 25% of contributions due in 2021 have been collected.

The SC noted the report.

**Reports on current activities of the Scientific Committees:**  
**Animals Committee:** On Wednesday, Animals Committee (AC) Chair Mathias Lörtscher (Switzerland) presented the report (SC73 Doc.8), describing the AC's ambitious intersessional work programme subsequent to the postponement of its 31st meeting due to COVID-19. He described the intersessional decisions, including the approval of the 2020-2022 workplan, and noted that six intersessional working groups had been established. To promote transparency, Humane Society International asked for observers to be invited to join any future informal working groups, with Chair Lörtscher agreeing. Species Survival Network delivered a statement on behalf of many non-governmental organizations (NGOs), pertaining to transparency and the Rules of Procedure, calling for in person, postal, or online votes to be recorded and made public.

The SC noted the document.

**Plants Committee:** On Wednesday, Plants Committee (PC) Chair Aurélie Flore Koumba Pambo (Gabon) introduced the report (SC73 Doc. 8.2), noting that its 25th meeting had been postponed but the Committee's work continued online. She said the PC established six intersessional working groups and agreed on a roadmap for 2020-2021.

The SC took note of the document.

**Arrangements for the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP19):** On Friday, Secretary-General Higuero updated participants that Costa Rica had to withdraw its offer to host CoP19 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. She noted that, in the absence of alternative offers, the fallback option is to host CoP19 in Geneva, Switzerland, in July 2022, with restricted participation. David Shepherd Wildlife Federation, on behalf of several NGOs, underscored the importance of ensuring transparency and equity and urged that there should not be physical or hybrid meetings until full participation can be ensured.

The SC noted the discussions.

### Strategic Matters

**Rules of Procedure of the COPs: Report of the working group:** On Wednesday, Chair Caceres, as Chair of the intersessional working group on Rules of Procedure, introduced SC73 Doc.9. She explained the draft amendments to the following rules of procedure of the CoPs: Rule 7.2a on the membership of the Credentials Committee, Rule 25.5 on addressing amendments to proposals, and Rule 25.6 on amendment proposals that concern the same taxon but are different in substance. She noted the working group agreed on the amendments to Rules 7.2a and 25.5 but needed extra time to finalize amendments to Rule 25.6 on two or more proposals relating to the same taxon but different in substance. Indonesia, New Zealand, Belgium, Canada, Peru, Kenya, Namibia, Sudan, and IWMC – World Conservation Trust supported the working group's recommendations on Rule 7.2 of increasing the number of representatives of different parties in the Credentials Committee from five to six.

On Rule 25.5, New Zealand, Belgium, Canada, Namibia, and IWMC – World Conservation Trust deemed the proposed amendments appropriate. India sought clarification on the intent of reducing the scope, with Chair Caceres explaining that Rule 25.5 is relevant only in the context of the original proposal as a whole,

not in the context of only the proposed amendment to the proposal. China noted potential conflict between Rule 25.5 and Rule 24.2, and stressed it should be ensured all parties can follow discussions when amendments to rules are proposed. Indonesia and Namibia noted Rule 25.6 as agreeable in its current format, while many participants concurred further deliberations were needed on the matter, with Belgium asking for any changes to the voting order to be exceptional and justified. Canada suggested amending the text pertaining to same taxon to ensure that if adoption of one proposal necessarily implies the rejection of another proposal, the latter proposal shall nevertheless be submitted in relation to any remaining taxon. Peru and others asked for additional time to consider options on Rule 25.6, while New Zealand suggested illustrating the options with real life examples.

**Outcome:** SC73 agreed to propose to CoP19 amendments to Rule 7.2a, Rule 25.5, and Rule 25.6 (first part only), as contained in SC73 Doc.9. SC73 agreed that Rule 25.6 paragraph 14 on how to manage two or more proposals relating to the same taxon requires further consideration.

