

## CITES CoP20 Highlights: Thursday, 27 November 2025

The twentieth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP20) to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) continued to meet in two parallel sessions throughout the day. Committee I adopted several listing proposals of plant and aquatic species, while delegates in Committee II discussed matters relating to conservation and trade of elephants, compliance, and legal acquisition findings.

### Committee I

#### Proposals to Amend the Appendices I and II

**Chilean Palm (*Jubaea chilensis*):** CHILE introduced Prop.41 to include the Chilean palm (*Jubaea chilensis*) in Appendix I. The Committee approved the proposal.

**Pony-tailed palms (*Beaucarnea hookeri* and *Beaucarnea glassiana*):** MEXICO introduced Prop.42 to include the pony-tailed palms (*B. hookeri* and *B. glassiana*) in Appendix II. The Committee approved the proposal.

**Aloes (*Aloe* spp.):** SWITZERLAND introduced Prop.48, to amend the listing of *Aloe* spp. in Appendix II to include four species previously treated under the genus *Chortolirion* (*A. bergeriana*, *A. jeppeae*, *A. subspicata*, and *A. welwitschia*). The Committee approved the proposal.

**Cape aloe (*Aloe ferox*) and Candelilla (*Euphorbia antisiphilitica*):** The UK introduced Prop.51 suggesting a minor amendment to annotation #4 for Cape aloe (*A. ferox*) and Candelilla (*E. antisiphilitica*).

Committee I approved the proposal.

#### Regulation of Trade

**Non-detriment findings for species of Appendix-II species taken from areas beyond national jurisdiction:** Chair Mathias Lörtscher (Switzerland) introduced [CoP20 Doc.51](#) with draft decisions on *Introduction from the sea*.

Committee I agreed to the document.

**Trade in stony corals:** The Chair introduced [CoP20 Doc.66.1](#) including revised decisions, new decisions, and amendments to Resolution Conf 11.10 (Rev. Cop15) on trade in stony corals.

Expressing concern with the definition of substrate in the amended resolution, the EUROPEAN PET ORGANIZATION, on behalf of other organizations and supported by INDONESIA and FIJI, requested an amendment to the revised decision directing the Standing Committee (SC) to make recommendations on possible amendments to the resolution as a whole, rather than its annex only. NEW ZEALAND, supported by CANADA, AUSTRALIA, and the UK, asked to restrict the amendments to the issue of substrate.

Chair Lörtscher suggested limiting the amendment to include the word “substrate” in the decision, which was accepted.

AUSTRALIA introduced [CoP20 Doc.66.2](#) containing proposed amendments to the definitions contained in annex 1 of Resolution Conf.11.10 (Rev. CoP15) and suggested an additional amendment to ensure alignment with Resolution Conf.10.16 (Rev. CoP19) on specimens of animal species bred in captivity. The US objected, proposing instead to continue discussion on this matter in the intersessional period. The US also proposed, but did not receive support for, an additional amendment to include reference to “subsequent generations” in line with Resolution Conf.12.3 (Rev. CoP19) on permits and certificates.

Committee I agreed to CoP20 Doc.66.1 as amended, and to CoP20 Doc.66.2 as amended by AUSTRALIA.

#### Species Conservation and Trade

**Aquatic species listed in the CITES Appendices:** The Chair introduced [CoP20 Doc.86](#).

Committee I agreed to the document.

**Queen Conch (*Strombus gigas*):** The Chair introduced [CoP20 Doc.91](#) proposing the renewal of decisions on Queen Conch (*S. gigas*).

Committee I agreed to renew the relevant decisions.

**Marine Ornamental Fishes:** Chair Lörtscher introduced [CoP20 Doc.92](#), which contains multiple draft decisions on analytical tools to support the prioritization of marine ornamental fishes.

Many parties supported the Secretariat’s recommendation not to adopt the draft decisions. The US, NEW ZEALAND, AUSTRALIA, the EU, and others supported retaining all draft decisions. ISRAEL suggested an amendment to draft decision 20.EE to include language on a potential Appendix III listing.

NEW ZEALAND suggested a compromise proposal retaining draft decisions aimed at parties increasing their data capacity on and prioritization of marine ornamental fishes, which Committee I adopted.

