MODULE 12: ONLINE TOOLS, CERTIFICATION SCHEMES, AND THEIR RELEVANCE TO NON-DETRIMENT FINDINGS

Contents

1. What is in this module?

This module includes information on the current status of online tools (**section 2**) and voluntary certifications schemes (**section 3**). These two aspects are not directly related. This module discusses their use, relevance, and utility for aiding in the making of CITES non-detriment findings (NDFs). This module is complimentary to the generic guidance **modules 1** and **2**, as well as the thematic guidance modules 3 - 11. It is noted that, by their nature, the tools are constantly evolving and so the information contained within this module should be regularly updated. The module makes use of a limited number of examples but applies to all taxa.

2. Online tools

To aid Scientific Authorities in making NDFs some online tools have been developed. These include:

1) **E-NDF for Elasmobranch species** (https://user.cites-endf.org/)
   a. This tool is based on the NDF guidance for Elasmobranch species (https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/prog/shark/docs/Shark%20NDF%20guidance%20incl%20Annexes.pdf). It combines guidance with electronic forms that are filled in by the user (or users, as more than one registered user can contribute to the same NDF). Works through the steps to ultimately complete an e-NDF.
   b. Drop down menus give standardised responses, or text can be entered.
   c. Some data on the relevant species is automatically pulled into the e-NDF from Sharkipedia (https://www.sharkipedia.org/) and the IUCN Red List (https://www.iucnredlist.org/en).
   d. The sources of information entered are recorded by the user.
   e. Pressures affecting the stock are matched with management measures (and their effectiveness) to assess whether these mitigate those pressures.
   f. A summary of information entered is given with an automated recommendation of whether the trade is recommended or not. However, the user can also override this decision stating their reason. Additional management measures (which could be advice to the MA or conditions) are also automatically suggested which can be confirmed or overridden by the user.
   g. The completed NDF can be published as a word document (for additional manual editing) or as a PDF ready for use.
   h. The software can easily be adapted for other taxa (currently being done for sea cucumbers).

2) E-NDF for sea cucumbers (https://www.spc.int/coastalfisheries; https://user.cites-endf.org/)
   a) The Pacific Community (SPC) with development support from Blue Resources Trust adapted the shark eNDF for use with sea cucumbers.
   b) Stepwise risk assessment approach is used with an added element to consider population dynamics relevant to sea cucumbers and sedentary invertebrates.
   c) Approach also considered “data-poor” scenarios for when information is unknown.

3) **9-Step Guidance for Perennial Plants and Timber species** (www.9steps-cites-ndf.org)
   a. Guidance material for perennials and timber

b. Online training course are also available through the website (https://www.9steps-cites-ndf.org/online-courses
c. A decision tree has been created (https://www.9steps-cites-ndf.org/decision-trees), similar to the e-NDF for elasmobranch, which can be used in conjunction with the training, working through the example given throughout the course, or it can be used for filling in any NDF giving a PDF report at the end. Unlike the e-NDF, automated recommendations for the conclusion or decision or condition/advice are not suggested.
d. These tools are being updated in line with the revised guidelines to be completed post the expert workshop in 2024.

4) **UNEP-WCMC online tool**
   a. A tool is under development that aims to bring together relevant datasets to support NDFs.

5) **Sustainability Map** (www.sustainabilitymap.org)
   a. An online platform that provides access to a wide range of information related to sustainability initiatives, standards, and trends. It is designed to help businesses deploy better sustainability practices in international trade.
   b. Comprehensive database of sustainability standards for environmental protection, labour rights, business ethics, due diligence, and traceability, among others.

6) **The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species** (https://www.iucnredlist.org/)
   a. Established in 1964, the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species has evolved to become the world's most comprehensive information source on the global extinction risk status of animal, fungus and plant species.
   b. To date, many species groups including mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, sharks and rays, cephalopods, reef building corals, conifers and cycads have been comprehensively assessed.

7) **Species Use Database** (www.speciesusedatabase.com)
   a. Created by IUCN SSC Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group (SULi) to facilitate the collection and synthesis of information relating to the utilisation of wild species globally, and specifically on the sustainability of that use.

8) **Species+** (www.speciesplus.net)
   a. Developed by UNEP-WCMC and the CITES Secretariat, it is a website designed to assist Parties with implementing CITES and other multilateral environmental agreements.
   b. It provides a centralised portal for accessing key information on species of global concern.
   c. Contains information on all species listed in CITES Appendices.