**Conduct of Committees: Guidance to assist Chairs of working groups established by the Committees:** On Wednesday, SC Chair Caceras introduced SC73 Doc.10, noting the guidance set forth. New Zealand noted the challenges for small delegations to participate in working groups as well as the need to ensure balance between parties and observer organizations throughout the duration of working groups. Poland, on behalf of the EU and its Member States, and Canada welcomed the guidance.

**Outcome:** SC73 endorsed the draft guidance and requested the Secretariat to finalize it, taking into account the comments received.

**Language strategy for the Convention:** On Wednesday, Switzerland, as Chair of the Finance and Budget Subcommittee, introduced SC73 Doc.11 (Rev.1), emphasizing the value of increasing the number of working languages of the Convention by including Arabic, Chinese and Russian and recognizing the significant budgetary implications. He presented two options: integration of such languages or the option to have an incremental language strategy that aims to identify, with the help of interested parties, those documents that should be translated as a priority.

Kuwait recognized the importance of introducing additional languages and proposed establishing an intersessional working group to further discuss this item. Belgium expressed preference for an incremental language strategy. Canada asked for a further discussion on the two options, with results presented at SC74.

The US noted that at this stage the SC is not in a position to make a decision on this item. China favored the first option, recognizing the importance of the Chinese language. Yemen underscored the need to add the Arabic language. The Russian Federation supported the inclusion of Arabic, Chinese and Russian as the working languages of CITES.

The Republic of Korea highlighted the cost implications but supported the first option as a way of reducing parties' administrative burden. Georgia noted the impact on enforcement of adding additional languages. Senegal underscored the burden of adding additional languages. Switzerland proposed to include China and Russian Federation in the further discussion in the Subcommittee.

**Outcome:** The SC agreed to further discuss this item in the subcommittee, and include China and the Russian Federation, and present a way forward at SC74.

**Cooperation with other biodiversity-related conventions: CITES input to the post-2020 global biodiversity framework:** On Wednesday, the Secretariat introduced SC73 Doc.12, emphasizing that CITES views should be considered in the negotiations on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and called for an intersessional working group on the matter, which Bahamas, Indonesia, Cambodia, and Democratic Republic of Congo supported. Israel, supported by Peru, Chile, Brazil, Gabon, Switzerland, the EU, and David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation, on behalf of 16 NGOs, noted that it could be too late in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) process to set up such a group. He suggested working with the CBD Secretariat and through the Chairs of the Scientific Committees to strive to convey such input. Georgia emphasized the need to involve CITES scientific and management authorities in providing input to the country CBD focal points.

Chair Caceres clarified that the role of the group would be to react to the evolving development of the framework.

**Outcome:** The SC agreed not to form an intersessional working group and instead invite the CITES Secretariat to engage in the CBD discussions with support from the Chairs of the SC and Scientific Committees.

**Cooperation with the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals:** On Thursday, Secretary-General Higuero introduced SC73 Doc.13 noting the work between CITES and the Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) is the embodiment and practice of synergies between biodiversity-related conventions and praised the excellent relationship between the two conventions. CMS Executive Secretary Amy Fraenkel welcomed the renewed collaboration between the two conventions. The US requested to "note" rather than "endorse" the CMS-CITES Joint Work Programme 2021-2025 and said any intersessional working group should take into account input from the AC, with Safari Club International Foundation concurring with the latter in a written note.

SC73 took note of the document.

**African Carnivores Initiative:** On Thursday, Secretary-General Higuero introduced the Report of the Secretariat (SC73 Doc.14), which presents the draft Programme of Work (PoW) for the Joint CITES-CMS African Carnivores Initiative (ACI). She explained the ACI aims to bring coherence and efficiency to the implementation of the resolutions and decisions of CITES and CMS relating to the African lion, leopard, cheetah, and African wild dog. She noted that the ACI addresses trade and broader conservation issues to ensure the long-term existence of the four species it covers. Peru, India, Gabon, and others voiced support for the initiative and acknowledged the importance of collaboration between the two conventions. Israel, supported by Niger and the US, noted that cheetah had been omitted from the planned action result pertaining to non-detriment findings for trade in lions and leopards in the ACI PoW and should therefore be added. Niger, supported by Gabon and Burkina Faso, suggested several amendments to the ACI PoW, such as changing "sustainable" to "non-detrimental" to improve CITES' implementation. Niger further proposed recognizing the risks