#### Proposals to Amend the Appendices I and II

**Anguillid eels (*Anguilla* spp.):** The EU introduced CoP20 Prop.35 to include the genus *Anguilla* spp. in Appendix II, with entry into effect being delayed by 18 months.

Supported by the UK, ISRAEL, and MONACO, the EU argued that all anguillid eel species meet the look-alike criteria and that national measures and species-by-species regulation alone are not sufficient. There was significant opposition from a number of parties, citing the health of non-CITES-listed eel populations, the availability of rapid identification technologies, challenges in enforcement, and the negative impacts on livelihoods. JAPAN requested a secret ballot.

With 35 for, 100 against, and 8 abstaining, Committee I rejected the proposal.

**Species Conservation and Trade**

**Eels (*Anguilla* spp.):** Chair Lörtscher introduced [CoP20 Doc.87](#) containing the draft resolution on trade, conservation and management of anguillid eel species (*Anguilla* spp.) and draft decisions.

The US proposed two amendments to the resolution to: include a reference to illegal eel trade in the preamble; and replace the third operative paragraph on ranching. CHINA, supported by the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, expressed concern that the resolution covers non-listed species and suggested minor amendments to address this. The EU proposed amendments to strengthen language on illegal harvest and trade in the resolution and proposed to delete the draft decision to explore options to facilitate discernment between aquaculture-raised and wild European eels, which the UK and AUSTRALIA opposed. JAPAN proposed other amendments to recognize the development of rapid DNA identification technologies.

Committee I agreed to the document, including the amended draft resolution and draft decisions.

**Proposals to Amend the Appendices I and II**

**Sea cucumbers (*Actinopyga echinites*, *A. mauritiana*, *A. miliaris*, *A. varians*, *A. lecanora*, and *A. palauensis*):** The EU introduced Prop.36 to include six species of sea cucumbers under Appendix II.

The UK, the US, and FIJI supported the proposal. Many opposed, leading to a vote.

With 50 in favor, 76 against, and 9 abstaining, the proposal was rejected.

**Golden sandfish (*Holothuria lessona*):** The EU introduced Prop. 37 to include golden sandfish (*H. lessona*) in Appendix II. JAPAN and SOLOMON ISLANDS opposed, but relented in the face of broad support. The proposal was accepted.

**Oceanic whitetip shark (*Carcharhinus longimanus*):** PANAMA introduced CoP20 Prop.28 to transfer the oceanic whitetip shark from Appendix II to Appendix I. ZIMBABWE, on behalf of the African region, NEW ZEALAND, SRI LANKA, the BAHAMAS, OMAN, and many others, expressed support for the proposal. JAPAN and CHINA objected to the listing, arguing that the proposal lacks scientific rationale, would negatively impact scientific activities, and isn't necessary due to existing strong protections. The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) reminded CITES parties who are also CMS parties of their legal obligations when deciding on inclusion of species in CITES Appendices. SAINT LUCIA requested a secret ballot.

With 110 in favor, 22 against, and 6 abstentions, Committee I adopted the proposal.

**School Shark (*Galeorhinus galeus*) and Smoothhounds (*Mustelus* spp.):** BRAZIL introduced CoP20 Prop.29 to include school shark (*G. galeus*) and smoothhounds (*Mustelus* spp.) in Appendix II and an amendment to the proposal to delay implementation by 18 months.

NEW ZEALAND proposed an annotation to exclude its populations, which received no support. JAPAN objected to "unnecessary" trade restrictions on species endemic to Japan.

Chair Lörtscher adjourned discussion on this item until Friday morning.

**Committee II****Species Conservation and Trade**

**Elephants: Implementation of Resolution Conf. 10.10 (Rev. CoP19) on Trade in elephant specimens:** Committee II Chair Anna Wong (Singapore) introduced [CoP20 Doc.76.1](#).

The EU, UK, KENYA, and others opposed deleting Decisions 19.36 and 19.37 and called for the renewal of these decisions to ensure continued funding for the Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) and Elephant Trade Information System (ETIS) programmes.

