

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Division of Scientific Authority
Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
(CITES)
Record of Advice on Export Permit Application

Application Number: 86927c DSA Date: 5/3/2018

DMA Contact: Robert Williams

Applicant: [REDACTED]

Specimens and Species: 115 dwarf sea horses (*Hippocampus zosterae*)
12 lined sea horses (*Hippocampus erectus*)

Source of Specimens: Wild caught

Recipient: [REDACTED]

Type of Permit: Appendix II Export

ADVICE

After examining the above permit application, we find that the proposed export
will **not be detrimental** to the survival of the species.

Background

The genus *Hippocampus* was included in CITES Appendix II in 2002, with an effective date of May 15, 2004 (CoP12 Prop. 37; UNEP-WCMC 2018). International trade in seahorses is primarily for live specimens used in the aquarium trade, specimens used in traditional medicine and as curios (Pollom 2017). At the 20th meeting of the Animals Committee (Johnnesburg, 2004) the committee agreed that specimens of wild-caught *Hippocampus* for international trade should have a minimum height of 4 inches (10cm) (Notification No. 2004/033), however, as stated in this Notification, "The use of this minimum size limit for specimens of wild origin in trade is voluntary". For seahorses, size is a better indicator of sexual maturity than age (Foster & Vincent 2004) and this value was determined to be the most appropriate size to allow the majority of seahorse species to reach reproductive age prior to harvest. The Animals Committee also noted that for smaller species, such as the dwarf seahorse (*Hippocampus zosterae*), due to their overall smaller size at maturity, Parties may wish to determine other methods to make non-detriment findings. This finding therefore is based on the fact that the average size of the dwarf seahorse is between 2-2.5 cm, with some individuals reaching 5cm in length, and that to insure that the export of these specimens will not be detrimental to the survival of the species, all specimens collected for export under this permit should be equal to or greater than 3/4 in (2 cm)

in height, as measured from the tip of the coronet to the end of the unfurled tail.

Dwarf seahorses (*Hippocampus zosterae*) are native to the Gulf of Mexico and the Bahamas. The IUCN Red List classification for this species is Least Concern (Masonjones et al. 2017). Currently, *H. zosterae* is being evaluated under the ESA for potential listing. A preliminary evaluation indicated that there was sufficient information available to warrant a full review and all comments and data which parties wished to submit for consideration in this review were due by July 3, 2012. As of May 22, 2018 a final determination is still pending.

In November 2015 Florida proposed changes to its commercial harvest quota for the dwarf seahorse. This change, if implemented, would reduce the current 400 individuals/day quota to a 200 individuals/day quota per boat or per individual, whichever is less. This proposed regulation change has gone through two public review periods and a final decision will be made once the pending ESA determination is made (Masonjones et al. 2017). To date (5/22/2018) there have been no changes to the commercial harvest quota of 400 individuals/day.

Lined seahorses (*Hippocampus erectus*) are native to the southwestern to northwestern Atlantic. In the wild, the species reaches a full grown length of about 12.5 cm and lives for almost five years; it becomes mature in approximately nine months. Broods of the lined seahorse range from 250 to 650, depending on the size of the adult, and hatch after an incubation period of about 20 days. In the wild, the species breeds from roughly February/March until late October, depending on water temperature (Gardiner 2001; Pollom 2017).

The lined seahorse, like the dwarf seahorse, was included in CITES Appendix II in 2002 under the *Hippocampus* genus listing (CoP12 Prop. 37). In 2017, the lined seahorse was classified as Vulnerable, with a decreasing population, on the IUCN Red List (Pollom 2017).

In Florida wild-caught seahorses are regulated by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, Florida Division of Marine Fisheries Management as authorized in Chapter 68B-42 of the Florida Administrative Code (<https://www.flrules.org/gateway/ChapterHome.asp?Chapter=68B-42>). These codes outline regulations which must be followed in order to legally harvest marine life in Florida waters. The code indicates no harvest limit for the lined seahorse (*Hippocampus erectus*) and it establishes a maximum daily harvest limit of 400 individuals for the dwarf seahorse (*Hippocampus zosterae*). These codes also indicate that those who commercially harvest seahorses in Florida waters are required to possess a Commercial Saltwater Products License (SPL) with the Restricted Species (RS) and Marine Life Dive Permit (MLD) endorsements. Wholesalers and Retailers are required to obtain separate Saltwater Products Licenses.