from trade in captive-bred specimens with regard to stimulation of demand, and the risks of zoonotic diseases from big cat breeding. Gabon called for harmonization in nomenclature and taxonomy used in the annexes, while Sudan highlighted the need for finance and cooperation in addressing the challenges faced by wildlife, with Zimbabwe suggesting a financial strategy to implement the PoW.

Conservation Force said some ACI PoW objectives might fall beyond the scope of the Convention, such as objective 2 on land use planning and habitat conservation. He underscored habitat loss as the main driver of decreasing wildlife. He noted conservation of ecosystems as more important than a single species approach and focus should be on “endangered spaces” instead of “species.” He supported tourist safari hunting as a primary tool in preventing habitat loss and called for financial support for range states.

In a written statement, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) noted that habitat conservation and restoration are core elements of CMS. Born Free Foundation, on behalf of many NGOs, suggested recommending the implementation of One Health principles as well as demand reduction strategies to combat illegal trade in ACI species. In a written intervention, Panthera made several suggestions including: strengthening the PoW by better defining the structures to facilitate implementation, such as establishing a framework for assigning activities; and taking into account the effects of climate change and human population growth on the four ACI species.

Chair Caceres suggested establishing an intersessional working group to take on board the proposed revisions, as the online format of the meeting does not permit concurrent working groups. She suggested the group work promptly to inform the June 2021 AC meeting.

**Outcome:** SC73 agreed to set up an intersessional working group, to be chaired by Germany, to incorporate issues raised during discussions, to inform the June 2021 AC meeting.

**Implications of the COVID 19 pandemic on the implementation of the Convention:** On Friday, Secretary-General Higuero introduced SC73 Doc.15. She noted it summarizes the implications of the pandemic on CITES implementation, specifically on national CITES authorities, governing bodies, and scientific advisory committees, as well as on the CITES Secretariat. She underscored the document presents lessons learned, garnered through feedback and a survey, and recommendations. She invited comments on the scope and objectives of the Secretariat’s proposed adaptation and mitigation measures to cope with unexpected events such as the COVID-19 pandemic in the future.

Israel drew attention to the World Health Organization (WHO), World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), and UN Environment Programme (UNEP) guidelines on reducing public health risks associated with the sale of live wild animals of mammalian species in traditional food markets. While applauding the creation of a working group on the role of CITES in reducing the risk of future zoonotic disease emergence associated with international wildlife trade, he suggested more immediate action through CITES links to law enforcement bodies and a notification from the CITES Secretariat urging parties to implement the WHO guidelines’ recommendations.

Chair Caceres took note of the intervention but encouraged participants to focus their interventions on the current agenda item. Indonesia called for financial flexibility in unforeseen circumstances to ensure transparency; noted potential problems with a hybrid meeting format; and asked for a comprehensive overview of budget implications as might be incurred by the cancellation of meetings. In terms of format, many voiced a preference for face-to-face gatherings, but stressed that in exceptional circumstances, such as COVID-19, other arrangements should be used to ensure work does not grind to a halt.

Canada, Gabon, Senegal, Tanzania, Chile, and others recognized the challenges of using virtual platforms and suggested adding “in case of emergencies and when in person meetings are not possible” or “under exceptional circumstances” in the pertinent recommendations. Poland, Morocco, Niger, Burkina Faso, Kenya, and others stressed the need to ensure transparency in decision making and access in a virtual setting. Japan concurred and drew attention to accountability and budget constraints. Natural Resources Defense Council raised concern with postal voting and encouraged information on such votes to be published to ensure transparency.