Committee II agreed to:

- renew Decisions 19.35, 19.36, and 19.37, with a specific reference to ETIS included in Decision 19.36;
- adopt the amendments to Resolution Conf.10.10 (Rev. CoP19) on trade in elephant specimens; and
- adopt the draft decisions on management of stockpiles.

Committee II noted that: the new project funded by the EU will include a feasibility study and voluntary testing of data collection and reporting methods to monitor illegal killing for other CITES-listed species in Africa; and future funding from the EU would be contingent on the inclusion of data collection and reporting of multiple species.

It also noted the "List of key elements to be considered regarding registering, marking and tracing systems for captive Asian elephants" endorsed by the SC.

NIGERIA, BENIN, KENYA, and others supported the retention of a paragraph in Decision 18.226 (Rev. CoP20) which provides that parties in the trade of Asian elephants are encouraged to provide information on the implementation of the decision for reporting by the Secretariat to the SC.

Committee II agreed on draft decision 20.AA with an additional paragraph c for the reporting by the Secretariat, and to revise Decision 18.266 (Rev. CoP20) with the retention of paragraph e.

NIGERIA, the UK, and others called to renew Decisions 19.107 and 19.108 on trade in Asian elephants (*Elephas maximus*).

Committee II agreed to renew these decisions, noting the need to update cross-referencing to SC meetings, and to delete Decisions 19.102 and 19.103 on trade in mammoth ivory.

**Implementing aspects of Resolution Conf. 10.10 (Rev. CoP19) on the closure of domestic ivory markets:** BURKINA FASO introduced [CoP20 Doc.76.2](#), submitted with Ethiopia, Niger, and Senegal. Noting that this document is related to Annex 1 of [CoP20 Doc.76.1](#), delegates discussed the two documents together.

JAPAN, with NEW ZEALAND, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE), NAMIBIA, KUWAIT, and others, opposed the draft revised decisions on closure of domestic ivory markets proposed in CoP20 Doc.76.2, noting that directing states in matters relating to domestic markets is outside CITES' mandate. The EU, ZIMBABWE, and THAILAND noted that the appropriate procedure to identify parties of concern is through the National Ivory Action Plan (NIAP) process.

The UK, supported by the US, proposed deleting "unless the ETIS Data Aggregates indicate ivory seizures connected to them are at negligible levels" in the call for parties to submit a report pursuant to Decision 18.117 (Rev. CoP20).

Noting the comments of Senegal, Committee II did not agree to [CoP20 Doc.76.2](#).

**Ivory stocks and stockpiles:** KENYA introduced [CoP20 Doc.76.3](#), highlighting the renewal of draft decisions regarding unreported government-held, significant privately held, and poorly secured ivory stockpiles. Chair Wong clarified that since Committee II had already agreed on proposed amendments to

Resolution Conf.10.10 (Rev. CoP19) under agenda item 76.1, Committee II would now consider the remaining recommendations.

Many parties supported renewing the decisions. The EU, along with ZIMBABWE, TANZANIA, and the US, did not see the value in renewing the decisions, citing the Secretariat's workload, but the EU and US said they would not oppose.

Committee II agreed to the document.

**Results of the African elephant dialogue meeting:** Chair Wong introduced [CoP20 Doc.76.6](#) and Committee II agreed to the document.

**Sustainable financing for the African elephant conservation and management:** ZIMBABWE introduced [CoP20 Doc.76.7](#), highlighting draft decisions on sustainable financing for the conservation and management of African elephants.

KENYA, with BENIN, proposed an in-session drafting group to refine draft decision 20.AA b) on convening a technical workshop for African elephant range states to consider mechanisms for sustainable management of elephants and ivory stockpiles.

ZIMBABWE called for a vote on the establishment of the in-session drafting group. With 26 agreeing, 15 disagreeing, and 43 abstaining, a drafting group was formed.

### **Illegal Trade and Enforcement**

**Implementation of the priority recommendations from the review of the ETIS Programme:** Chair Wong introduced [CoP20 Doc.42](#).

