CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES
OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA

_____

Sixty-second meeting of the Standing Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 23-27 July 2012

Interpretation and implementation of the Convention

Trade control and marking

ELECTRONIC PERMITTING

1. This document has been submitted by Switzerland, as Chair of the Working Group on Information Technologies and Electronic Systems[*].

2. At its 15th meeting (Doha, 2010), the Conference of the Parties adopted Decisions 15.54 to 15.56 on *Electronic permitting*. Decision 15.55 is directed to the Standing Committee as follows:

   The Standing Committee shall extend the mandate of its Working Group on Information Technologies and Electronic Systems in order for it to perform the following tasks:

   a) *gather information from Parties and relevant organizations and initiatives on new developments related to electronic permitting systems, and submit such information to the Secretariat for possible inclusion in the toolkit;*

   b) *collaborate with the Secretariat in updating the toolkit with new information related to the use of common information exchange formats, protocols and standards and electronic signatures;*

   c) *promote the development and use of electronic permitting systems among Parties;*

   d) *examine how electronic permitting can contribute to ensuring legal electronic commerce in specimens of CITES-listed species;*

   e) *invite relevant organizations with knowledge about electronic permitting systems to join the Working Group; and;*

   f) *report to the Standing Committee at its regular meetings on the results of its work.*

3. The Working Group also notes Objective 1.2 in Resolution Conf, 14.2 on the CITES Strategic Vision: 2008-2013 which states: Parties have in place administrative procedures that are transparent, practical, coherent and user-friendly, and reduce unnecessary administrative burdens. Indicator 1.2.2 also states that; The number of Parties making use of the simplified procedures provided for in Resolution Conf. 12.3 (Rev. CoP13).

4. The Working Group on Information Technologies and Electronic Systems is composed of the following members: Parties: Brazil, Canada, Czech Republic, France, Guatemala, Japan, United Kingdom, Singapore, Philippines, Portugal, Switzerland (Chair), Thailand, United Arab Emirates and Vietnam and the UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC and the World Customs Organization (WCO).

_____

* The geographical designations employed in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the CITES Secretariat or the United Nations Environment Programme concerning the legal status of any country, territory, or area, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The responsibility for the contents of the document rests exclusively with its author.

5. In support of Decision 15.55, the Working Group met several times to discuss implementation of activities and to plan for new activities, particularly through the establishment of partnerships. Activities and partnerships have been decided and established with the view to create environments that enhance factors responsible for legal, sustainable and traceable international trade in CITES-listed species. In addition, the Working Group believes that the advent of CITES e-permitting systems will impact positively on enforcement of and compliance with the Convention by making CITES permits harder to forge and easier to authenticate by relevant authorities. Finally, the data provided by e-permits will allow for better monitoring of the levels of international trade in CITES-listed species and so assist with non-detriment findings and significant trade reviews.

6. In this regard, the Working Group acknowledges the contributions of UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC and the World Customs Organization (WCO).

7. The Working Group met 2 times during the intersessional period (Bern, 2011, Prague, 2012) to review work achieved to date, and plan for new activities and identify possible partners. Note is taken that the lack of funding has prevented the participation of members from developing countries to these meetings.

8. The joint project between the Czech Republic, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland continues to progress, with discussions ongoing with Customs authorities regarding their possible participation. Guatemala and Thailand have expressed interest in joining the project, and the Working Group is examining how to facilitate participation. However, lack of funding to attend meetings of the Working Group where project activities are discussed has created obstacles preventing full participation by these countries.

9. France and Switzerland also met several times with Customs officials in the 2011 and 2012 to implement a pilot project for a completely paperless CITES import and export process between the two countries. This pilot project is based on existing dematerialized document issuance procedures on both sides.

10. The Working Group also collaborated with the Secretariat to update the CITES e-permitting toolkit with new information related to the use of common information exchange formats, protocols and standards and electronic signature. The new version of the toolkit, scheduled for release in October 2012, will include standards related to United Nations Electronic Data Interchange For Administration, Commerce and Transport (UN/EDIFACT). The maintenance and further development of this standard is overseen by the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT). UN/EDIFACT is comprised of a set of internationally agreed standards, directories, and guidelines for the electronic interchange of structured data, between independent computerized information systems. Many Parties are using UN/EDIFACT, and the inclusion of this standard in the CITES e-permitting toolkit will facilitate development of e-permitting systems. The new version of the toolkit will also include new standards published in the WCO Data Model.