9) **UNCTAD Toolbox** (www.unctad.org/projects/TOOLBOX)
   a. A collection of technical cooperation products that can assist countries in putting in place the policies, regulation, and institutional frameworks needed to fulfil the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
   b. Tailored to the needs of donors, partners, and other stakeholders to achieve concrete, measurable results.

10) **World Flora Online** (www.worldfloraonline.org)
   a. An international initiative that aims to achieve Target 1 of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation by providing a global overview of the diversity of plant species.
   b. An online database of all 1 383,054 known plant species.

11) **Catalogue of Life** (www.catalogueoflife.org)
   a. A collaboration bringing together the effort and contributions of taxonomists and informaticians to address the needs of researchers, policymakers, environmental managers and the wider public for a consistent and up-to-date listing of all the worlds known species.

12) **iNaturalist** (www.inaturalist.org)
    a. An online social network of people sharing biodiversity information to help each other learn about nature.
    b. It is also a crowdsourced species identification systems and organism occurrence recording tool.

13) **Seek by iNaturalist** (https://www.inaturalist.org/pages/seek_app)
    a. An online application that uses image recognition technology to identify animals and plants.
    b. Seek is freely available on both iOS and Android

14) **GBIF** (www.gbif.org)
    a. An international network and data infrastructure funded by the world's governments.
    b. Aimed at providing anyone, anywhere, open access data about all types of life on Earth.
    c. Training is available online:
        a. https://www.gbif.org/training
        b. https://w https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/prog/ndf/ndf_guidance/Module_1.pdf
        c. ww.gbif.org/data-use

15) **The '5-D' Sustainability Assessment Frameworks (5DSAF)**
    a. A tool currently being developed by a number of stakeholders (e.g., SULi, TRAFFIC) to assess sustainable use in a comprehensive, but accessible, way.
    b. Comprises a 5-dimensionsal assessment framework that includes animal welfare, human health, social, ecological and economic dimensions of sustainability.

16) **National databases**
    a. Databases designed for domestic use e.g., iPlant in China (www.iplant.cn)

17) **Online resources specific to plants**
    a. Plants of the World Online (https://powo.science.kew.org/)
    b. Medicinal Plant Names Services Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew (https://www.kew.org/science/our-science/science-services/medicinal-plant-names-services)
    c. iPlant (www.iPlant.cn)
    d. Tropicos (https://www.tropicos.org/home)
    e. Sustainable Use of Plant Species (www.plant-conservation.com/maprow/)
    f. FairWild Standard (https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/cop/18/inf/E-CoP18-Inf-036.pdf)
    g. United Plant Savers (UPS) Species at risk decision tool (https://unitedplantsavers.org/species-at-risk-assessment-tool/)

18) **General tools and data resources**
    a. BirdLife Data Zone (http://datazone.birdlife.org/home)
    b. CITES Trade Database (https://trade.cites.org/)
    c. CITES Wildlife TradeView (https://tradeview.cites.org/)
    d. Climate change and migratory species: a review of impacts, conservation actions, indicators and ecosystem services. Part 3 – Migratory species and their role in ecosystems (https://jncc.gov.uk/media/8523/climate-change-migratory-species-review-part-3.pdf)
    e. Ecological Data Exploration Platform (https://species.conabio.gob.mx/)
    f. GenBank (https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/genbank/)
    g. GeoCAT (https://geocat.iucnredlist.org/)
    h. IUCN library system (https://portals.iucn.org/library/)
    i. IUCN Guidance on the Precautionary Principle (https://www.iucn.org/resources/publication/precautionary-principle-biodiversity-conservation-and-natural-resource)
    j. IUCN Recommendations and Resolutions Platform (https://portals.iucn.org/library/resrec/search)
    k. SANBI (http://speciesstatus.sanbi.org/)

l. The Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (https://www.coe.int/en/web/bern-convention/documents)
m. Zauba (https://www.zauba.com/) [Note - This online resource is a commercial website requiring paid subscription]

3. Certification Schemes and NDFs

Certification schemes exist to evaluate performance against a set of standards, which can be led by governments, third parties or companies. Some may certify that harvest or production are ecologically sustainable, such as the Marine Stewardship Council, Forest Stewardship Council, and FairWild certification. Some look at specific species from a specific area (e.g., FairWild), whereas others may look at an area or harvesting operation more generally.