SINGAPORE, MALAYSIA, UAE, and others noted key concerns regarding data validation and its relation to [CoP20 Doc.76.5](#) on the ETIS report. SINGAPORE proposed an amendment to direct the Secretariat to take into account any views provided by parties through a notification, in revising the draft protocol in Annex 2a of SC78 Doc.65.2. The US proposed to add "as appropriate" after "revise." Noting that the textual amendments proposed by UAE can be addressed by the notification as proposed by Singapore, Committee II agreed to the document and the draft decision on the ETIS data validation protocol, as amended by Singapore, the EU, and the US.

**ETIS categorization of Parties:** Chair Wong introduced [CoP20 Doc.43](#).

The EU requested amendments to include contextual information in step 1 of the "Guidelines to the NIAP process," among others. JAPAN opposed, noting that this reduces transparency, and that the relationship between criterion 1 and 2 should be clarified. UAE asked for clarity on how categorizations are derived. QATAR noted that several elements need further clarification, such as differentiation with transiting territories. Chair Wong established a working group to look at the recommendation 13a of [CoP20 Doc.43](#). Committee II agreed to delete Decisions 19.77 and 19.78.

**Ivory seizures and domestic ivory markets:** Chair Wong introduced [CoP20 Doc.44](#), which recommended to note that due to the constraints identified by the MIKE-ETIS Technical Advisory Group, the MIKE-ETIS Subgroup, and the Secretariat, it was not feasible to undertake the analysis.

Committee II agreed to note the document.

### **Compliance**

**Compliance matters: Review of the National Ivory Action Plans Process:** Chair Wong introduced [CoP20 Doc.35.2](#).

The UAE, supported by SINGAPORE, SAUDI ARABIA, VIETNAM, and others proposed edits to the "Guidelines to the National Ivory Action Plan" contained in Annex 1 to, *inter*

*alia*, ensure that demand reduction activities remain focused on illegal ivory. The EU, supported by CONGO, said the parties' timeframe should be defined in the UAE's suggested edits, and the Secretariat suggested 15 days.

Committee II agreed to the document as amended.

### **Regulation of Trade**

**Legal acquisition findings:** Chair Wong introduced [CoP20 Doc.49](#).

BRAZIL, on behalf of ARGENTINA, BELIZE, COLOMBIA, and others, and supported by MEXICO, called for incorporating draft guidance on legal acquisition findings (LAFs) as an amendment to Resolution Conf.18.7 (Rev. CoP19) instead of as a standalone posting on the CITES website, disagreed with the document as it stood, and supported the term "founder stock." CHINA, CANADA, and the EU called for the SC to establish an intersessional working group to reach an agreed definition for "founder stock." NEW ZEALAND, supported by AUSTRALIA, suggested referring to "the generation taken from the wild as the original founding stock." The US and the EU suggested additional draft decisions.

The Secretariat said they would prepare an in-session document compiling proposed new edits and draft decisions for further discussion.

**Definition of the term 'appropriate and acceptable destinations':** Chair Wong introduced [CoP20 Doc.63](#), submitted by the SC in consultation with the Chair of the Animals Committee (AC).

The EU recalled that the AC has further identified the need to clarify language related to re-export of elephants that have been kept *ex situ*, outside of range states. INDIA proposed shortening the timeframe for the issuance of the notification to parties from one year to six months to allow for party feedback to be considered at the 81st meeting of the AC. The Secretariat explained that this was not feasible as decisions come into force only after three months.

Committee II accepted the document.

### **In the Corridors**

F-eel-ings were strong on Day 4 of CITES CoP20, with Committee I undertaking highly-anticipated discussions on *Anguilla* spp. Delegates were so eager to vote on the proposed listing that Chair Lörtscher had to remind them to refrain from prematurely pressing their buttons before the official start of the vote.

The debate on both the listing proposal and draft resolution brought into focus the potential of new technologies for facilitating CITES enforcement and compliance. One lab in attendance excitedly shared that they had successfully identified eel sushi purchased in Samarkand as American eel, illustrating that these technologies can offer an efficient way to distinguish look-alike species. Others seemed more wary, citing the novelty of the technology and accessibility concerns, particularly in developing countries. "Technology is not always the solution," as one delegate cautioned. In Committee II, delegates engaged in lengthy discussions on elephant-related implementation and enforcement. "Tools are nothing without proper implementation," one observer noted—then, likely thinking of eels, added: "No point in getting scuba gear if you don't know how to swim."

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