PRESS KIT

CITES 2004

Thirteenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

2 – 14 October 2004, Bangkok, Thailand

Contents

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PRESS RELEASE

CITES conference on wildlife trade to consider introducing new rules for high-value fish and timber

Bangkok agenda also features the African elephant, minke whale and bald eagle, plus turtles, rhinoceroses and medicinal plants

7 September 2004, Bangkok/Geneva – The 166 member governments of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) will meet in Bangkok from 2 – 14 October to update the trade rules governing some of the world's most charismatic, exploited and economically valuable wildlife species.

The conference will decide on some 50 proposals for improving the conservation and sustainable use of the African elephant, the minke whale, the great white shark, the ramin timber tree, the Chinese yew and other medicinal plants, the yellow-crested cockatoo and the lilac-crowned parrot, five Asian turtles, the white rhinoceros, the Nile and American crocodiles, the European date mussel and many other species.

"The CITES conferences are major environmental events because they produce enforceable decisions and practical actions for conserving wild nature and the Earth's biological diversity," said Executive Director Klaus Toepfer of the United Nations Environment Programme, which administers the CITES Secretariat.

"By promoting the science-based management of wildlife as a valuable natural resource, CITES also supports the UN's Millennium Development goals of halving the number of people living in extreme poverty and hunger by the year 2015," he added.

Long known as the forum where critical decisions are taken about such high-profile issues as the ivory trade and whaling, CITES is increasingly the focus of efforts to protect fish and timber species that are traded globally in profitable commodity markets.

"Reversing today's massive destruction of the world's oceans and forests will require governments to use the full range of policies and tools available to them. It is increasingly recognized that the CITES system for regulating trade through a system of permits and quotas is effective and can make an important contribution," said CITES Secretary-General Willem Wijnstekers.

This year's most commercially significant proposals include recommendations to add the humphead wrasse, a large reef fish from the Indian and Pacific oceans, and the great white shark, perhaps best known as the star of the "Jaws" film, to an internationally agreed list of species requiring trade permits. A major step towards using the CITES trade rules for protecting valuable fish species was taken in 2002 when the whale shark – the world's largest fish – and the basking shark were added to this list.

Similar CITES rules have also been introduced recently to address the unsustainable global trade in timber and tree products. All shipments of Latin America's bigleaf mahogany have required CITES export permits since November 2003. Now Indonesia is proposing tighter controls for trade in ramin, one of Southeast Asia's highest earning export timbers, and agarwood trees, which contain the valuable "agar" oil used for making incense, perfumes and medicines.

Another group of species threatened by traditional and newly emerging commercial markets are medicinal plants, including southern Africa's hoodia and Asia's Chinese yew and desert-living cistanche; proposals on the table call for strengthening conservation measures for all three groups of species. Several proposals also seek to conserve Asian turtles and tortoises that are being over-exploited for traditional food markets and the international pet trade.

Still other proposals seek to ease the rules on trade in some of the large, beautiful and exotic animals that have been icons of the conservation movement since the 1960s and 1970s. The minke whale and the African elephant are returning to the CITES agenda, and rhinoceroses, bald eagles and crocodiles feature as well. The proponents argue that certain populations of these species have recovered sufficiently to permit some tightly controlled trade.

Note to journalists: Each proposal is described in more detail starting on page 6 below. For more information, contact Juan-Carlos Vasquez at +41-22-917-8156 (office) or juan.vasquez@unep.ch, or Michael Williams at +41-79-409-1528 (cell), +41-22-917-8242 (office), or michael.williams@unep.ch. See also www.cites.org.

Backgrounder: Understanding CITES and COP13

Thousands of species around the world are endangered or at risk as a result of human activities such as habitat destruction, over-harvesting and pollution. CITES was adopted in 1973 to address the threat posed by just one of these activities: unsustainable international trade. With some 166 Parties, CITES is one of the world's most important agreements on species conservation and the non-detrimental use of wildlife.

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

Three ways to regulate

CITES provides three regulatory options in the form of Appendices. Animals and plants listed under **Appendix I** are excluded from international commercial trade except in very special circumstances. Appendix I contains almost 600 animal species and a little more than 300 plant species, including all the great apes; various big cats such as cheetahs, the snow leopard and the tiger; numerous birds of prey, cranes, and pheasants; all sea turtles; many species of crocodiles, tortoises and snakes; and some cacti and orchids.

Commercial international trade is permitted for species listed in **Appendix II**, but it is strictly controlled on the basis of CITES permits. This Appendix II covers over 4,100 animal species and 28,000 plant species, including all those primates, cats, cetaceans, parrots, crocodiles and orchids not listed in Appendix I.