11. Another result of collaboration between the Working Group and the CITES Secretariat was the successful presentation of a Data Maintenance Request (DMR)[1] by the Secretariat to the Data Model Project Team (DMPT) of the WCO. The next version of the WCO Data Model, namely version 3.3 tentatively scheduled for release in October 2012, will include recommended standards on CITES e-permits found in the CITES e-permitting toolkit.

12. Inclusion of CITES e-permitting standards with the WCO Data Model, version 3.3, will facilitate greatly development of CITES e-permitting systems that are harmonized with international standards and norms and the establishment of Single Windows[2]. It also set the norms for other multilateral environmental agreements that have trade-related obligations and must issue trade documentation.

13. The Working Group also assisted the Secretariat in preparations for a meeting on CITES e-permitting systems organized in cooperation with the Permanent Secretariat of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO), which was held in Brasilia, Brazil from 25 to 26 October 2012. An outcome of the

---

[1] The objective of the Data Element Maintenance Mechanism ("Mechanism") is to provide a clear amendment process for the addition or deletion of data elements in the WCO Data Model

[2] A Single Window is defined as a facility that allows parties involved in trade and transport to lodge standardized information and documents with a single entry point to fulfil all import, export, and transit-related regulatory requirements. If information is electronic, then individual data elements should only be submitted once (UN/CEFACT recommendation no. 33 establishing a Single Window to enhance the efficient exchange of information between trade and government. http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/cefact/recommendations/rec33/rec33_trd352e.pdf)

meeting included a request for support to assist ACTO Member Countries with the elaboration and implementation of a regional project on CITES e-permitting systems. A copy of the final report of the meeting is available on the CITES website at: http://www.cites.org/eng/prog/e/Meeting_report_brasilia1011.pdf.

14. During this meeting, Brazil offered to share its expertise and technology with countries in the region. Ecuador and Colombia also offered to share its expertise with current projects related to the establishment of Single Windows. The German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) and the European Commission are working with the CITES Secretariat in the development of a project to develop a regional CITES e-permitting system for member countries to ACTO.

15. The Chair of the Working Group also participated in the Meeting on the Development of CITES E-Permitting Systems, which was held in Guangzhou, China, from 9 to 11 May 2012. The objectives of the meeting were to discuss implementation of an Asian CITES e-permitting system, identify possible sources of funding and facilitate South-South cooperation. The participation by Brazil and Namibia in the meeting contributed to discussions on a possible project to exchange technologies and to implement CITES e-permitting systems.

16. Collaboration continues with UNEP-WCMC on enhancement of the Electronic Permit Information eXchange (EPIX). The Working Group is examining the possibility of expanding EPIX to provide Management Authorities and Customs officials with a clearing-house of CITES e-permits and certificates. In this manner, they would have access to CITES documentation thereby facilitating the authentication and revision of the document.

17. Discussion is also ongoing with regard to using EPIX as an out-of-the-box virtual CITES e-permitting system for least developed countries. The system could be customized to a country's need and offer a fully functioning CITES e-permitting system that is harmonized with international standards and norms. Countries in Africa and Asia have expressed interest in participating in a pilot project using a virtual e-permitting system based on EPIX.

Recommendation

18. The Standing Committee may wish to consider:

a) A recommendation that the Conference of the Parties at its 16th meeting extend the mandate of the Working Group on Information Technologies and Electronic Systems to:

   i) collaborate with the CITES Secretariat to continue in the drafting of funding proposals related to the development of CITES e-permitting systems;

   ii) work with the UN/CEFACT and the WCO and other relevant organizations to ensure that CITES e-permits are aligned with international trade standards and norms;

   iii) collaborate with the UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre to further develop EPIX to act as a clearing-house of CITES e-permits and certificates and to offer Parties in developing regions a ready-to-use virtual CITES permitting system;

   iv) work with the CITES Secretariat to ensure that the CITES toolkit is updated as necessary; and,

   v) support the participation of Parties in developing regions in the Working Group.