Certification schemes are typically governed by independent bodies who work under contract with their clients. Collaboration with Scientific Authorities is not necessary to achieve certification and therefore specific arrangements need to be made to align certification schemes with the NDF process.

Germany and TRAFFIC reviewed the information required for various voluntary certification standards to assess whether it might also provide any of the information needed by Scientific Authorities to help with making NDFs, which many did. Examples of independently evaluated certification schemes include Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), the Programme for Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC), the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), Certification of Sustainable Forest Management (SFM), and the Pan African Forest Certification (PAFC).

In general, certification schemes for timber consider forest units rather than species but there may be ways to utilise processes and data available in formulating NDFs. Certification for timber requires formulation of a forest management plan for the area being certified, which is a major source of information for an NDF. Additionally, chain of custody certification requires verification of products sourced from the forest unit.

Certification schemes often require independent audit or verification of information, in some cases including resource surveys, therefore certification documentation can, in some cases, provide significant information for the making of non-detriment findings by CITES Scientific Authorities and Legal Acquisition Findings (LAFs) by CITES Management Authorities. They may also provide a means of ongoing monitoring and continual observation of trade.

Table 12A illustrates the extent to which certification standards can contribute towards the NDF process using four examples, namely FairWild, FSC, MSC, and the Responsible Reptile Sourcing Standard (RRSS). A matrix is used to compare the general usefulness of standard requirements against the generic NDF guidance outlined in **module 2**. More details on specific principles can be found on the respective websites. Parties should be encouraged to share case studies that help to illustrate how certification schemes can be linked with the NDF process. Similarly, stakeholders should be encouraged to explore the NDF process to see how it can inform the creation of new standards and certifications.

Access to the information derived from the certification process may require special arrangements between the Scientific Authority and the certification providers; it cannot be assumed that information will be shared. **Figure 12A** gives an example of how this could work in practice.

Figure 12A: Example of how a pre-agreement between CITES authorities and standard holders/certification bodies could work in practice. Source: Timoshyna A, Furnell S, Harter D. CITES and voluntary certification for wild medicinal and aromatic plants. TRAFFIC Bulletin. October 2019, 31(2)

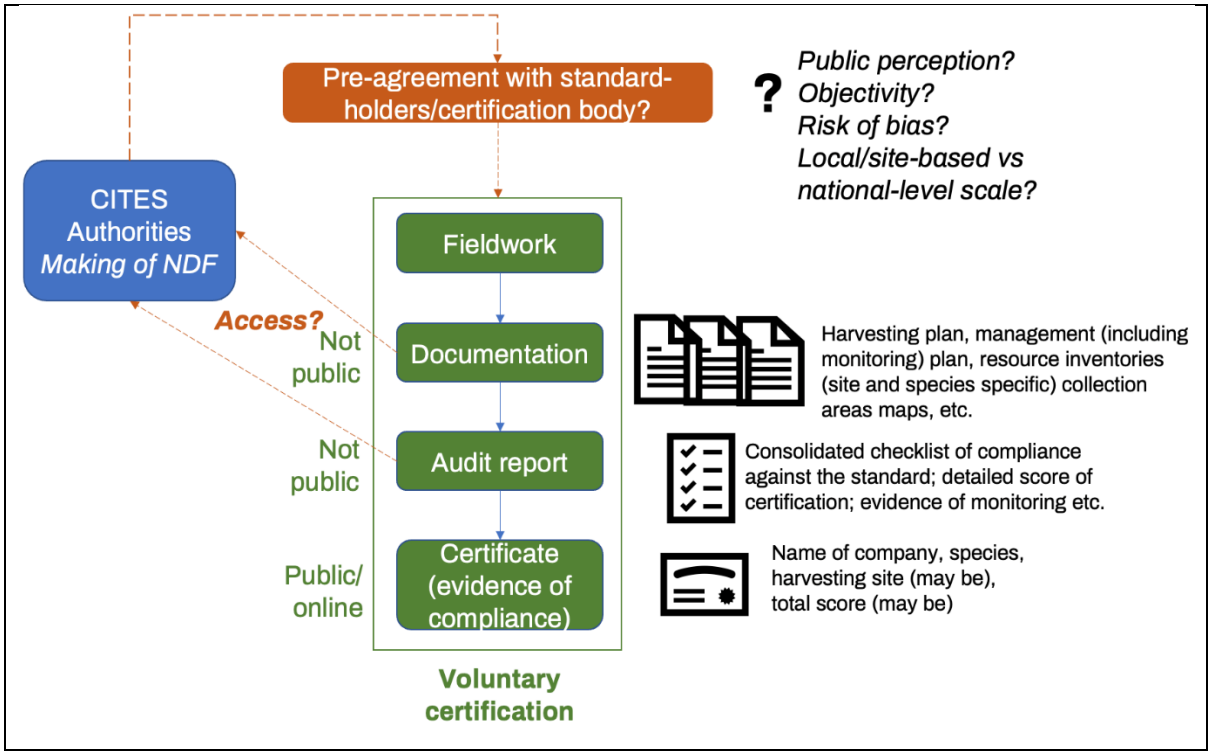
Pre-agreement with standard-holders/certification body?
?
Public perception?
Objectivity?
Risk of bias?
Local/site-based vs national-level scale?
CITES Authorities
Making of NDF
Fieldwork
Documentation
Audit report
Certificate (evidence of compliance)
Access?
Not public
Not public
Public/ online
Harvesting plan, management (including monitoring) plan, resource inventories (site and species specific) collection areas maps, etc.
Consolidated checklist of compliance against the standard; detailed score of certification; evidence of monitoring etc.
Name of company, species, harvesting site (may be), total score (may be)
Voluntary certification