Niger underscored the concern of unequal access to vaccines. Canada, Peru, Gabon, and Senegal supported Israel and looked forward to the working group on the role of CITES in reducing the risk of future zoonotic disease emergence associated with international wildlife trade. Tanzania underscored the importance of live markets in ensuring livelihoods. Japan expressed interest in joining the working group, but noted that other organizations are already undertaking this work.

SC73 noted the document and interventions.

### ***Interpretation and Implementation Matters***

**Review of resolutions and decisions:** On Thursday, Chair Caceres introduced the Secretariat’s report (SC73 Doc.16), highlighting the proposal to correct the non-substantive errors in the interpretation section of the Appendices and in resolutions and decisions. Poland, Peru, and others expressed support. Australia reiterated that one of the decisions in question directs the AC not to conduct periodic reviews for any great whale species while the moratorium by the International Whaling Commission is in place. Gabon, Argentina, and Pro Wildlife, on behalf of several NGOs, agreed to the change in Resolution Conf.10.10 on trade in elephant specimens, indicating the change does not narrow the scope of the resolution.

**Outcome:** The SC agreed to the proposed corrections of the non-substantive errors outlined.

**Revisions to the guidelines for the preparation and submission of CITES annual reports and to guidelines for the preparation and submission of CITES annual illegal trade reports:** On Thursday, Chair Caceres introduced SC73 Doc.17 with proposed revisions to the guidelines. The Secretariat clarified that “tusks” refers to elephant, hippopotamus, walrus, and narwhal. Belgium and Israel expressed support for the revisions. Peru offered text to clarify some areas.

**Outcome:** The SC agreed to the revised guidelines for the preparation and submission of CITES annual reports and the revised guidelines for the preparation and submission of CITES annual illegal trade reports.

**Electronic systems and information technologies:** On Thursday, Switzerland, as Chair of the working group, introduced SC73 Doc.18, and noted the work of the CITES Electronic Permit Information eXchange (EPIX) Task Force, and the proposed revision of Resolution Conf. 12.3 (Rev. CoP18) on permits and certificates. Many countries praised the report and the proposed innovations, and supported the changes. New Zealand emphasized the value of exchanges between multiple management authorities. Australia welcomed the adoption of modern border clearance processes. The US offered some textual changes to the draft electronic permit.

**Outcome:** The SC noted the document and agreed to some revisions of Resolution Conf.12.3 as offered by parties.

**Purpose codes on CITES permits and certificates:** Australia introduced the report of the intersessional working group (SC73 Doc.19), emphasizing its focus on codes “Z” (zoo), “P” (personal), “T” (commercial), “M” (medical), “E” (educational), “N” (reintroduction or introduction to the wild), and “L” (law enforcement/judicial/forensic). Israel welcomed the report and requested to include new code “F” when the purpose of transaction is for food, underscoring the linkages between zoonotic diseases and bushmeat. Canada agreed that parties would benefit from a separate resolution on zoos; and there is a need to look more into the trade in species covered by Appendix I. Belgium offered: for “Z” the addition of “rescue center”; and that “P” might require further discussion. Gabon noted that “T” should be used when elephants are exchanged. Brazil offered a new definition for code “L” referencing transfer of specimens for forensic purposes if the permit is issued under court order.

SC73 noted the progress made by the working group and the comments provided.

**Simplified procedures for permits and certificates:** On Friday, the Secretariat introduced draft guidance on the use of the scientific exchange exemption and the simplified procedures to issue permits and certificates (SC73 Doc.20). Indonesia supported finalizing the guidance. Belgium supported the development of a short checklist to accompany the guidance.

**Outcome:** SC73 endorsed the draft guidance and requested the Secretariat to finalize the guidance, taking into account the considerations expressed by parties, and to make it available on the Convention website.

**Stocks and stockpiles:** On Friday, Chair Caceres introduced SC73 Doc.21, which presents the overview of existing provisions agreed by the parties concerning controls on stocks of specimens of CITES-listed species. She explained that in order to implement Decision 17.170 (Rev. CoP18) that directs the SC to consider the objectives and implementation of controls on stocks of specimens of CITES-listed species, the Committee should establish an intersessional working group.