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

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

CITES requires each member government to adopt the necessary national legislation and officially designate a Management Authority that issues trade permits. Governments must also designate a Scientific Authority to provide scientific advice on imports and exports. These national authorities are responsible for implementing CITES in close cooperation with Customs, wildlife enforcement, police or similar agencies.

As the impact of trade on a population or a species increases or decreases, the species can be added to the CITES Appendices, removed from them, or transferred from one Appendix to another. These decisions are to be based on the best biological information available and an analysis of how different types of protection can affect specific populations.

It is worth noting that when a species is transferred from Appendix I to Appendix II, its protection has not necessarily been 'downgraded'. Rather, it can be a sign of success that a species' population has grown to the point where well-regulated trade may be possible. In addition, by allowing a species to be commercially traded at sustainable levels, an Appendix-II listing can actually improve protection by giving local people a greater stake in the species' survival.

The CoP13 agenda

The Conference of the Parties (CoP) is the Convention's ultimate authority and includes all States that have joined CITES. It meets every two to three years. While the official delegates are appointed by governments, observers from intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations also play an important role in the CITES process.

CoP13 will be conducted in the three working languages of the Convention – English, French and Spanish. It will be guided by an agenda (Doc. 3 (Rev. 2)). The Chairman of the CoP, in consultation with Parties, will guide the meeting on a day-to-day basis. The plenary session of the CoP normally meets at the beginning of the two-week conference and again at the end, when it formally adopts the meeting's resolutions and decisions. During the middle days, two committees meet to consider reports from the subsidiary bodies, financial and budgetary issues and a range of critical technical issues.

Of greatest interest to journalists will be the **proposals to amend Appendices I and II**. These proposals are submitted by party States and are numbered as Proposals 1 through 50. Many of these proposals tell fascinating stories and are well worth reading in their entirety. The proposals are described in more detail starting on page 6 of this press kit.

In addition to the proposals, the meeting will examine a number of **strategic, conservation and implementation issues**. For example, the European Community wants CITES to urge the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) and others to address more actively the **bushmeat crisis** caused by the over-hunting of local wildlife in Central Africa (Docs 62.1 and 62.2). A related proposal calls on CITES to adopt a resolution on the **great apes** urging all governments to take stronger action to protect humanity's "closest cousins in the animal world" (Doc. 26). The EC is also recommending stronger action to protect Central Asia's **saiga antelope** which, despite being listed in Appendix II since 1995, continues to suffer declining numbers (Doc. 32).

Conservation and implementation issues raised by other Parties include **sea cucumbers** (Docs. 37.1 and 37.2), **synergies** between CITES and the Convention on Biological Diversity (Docs. 12.1.1 and 12.1.2), cooperation between CITES and FAO on fisheries issues (Doc. 12.4, the complex relationship between ***ex situ*** **breeding and** ***in situ*** **conservation** (Docs. 56.3.1 and 56.3.2), and South Africa's desire to increase its annual export quota for **leopard** hunting trophies and skins for personal use from 75 to 150 specimens (Doc. 19.2).

The proposals for amending the CITES Appendices

Over the years, CITES has fine-tuned the criteria it uses for listing a species in Appendix I (which prohibits commercial trade) and Appendix II (which regulates commercial international trade through permits). It puts the onus on the proposing Government to make its case on the basis of scientific, biological criteria. To do this, the Government must provide as much detailed information and data as possible on population and trade trends. Recognizing that not all species whose conservation is of concern are affected by international trade, CITES avoids listing species for which its specialized provisions are not useful. Its decisions also consider practical matters such as whether any new controls can actually be enforced.

MAMMALS

Japan is recommending that three populations of **minke whale** be transferred from Appendix I to Appendix II (Proposal 4). It argues that since these particular populations together contain over 200,000 animals (with one million minke worldwide), they cannot be considered at risk. Its proposal emphasizes precautionary measures such as the use of DNA register systems to prevent illegal trade.

Similar proposals by Japan and Norway at past CITES conferences have not been accepted owing in part to the provision that CITES must be consistent with the conservation measures agreed by the International Whaling Commission (IWC). Commercial whaling has been prohibited by the IWC since the mid-1980s and cannot resume until the Commission has agreed upon a management regime. All great whales are listed in CITES Appendix I.