Table 12A. Matrix comparing the steps of the NDF process (**module 2**) against the information provided by four certification standards. High implies significant crossover with the information required by the NDF process.

Generic NDF		FairWild Standard Ver 3.0	FSC International	MSC Fisheries Standard 3.0	RRSS
Pre-NDF check					
Simplified NDF Assessment	1) Annual harvest Level	*High*	*High*	*High*	*High*
	2)Life history traits	*High*	*Low*	*Medium*	*High*
	3)Area of Distribution	*High*	*Medium*	*Medium*	*Low*
	4)Illegal trade	*High*	*Medium*	*Low*	*Medium*
	5)Threat status	*High*	*Low*		*Low*
Comprehensive NDF Assessment	1)Biological and life history characteristics	*High*	*Low*	*Medium*	*High*
	2)Range	*High*	*Medium*	*Medium*	*Medium*
	3)Population structure, status, and trend	*High*	*High*	*High*	*High*
	4)Conservation status	*High*	*High*	*Low*	*Low*
	5)Threats	*High*	*Low*	*Low*	*Medium*
	6)Harvest	*High*	*High*	*High*	*High*
	7)Trade	*High*	*Low*	*Low*	*Low*
	8)Benefits to local livelihoods	*High*	*High*	*Low*	*High*
	9)Harvest impact	*High*	*High*	*High*	*Medium*
	10)Trade impact	*High*	*High*	*Low*	*Low*
	11)Population monitoring	*High*	*High*	*High*	*High*
	12)Management measures	*High*	*High*	*High*	*Medium*
	13)Ecosystem impact	*High*	*High*	*High*	*High*

Timber provides a good example of how certification schemes develop and how multiple schemes can interact. The FSC certification covers a range of CITES timber species. Mahogany exported from Brazil is one example (see PC24 Inf. 12) and in Tanzania, an FSC group certification scheme has been developed for *Dalbergia melanoxylon* sourced from community-managed natural forest. Forest certification has developed relatively recently in Africa but is now well-established. The first experience with forest certification in Central Africa was in 1996 with an FSC attempt in Gabon. In 2004, companies turned first to legal certifications (e.g., LegalSource), and then again to voluntary FSC, whose first certificates were issued in 2005. In parallel, the idea of a pan-African certification was born in the early 2000s. The approach, called PAFC (Pan African Forest Certification) was first developed at the national level, and aimed to be recognized by PEFC, allowing the sale of PAFC-certified wood with the PEFC logo. The first operational and recognized national scheme was the PAFC Gabon in 2009, with a first certificate issued in 2018. In 2019, the initiative to develop a regional Congo Basin PAFC scheme was launched, led by the International Tropical Timber Technical Association (ATIBT) and funded by the German cooperation KFW. The Congo Basin PAFC scheme was recognized by the PEFC at the end of 2021. At the end of 2021, the Congo Basin had 5,392,066 ha of FSC and PAFC certified forest (representing 10% of exploitable forests), with a concession of approximately 600,000 ha being doubly certified. In Gabon, all logging concessions had to be certified by 2022.