Poland, Zimbabwe, and Peru supported the establishment of the intersessional working group, with the former, along with China, suggesting reducing its scope. Argentina, Chile, and Peru indicated their interest in participating in the group. Canada suggested

establishing the new group might be challenging in view of the pandemic and the many other groups already created. Canada called for any resulting guidance from the working group to reflect the scope of CITES.

**Outcome:** SC73 agreed to establish a working group to focus on:

- controls on stocks of specimens of CITES-listed species specified in SC73 Doc.21;
- conservation and enforcement objectives in the management of both government and privately held stocks and stockpiles of specimens; and
- definitions of “stock” and “stockpile.”

**Stocks and stockpiles (elephant ivory): Report of the working group:** On Friday, noting SC73 had run out of time to discuss SC73 Doc.22, Chair Caceres commended the EU, as the Chair of the intersessional working group on guidance on ivory stockpiles, for the group’s work, and invited further guidance to be included and to report back to SC74.

### **Species Specific Matters**

**Maintenance of the Appendices: Annotations:** On Friday, Chair Caceres thanked the working group for its report (SC73 Doc.25) and noted the group would report back to SC74.

**Guidance for the publication of the Appendices:** On Friday, Chair Caceres noted that consideration of the report of the Secretariat (SC73 Doc. 26 Rev.1) would be deferred to SC74.

**CITES Big Cats Task Force:** Noting time constraints, Chair Caceres asked the Secretariat to post the draft terms of reference and *modus operandi* for the Big Cats Task Force (SC73 Doc.23) on the CITES website and provide an intersessional review, with an updated document to be considered by the SC at a future point.

**Tortoises and freshwater turtles (Testudines spp.): Implementation of Resolution Conf. 11.9 (Rev. CoP18) on conservation of and trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles in Madagascar:** On Friday, Madagascar introduced its report (SC73 Doc. 24.2), noting that trafficking had continued during the pandemic and underscored that since 2020 her government has applied a zero-tolerance approach. She described actions taken to improve governance and combat corruption, including the arrest of dishonest police officials and European citizens. She noted that all forms of media are being used and meetings set up with local communities to spread the message. In noting that illegal trade is driven by international demand, she thanked the Secretariat and partners for their help in conserving the species.

On Friday, Secretary-General Higuero noted that the report of the Secretariat (SC73 Doc.24.1) contains the observations and recommendations of the Secretariat on the report submitted by Madagascar. She drew attention to paragraph 16, which contains recommendations to the SC.

The US, supported by Humane Society International, on behalf of several NGOs, commended Madagascar and the Secretariat for their efforts, but noted the information contained in the reports is out of date, and suggested the SC request a further report from Madagascar with updated data. Madagascar agreed to provide further information, as requested.

**Outcome:** SC73 noted the report prepared by Madagascar and agreed to recommendations directing:

- Madagascar to scale up efforts to gather information and intelligence concerning the criminal networks operating within and from the country, to facilitate investigations that will go beyond frontline offenders such as the local poachers who are often at the lowest end of the illegal trade chain, targeting those individuals managing and organizing the illegal activities;
- parties, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations implementing programmes in Madagascar or planning to do so to take into consideration in their work programmes and activities the regional strategy to combat trafficking in radiated tortoises in the Atsimo-Andrefana region; and
- the Secretariat to continue to monitor illegal trade in tortoise and freshwater turtle species as it affects Madagascar, and the measures being implemented to address it, and to bring any matters of concern that may arise to the attention of the SC.

### Concluding Items

**Future Standing Committee meetings and activities:** On Friday, Secretary-General Higuero introduced a risk analysis for future meetings of the Standing Committee (SC73 Doc.28) with three different scenarios for SC74:

- hold a face-to-face meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, in September 2021;
- invite a party to host SC74 or seek alternative facilities in Switzerland in late 2021 or early 2022; or
- hold SC74 in an online format in early 2022.