The **African elephant** returns yet again to the CITES agenda. CITES banned the international ivory trade in 1989. Then, recognizing that southern Africa's elephant populations are healthy and well-managed, CITES permitted some one-off sales in 1997 and again in 2002 of existing stocks of ivory gathered mostly from elephants which have died of natural causes. The agreed 2002 sales from Botswana (20 tonnes of ivory), Namibia (10 tonnes) and South Africa (30 tonnes) have not yet occurred pending the establishment of baseline data on poaching and wild populations.

This year at the Bangkok conference, Namibia is requesting an annual export quota of two tonnes of ivory. Both Namibia and South Africa are proposing to trade elephant leather commercially in addition to ivory (Props. 7 and 8).

The debate over elephants has focused on the benefits that income from ivory sales may bring to local communities and to conservation programmes versus concerns that such sales may inspire increased poaching. A dialogue meeting of the African elephant range States will be held immediately before the Bangkok conference to seek a regional consensus.

Swaziland is proposing that its national population of the southern **white rhinoceros** be transferred from Appendix I to Appendix II to permit the export of live animals and trophies (Prop. 9). The white rhino was re-established in Swaziland in 1965 after earlier becoming extinct there and now numbers some 61 animals. The proposal argues that the current population is fast approaching the ecological and social carrying capacity of available secure

habitat and that the revenue from rhino sales would be ploughed directly back into rhino conservation.

Meanwhile, Namibia and South Africa are requesting approval for the export of five and 10 **black rhinoceroses**, respectively, as hunting trophies (Docs. 19.3 and 19.4). Black rhinos are listed on Appendix I and have not been legally hunted for many years. However, the proponents argue that the decline in the black rhino population started to reverse in the late 1990s.

Kenya proposes transferring the **African lion** from Appendix II to Appendix I (the Asiatic sub-species is already listed on Appendix I) (Prop. 6). It argues that numbers in the wild are declining and that remaining populations are small and fragmented. Lions are often persecuted by humans and their available prey is declining.

The **Irrawaddy dolphin** lives in the estuaries, bays and sounds of the Indo-Pacific region, generally near mangrove forests, as well as in three freshwater river systems – the Mahakam of Indonesia, the Ayeyarwady (formerly Irrawaddy) of Myanmar and the Mekong of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Cambodia and Viet Nam. Threats to the species include entanglement in fishing nets and removal from the wild for live display. Thailand is recommending granting greater protection for the Irrawaddy dolphin by transferring it from Appendix II to Appendix I (Prop. 3).

Bobcats range widely throughout North America. They are legally harvested for their pelts, but the only significant threat facing them is the loss of habitat to urban development. As a result, its United States population, estimated at 700,000 to 1,500,000 adults in 1988, seems to have been increasing. The United States is proposing that the bobcat be deleted from Appendix II (Prop. 5).

FISH

The **white shark** is a large, slow-growing and uncommon predator found mostly in temperate coastal waters. White shark jaws, teeth and fins are extremely valuable. These products enter international trade both legally and illegally. Madagascar and Australia propose adding the great white shark to Appendix II with a zero annual export quota (Prop. 32). No sharks were listed in Appendix II until two years ago, when the whale shark and the basking shark were placed in Appendix II.

The **humphead wrasse** is found in healthy coral reefs throughout the Indo-Pacific region. It can live at least 30 years, grow up to two metres in length and weigh 190 kg. Its numbers seem to be declining throughout its range. The species is particularly threatened by over-fishing for the live reef food fish trade, which services the luxury restaurant markets in Hong Kong SAR, China, Singapore and other countries. At the same time, its coral habitat is threatened by destructive fishing techniques, overfishing, dredging, mining, sewage, sedimentation from deforestation and agriculture, and climate change. Fiji, the European Community and the United States therefore propose including the humphead wrasse on Appendix II (Prop. 33). A similar United States proposal was rejected in 2002.

The **European date mussel** is a slow-growing mollusc with a distinctive date-like appearance. It inhabits limestone rocks throughout the Mediterranean Sea and can be found in

the Atlantic Ocean on the Portuguese coast, the North African coast down to Senegal and the northern coast of Angola. When the mussel is harvested for human consumption, the rocks it inhabits are broken into small pieces, often with pneumatic hammers and explosives, rendering them unsuitable for later colonization by marine organisms. Italy and Slovenia, on behalf of the EC Members States, are recommending the European date mussel for inclusion on Appendix II (Prop. 35).

