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

Eighteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties
Geneva (Switzerland), 17-28 August 2019

TEATFISH CITES SCIENTIST SUPPORT LETTER

This document has been submitted by the United States of America at the request of a group of concerned Teatfish Sea Cucumber Scientists in relation to proposal 45.*

* *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.*

August 8, 2019

To the CITES Secretariat and the Parties of CITES,

We, the undersigned scientists and researchers on sea cucumbers and their status, ecological role, habitat, and exploitation, **express our strong support for inclusion of three teatfish sea cucumber species on Appendix II** of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

The teatfish – *Holothuria nobilis* (black teatfish, Indian Ocean), *H. whitmaei* (black teatfish, Pacific Ocean), and *H. fuscogilva* (white teatfish) – are threatened by overfishing and international trade. IUCN has assessed *H. nobilis* and *H. whitmaei* as "Endangered" due to declines of 60-90 percent over substantial portions of their respective ranges; *H. fuscogilva* is "Vulnerable" due to a 30-50 percent decline.[1] Teatfish, like other sea cucumbers, are susceptible to overexploitation due to their late maturity, slow growth, and ease of capture due to their low mobility.[2]

The primary threat to teatfish is overfishing: over-exploitation of teatfish in recent decades has resulted in documented depletion and declines in many parts of the species' range. Teatfish inhabit seagrass and tropical reefs; continued degradation and decline of these habitats further threaten the teatfish.[3]

Teatfish are particularly high-value species in the international *bêche-de-mer* trade,[4] and globally, sea cucumber catch has increased roughly 15-fold since the 1950s.[5] While teatfish are easily distinguishable from other sea cucumber species due to their unique lateral protuberances ("teats"), the three teatfish species are difficult to distinguish from each other in their commonly-traded, dried form. Management techniques include minimum legal-size limits, gear restrictions (e.g., no use of scuba), and no-take reserves. Inclusion of teatfish, including *H. nobilis*, *H. whitmaei*, and *H. fuscogilva*, on Appendix II of CITES is important to ensure that fishing and international trade in these species are sustainable and do not contribute to further decline. We urge the Parties to support the proposal.

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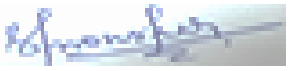
[1] Conand, C., Purcell, S., Gamboa, R. & Toral-Granda, T.G. 2013a. *Holothuria nobilis*. *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* 2013; Conand, C., Gamboa, R., Purcell, S. & Toral-Granda, T.G. 2013b. *Holothuria whitmaei*. *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* 2013; Conand, C., Purcell, S. & Gamboa, R. 2013c. *Holothuria fuscogilva*. *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* 2013.

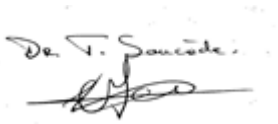
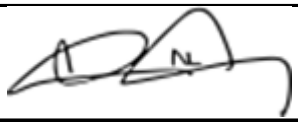
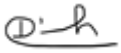
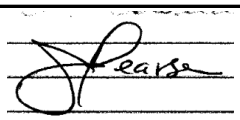
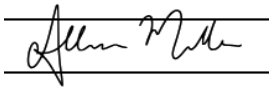
[2] *See* Uthicke, S., O'Hara, T.D., & Byrne, M. 2004. Species composition and molecular phylogeny of the Indo-Pacific teatfish (Echinodermata: Holothuroidea) bêche-de-mer fishery. *Mar and Freshwater Res*, 55, 837-848.

[3] Kinch, J., Purcell, S., Uthicke, S., & Friedman, K. 2008. Population status, fisheries and trade of sea cucumbers in the Western Central Pacific, and [3] Conand, C. 2008. Population status, fisheries and trade of sea cucumbers in Africa and the Indian Ocean. In V. Toral-Granda, A. Lovatelli and M. Vasconcellos. Sea cucumbers. A global review of fisheries and trade. *FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper*. No. 516. Rome, FAO.

[4] Purcell, S.W., Williamson, D. & Ngaluafe, P. 2018. Chinese market prices of beche-de-mer: Implications for fisheries and aquaculture. *Marine Policy* : 58-65 and [4] Eriksson, H.O., Crona, B, Troell, M., Andrew, N., Wilen, J., & Folke, C. 2015. Contagious exploitation of marine resources. *Front. Ecol. Environ*. 13(8): 435-440.

[5] Purcell, S.W., Mercier, A., Conand, C., Hamel, J., Toral-Granda, M.V., Lovatelli, A., & Uthicke, S. 2013. Sea cucumber fisheries: global analysis of stocks, management measures and drivers of overfishing. *Fish Fish*. 14, 34–59; and [5] Conand, C. 2018. Tropical sea cucumber fisheries: Changes during the last decade. *Mar. Poll. Bull*. 133 : 590-594.

Institution	Country	Scientist name	Signature
Museum National Histoire Naturelle, Paris	France	Pr. Chantal Conand	
Halidonie, self-owned marine biology consulting company.	New Caledonia	Paul CHABRE	
University of Queensland	Australia	Dr. Kennedy Wolfe	
Center for Scientific Research and Higher Education at Ensenada	México	MC. Abigail Pañola-Madrigal	
Ordu Un iversity	Turkey	Assoc.Prof. Mehmet AYDIN	
ARVAM	France Réunion	Dr Jean-Pascal Quod	
National University	Costa Rica	Ph.D. Karol Ulate	
Bloomsburg University, Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania	USA	Dr. Thomas ScottKlinger	
Scripps institution of Oceanography	USA	Paul Dayton	
Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University-Mostaganem, Algeria.	Algeria	Pr. Karim Mezali	
Marine Taxonomy Reference Lab, Department of Science and Technology	Lakshadweep, India	Mohammed Nowshad, Research Fellow	
Universitas Hasanuddin	Indonesia	Dr. Abigail M. Moore	
Marine and Environmental Sciences Centre, University of Lisbon, Lisbon	Portugal	Dr. Romana Santos	

Université Bourgogne Franche-Comté, Dijon	France	Pr. Thomas Saucède	
University of San Diego	USA	Drew M. Talley	
Australian Institute of Marine Science	Australia	Dr. Sven Uthicke	
Centro Interdisciplinario de Ciencias Marinas. Instituto Politécnico Nacional	México	Dr. María Dinorah Herrero Pérezrul	
Universidad de la República / Universidad de Oriente	Uruguay / Venezuela	Lic. María Cecilia Gómez M	
University of Califonia, Santa Cruz	USA	Prof. John Pearse	
Universidad Autónoma de Baja California Sur	México	Dr. Héctor Reyes Bonilla	
University of Mons	Belgium	Dr. Guillaume Caulier	
University of Auckland	New Zealand	Dr. Mark Costello	
University of Guam	USA	Allison Miller	
University of Reunion Island	France	Mr. Nicolas Oury	
Universidade Federal do Paraná	Brazil	Dr. Rosana Moreira da Rocha	
University of Guam	USA	Pr. Alexander M. Kerr	
Cinvestav-IPN, Unidad Mérida	México	PhD. Julieta Maldonado Sánchez