Chair Caceres underscored the challenges of the online format for an expected heavy agenda. France said it would be prepared to consider hosting SC74 in early 2022, however should the pandemic continue, it would have to limit participation. Peru expressed preference for an online format. New Zealand noted that having a meeting in early 2022 would make deadlines tight for CoP19. Poland suggested having in-session working groups in an online format. Canada expressed preference for face-to-face meetings, but if there was no other option, the agenda should prioritize items for discussion and defer less urgent items to intersessional work. China, Kenya, Gabon, Congo, and Bahamas also stressed that a face-to-face meeting would be the most efficient format. Niger said online is the preferred option for all meetings until vaccines are available to everyone. Sudan supported the face-to-face option but also the concerns shared about availability of vaccines.

**Outcome:** Taking into account the input received, SC73 instructed the Secretariat to progress with its planning going forward.

**Closing remarks:** On Friday, Chair Caceres thanked all participants for their patience and input. She said she was sad they had not managed to conclude the agenda but that important lessons had been learned about virtual meetings. SG Higuero noted a consolidated executive summary would be circulated and posted online and thanked all delegates.

Chair Caceres closed the meeting at 3:50 pm CET (GMT +2).

### A Brief Analysis of SC73

A year and half ago, the world was preparing for 2020 to be a landmark year for biodiversity. And then the COVID-19 pandemic struck, forcing the cancellation or postponement of numerous conferences, meetings, and negotiations. Following months of hope that the pandemic would subside and allow for participants to meet in person, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) was one of the last multilateral environmental agreements to move to an online format. During nine hours of meetings spread over three days, the first CITES Standing Committee (SC) to be held online turned out to be the most attended and proved that while physical meetings are still the preferred option, online formats can provide inclusion and transparency, while addressing complex issues.

This brief analysis reflects on how the pandemic is affecting the work of the Convention and whether there is a role for CITES in addressing its root causes.

### Navigating the Pandemic

In her opening remarks, SC Chair Carolina Caceres praised the Secretariat for moving the SC agenda forward. The relatively light agenda for this meeting was bolstered by the work carried out through more than 15 intersessional working groups established since SC72 in 2019, regional briefings, and numerous informal online meetings. Cumulatively, these activities have advanced the work of the Convention, despite the challenges of not being able to convene face-to-face.

Interestingly, registration requests also included some parties that had been unable to send representatives to previous face-to-face meetings of the Standing Committee. Despite the inevitable connection glitches experienced by some participants, most were able to make their interventions. The message board was also a means to submit interventions that could not be presented orally, which Chair Caceres would then read into the Summary Record. At the end of the meeting, many expressed satisfaction with the process, despite missing meeting face-to-face.

Completing the agenda proved challenging, nonetheless. Some agenda items, including the discussion of the terms of reference and *modus operandi* of the Big Cats Task Force and the intersessional working group on stocks and stockpiles (elephant ivory), were postponed due to lack of time.

Delegates considered at great length the format of the next SC. Many welcomed France's offer to potentially host a meeting, possibly even a hybrid one, in early 2022. Some African countries expressed concern that unless everyone is vaccinated, SC74 should be held in an online format to ensure equity. There was overall agreement that if online meetings are held in the future, in-session working groups should be given space and time to meet. Some delegates commented that discussions on the language strategy for the Convention and Rules of Procedure for meetings of the Conference of the Parties (CoP) would have benefited from an in-session working group meeting to expedite consensus.

### Facing the Pandemic

The pandemic and its zoonotic origins were not seen as a logistical challenge alone. In discussions on the African Carnivores Initiative, for example, Niger proposed to recognize the risks from trade in captive-bred specimens with regard to the possibilities that big cat breeding could spread zoonotic diseases.