FLORA

Because wood from the **ramin** tree has a luxurious appearance and is easy to work, it has long been one of Southeast Asia's major export timbers. Native to the swamp forests of Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines, many ramin species are now considered to be over-exploited and vulnerable owing to heavy logging (much of it illegal) and habitat destruction. Ramin populations have been so severely depleted that timber production has fallen dramatically in recent years. Indonesia is proposing tightening the controls on trade in ramin by listing it in Appendix II (Prop. 50). Indonesia has already listed ramin under Appendix III.

Agarwood trees contain the valuable "agar" oil widely used for making incense, perfumes and medicines. They can be found in Borneo, peninsular Malaysia and Sumatra, but rising demand and illegal trade are reducing all populations. Indonesia is recommending the listing of all agarwood species (one species was listed in 1995) in Appendix II (Prop. 49).

The slow-growing southern African plant known as **hoodia** or gaap is traditionally used by the San people (formerly referred to as the bushmen) as an appetite suppressant, thirst quencher and cure for severe abdominal cramps, haemorrhoids, tuberculosis, indigestion, hypertension and diabetes. Its medicinal properties and the isolation of its active ingredient have attracted the attention of major pharmaceutical firms eager to satisfy the lucrative global market for diet pills; at least 10 companies are already offering hoodia products for sale on their websites. Hoodia are also popular with collectors and have suffered from habitat disturbance. Given the plant's considerable economic potential for both the range states and the San and other indigenous peoples, Namibia and South Africa propose listing the hoodia in Appendix II as a way of ensuring effective regulation and monitoring (Prop. 37).

The **Chinese yew**, a group of small to medium-sized evergreen trees and shrubs with medicinal properties, was placed in Appendix II in 1994. Finished pharmaceutical products, however, were exempted from the listing. Arguing that this exemption ignores most of the trade in the yew, China and the United States now propose amending the listing to include chemical derivatives and finished pharmaceutical products (Prop. 47). China also proposes adding other species in the Chinese yew family to Appendix II to assist efforts to control the international trade in those yew species that are medicinally valuable (Prop. 48).

A unique parasitic herb that lives on the roots of the bunge plant (which is itself in decline), China's **desert-living cistanche** has been used for some 1,800 years as a natural tonic drug. It was listed in Appendix II in 2000. China recommends clarifying this listing by stating explicitly that it covers not only whole specimens but parts and derivatives as well (Prop. 45).

Although only 200 specimens of the **palm tree** (*Chrysalidocarpus decipiens*) are known to survive in the relic forests of central Madagascar, a legal trade in the plant's seeds and seedlings continues. Madagascar proposes increasing the tree's protection by transferring it from Appendix II to Appendix I (Prop. 46).

Many thousands of **orchids** are listed in Appendix II because their popularity with collectors has led to the over-harvesting of wild specimens. Five proposals concerning orchids will be on the table in Bangkok. Thailand's proposal is the most far-reaching: it calls for exempting the artificially propagated specimens (or hybrids) of all orchid species listed on Appendix II from the Convention's provisions when they are readily recognizable as artificially propagated (Prop. 40). Switzerland proposes excluding artificially propagated hybrids from seven specific taxa (Prop. 41) and exempting hybrids from another taxa under certain circumstances (Prop. 42). Colombia proposes transferring the Christmas orchid from Appendix I to Appendix II (Prop. 43). Thailand recommends the same transfer for the blue vanda orchid (Prop. 44).

Thailand proposes amending the existing Appendix-II listing of the **candelabra cactus** to exempt artificially propagated specimens of crested or fan-shaped forms and of colour mutants of a particular species of this popular succulent. It argues that because these specimens are cultivated and do not occur in nature such trade would not be harmful to the wild population (Prop. 38). A second proposal would exempt shipments of all artificially propagated candelabra cacti containing 100 or more plants. The proposal would also exempt any cultivars that are readily recognizable as artificially propagated specimens (Prop. 39).

REPTILES

The **American crocodile** inhabits the brackish or salt waters of estuaries, lagoons and mangrove swamps in Florida, many Caribbean islands and northern South America and along the Atlantic and Pacific coasts of Central America. Cuba would like to transfer its national population of the American crocodile from Appendix I to Appendix II so that it can remove 1,500-2,000 eggs and hatchlings annually from the wild to support ranching operations for export (Prop. 24).

Namibia proposes the transfer of its national population of the **Nile crocodile** from Appendix I to Appendix II to facilitate hunting for trophies (Prop. 25). Its proposal states that, while crocodiles were endangered in the 1960s and 1970s because of excessive hunting, the population has returned to normal or high levels and is probably still increasing.

Zambia's wild population of the Nile crocodile, now estimated at 13,702 animals, was transferred to Appendix II in 1985 to permit ranching. The government is now requesting an annual export quota of no more than 548 wild specimens to permit hunting for trophies and the sale of animals culled to protect people and livestock (Prop. 26).

Many **turtles and tortoises** from South, Southeast and East Asia are traded in significant quantities for regional food markets, Asian traditional medicines and international pet markets. There is extensive evidence of illegal trade, but turtles are also harvested for subsistence consumption. Habitat loss is another major threat to their survival. Not surprisingly, their numbers have been dwindling in recent years. In 2002 CITES added 26 species of Asian turtles to Appendix II. This year's conference will consider adding five more

species to Appendix II based on the recommendations of the recent CITES-sponsored Technical Workshop on Conservation of and Trade in Freshwater Turtles and Tortoises in Asia.

Indonesia and the United States have submitted proposals for the soft-shelled pig-nosed turtle, which occurs in Australia, Papua New Guinea and Indonesia (Props. 21 and 22); the Roti snake-necked turtle, a very rare freshwater turtle endemic to the Indonesian island of Roti (Prop. 23); the Malayan snail-eating turtle, a Southeast Asian freshwater turtle that suffered substantial declines in the 1990s when annual exports totalled tens of tonnes (Props. 16 and 17); the Asian soft-shelled turtle, another Southeast Asian freshwater turtle that is probably the most heavily traded of all wild-harvested Asian turtles (Prop. 20 – US only); and the Malaya flat-shelled turtle, a Southeast Asian freshwater turtle whose lowland forest habitat is becoming increasingly fragmented, logged and converted (Props. 18 and 19).

A sixth species, the Malagasy spider tortoise, is already listed in Appendix II and is now being recommended for an Appendix-I listing by Madagascar (Prop. 15). This endemic species is estimated by the proponent to number over 10,000 animals.

The **Mount Kenya Bush Viper** lives in two mid-altitude forests in Kenya, whose government proposes listing the species in Appendix II (Prop. 30). It argues that the bush viper's habitat is under threat from agriculture and that its numbers are likely to decline due to the increased removal of specimens for trade. The government also recommends listing the **Kenya horned viper**, which is also endemic to Kenya, in Appendix II (Prop. 31).

Madagascar's three species of the snake genus ***Langaha madagascariensis*** boast a spectacular appearance that makes them popular with collectors. Little information is available about the populations of these tree-dwelling snakes. Madagascar is calling for an Appendix-II listing (Prop. 28). It proposes the same listing for another distinctive but little-known species known as the **colourful arboreal snake** (Prop. 29).

The 11 species of **leaf-tailed gecko** are endemic to Madagascar. Little is known about their numbers. Madagascar is proposing an Appendix-II listing for these geckos (Prop. 27).

BIRDS

The beautiful **lilac-crowned parrot** suffers from widespread illegal trade. As a result, its population has declined drastically over the last 20 years to around 7,000 – 10,000 wild specimens. Mexico proposes tackling illegal trade by transferring this parrot from Appendix II to Appendix I (Prop. 13).

The **painted bunting** breeds in the United States and northern Mexico and then migrates to its wintering grounds in Central American and the Western Caribbean. Habitat loss, brood parasitism and trapping for the local bird trade have caused the total population to decline to around 3.6 million individuals. Mexico and the United States want to improve the management of international trade in the painted bunting by having the bird included in Appendix II (Prop. 14).

The **yellow-crested cockatoo** inhabits the central archipelago of Indonesia as well as newly independent Timor Leste. All four subspecies are critically endangered and suffered precipitous losses in the last quarter of the 20th century. While habitat loss plays an important role, illegal trade is also a critical threat. Indonesia proposes upgrading protection for the cockatoo by transferring it from Appendix II to Appendix I (Prop. 11).

The **bald eagle**, an icon of the North American wildlife protection movement, has recovered significantly since the 1960s. In the Unites States, the population doubles every seven to eight years, while in Canada its numbers have increased tenfold, producing a growing global population of some 100,000 birds. The United States proposes transferring the species from Appendix I to Appendix II (Prop. 10).

Because the **peach-faced lovebird** is bred extensively in captivity, the demand for wild specimens is negligible. Namibia and the Unites States argue that the species' 1970s listing in Appendix II is no longer necessary and propose removing it altogether from CITES (Prop. 12).

INSECTS

The proposal regarding the **birdwing butterfly** provides a technical correction to the species' 1979 Appendix-II listing and would not alter its status under CITES (Prop. 34).

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