Subsequently, when CITES Secretary-General Higuero introduced the agenda item on the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of the Convention, Israel drew attention to the World Health Organization (WHO), World Organisation for Animal Health, and UN Environment Programme guidelines on reducing public health risks associated with the sale of live wild animals of mammalian species in traditional food markets. He encouraged more immediate action, for example, through CITES links to law enforcement bodies. One participant reacted by saying that Israel's comment was not appropriate for the agenda item, as the item was about the logistical challenges. Others noted that the WHO had not concluded that the COVID-19 pandemic had a zoonotic origin. Supporting Israel, some NGOs stressed that, given the global emergency, "there is need for more urgent action than a working group can provide." Some suggested to raise the issue under "Any other business" and propose issuing a notification on that matter. However, that was ultimately not possible as SC73 ran out of time and there was no further discussion.

### Addressing the Roots of the Pandemic

Much discussion around the pandemic has focused on the potential role of illegal wildlife trade. But it is just as critical to think of the risks and vulnerabilities caused by large-scale *legal* wildlife trade. The legal wildlife trade is the backbone of the Convention. As such, the intersessional working group on the role of CITES in reducing the risk of future zoonotic disease emergence associated with international wildlife trade due to report back at SC74 will be key to understanding whether CITES has a role to play in reducing the threat of coronavirus pandemics. And the answer may well be yes. Most countries do not have an agency dedicated to comprehensively screening wildlife imports for diseases. Participants think this, as well as bans on high-risk wet markets, stricter regulations on certain captive breeding programmes, wildlife trade and consumption, are some of the issues that the working group could address to ensure the implementation of the Convention. Given the current global situation, many expressed hope that the working group will find its bearings quickly to enable it to promptly start its work on this pressing issue.

### Upcoming Meetings

**CITES AC31:** The thirty-first meeting of the CITES Animals Committee will convene online to advance work on implementation before CoP19. **dates:** 31 May and 1, 4, 21 and 22 June 2021 **location:** virtual **www:** <https://cites.org/eng/com/ac/31/index.php>

**CITES PC25:** The twenty-fifth meeting of the Plants Committee will convene online to advance work on implementation before CoP19. **dates:** 2-4 and 21 and 23 June 2021 **location:** virtual **www:** <https://cites.org/eng/com/pc/25/index.php>

**World Environment Day:** This year's observance of World Environment Day will be on the theme of ecosystem restoration and focus on resetting our relationship with nature. It will also mark the formal launch of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030. **date:** 5 June 2021 **location:** global **www:** <https://www.worldenvironmentday.global/>

**Eighth Session of the Plenary of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES):** This virtual meeting will consider, for approval, the scoping report for the nexus assessment and a thematic transformative change assessment. It will also consider interim work plans of the IPBES task force for the intersessional period 2021–2022, as well as financial and budgetary arrangements. **dates:** 14–24 June 2021 **location:** virtual **www:** <https://ipbes.net/>

**IUCN World Conservation Congress 2020:** The IUCN Congress will be a key milestone for nature conservation and the development of a new global framework for biodiversity. **dates:** 3–11 September 2021 **location:** Marseille, France, and virtual **www:** <https://www.iucncongress2020.org/>

**2021 UN Biodiversity Conference (CBD COP 15):** The 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the CBD, the 10th meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, and the 4th meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing are scheduled to take place to review the achievement and delivery of the CBD's Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020. It is also expected to take a final decision on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, as well as decisions on related topics, including capacity building and resource mobilization. **dates:** 11–24 October 2021 (TBC) **location:** Kunming, China **www:** <https://www.cbd.int/meetings/>

**CITES SC74:** The 74th meeting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora will meet either in person or hybrid format in early 2022 or online in the late fall/winter of 2021/2022. **dates:** 2021/2022 TBD **location:** TBD **www:** [www.cites.org](http://www.cites.org)

**CITES CoP19:** The 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora will meet in 2022. **dates:** 2022 (TBD) **location:** TBD **www:** [www.cites.org](http://www.cites.org)

For additional upcoming events, see <http://sdg.iisd.org/>

### Glossary

AC	Animals Committee
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
CMS	Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals
CoP	Conference of the Parties
PC	Plants Committee
SC	Standing Committee
WHO	World Health Organization