Basis for Advice

1) The applicant, [REDACTED], requests authorization to export 115 dwarf sea horses (*Hippocampus zosterae*) and 12 lined sea horses (*Hippocampus erectus*) to [REDACTED] the United Kingdom. While his last permit required that he provide a trip ticket documenting his catch to the State of Florida, the applicant canceled this permit and so no harvest occurred. This export is for commercial purposes.

2) According to the documentation provided by the applicant, [REDACTED] is a Federally Licensed Wildlife Importer/Exporter and is properly licensed in Florida with a valid SPL including the RS and MLD endorsements. He also holds current Florida Saltwater Products Wholesale and Retail licenses. In addition, he maintains a current Florida Saltwater Products Vessel Decal for the primary harvesting vessel. The applicant therefor holds all permits required by the Florida Division of Marine Fisheries Management to harvest wild seahorses in Florida waters and has in the past received seahorse export permits from this office. His current application requests authorization to export fewer individuals than are permitted by the state of Florida to be harvested from the wild in one day. He is also legally permitted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to Import and Export wildlife and wildlife products.

3) The specimens to be exported are native to the west-central Atlantic, and in the United States are native to Florida coastal waters. The specimens will be collected from the wild in the Bay of Florida between Big Pine Key and Anett Key basin to Cowpens's basin in Monroe County, Florida; collections are authorized under Florida permitting and licensing authority, only after this export permit has been issued. Collections will be made with special consideration given, as noted in the application, to avoid collection of brooding males, to not deplete local populations during harvest, and to ensure only individual meeting the required minimum size are harvested. Once collected, the specimens will be maintained at [REDACTED]' facility in [REDACTED], Florida for up to 30 days prior to shipment.

Therefore, based on the information provided by the applicant, we conclude that the specimens to be exported are wild-caught by a licensed and permitted harvester, and that their export will **not be detrimental** to the survival of the species, provided the permit conditions and reporting requirements listed below are followed.

PERMIT CONDITIONS (3):

1. For dwarf seahorses, the applicant may export only adult dwarf seahorses (*Hippocampus zosterae*) equal to or greater than 3/4 in (2 cm) in height. Height is measured from the top of the coronet to the tip of the straightened tail. Care should be taken when unfurling the tails.
2. For both the lined seahorses and dwarf seahorses, collection of brooding (pregnant) males should be avoided. While it can occasionally be difficult to distinguish brooding seahorses, we recommend that the applicant take note of the tendency for brooding males to congregate in local areas.
3. For both the lined seahorses and dwarf seahorses, care should be taken not to deplete a local colony during harvest.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS (3):

Within two weeks of export, please submit to DMA a report that includes the following information regarding the specimens that were exported under this permit:

1. A copy of the trip ticket(s) associated with the specimens that were exported under this permit.
2. Catch per unit effort (i.e., the amount of time needed to catch the specimens, and the number of specimens caught in that amount of time, and the sex of all mature specimens).
3. Mortality rate of specimens collected, including mortality from harvest to export, and any reported mortality from export to arrival of specimens to recipient. Also, please report the sex of each mature specimen which dies.



Jon Siemien
Biologist
Division of Scientific Authority

5/23/18



Eleanora Babij, Ph.D.
Chief, Branch of Consultation and Monitoring
Division of Scientific Authority

5/23/18

To be filed in: DSA\Findings\Animal\Export\86927c - Export _ lined and dwarf seahorses _ W
Samples.docx

References

CoP12 Prop .37. 2002. Inclusion of all species of the genus *Hippocampus* (*Hippocampus* spp.) in Appendix II of CITES. Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)-Twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties. 26 pp. Online at: <www.cites.org/eng/cop/12/prop/E12-P37.pdf>. [Retrieved May 14, 2013].

Foster, S.J. and C.J. Vincent. 2004. Review Paper: Life history and ecology of seahorses: Implications for conservation and management. *Journal of Fish Biology* 65(1): 1-61.

Gardiner, N. 2001. "Hippocampus erectus" (On-line), Animal Diversity Web. Accessed September 13, 2013 at http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/accounts/Hippocampus_erectus/

Masonjones, H., Hayashida-Boyles, A. & Pollom, R. 2017. *Hippocampus zosterae*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2017: e.T10089A46910143. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2017-3.RLTS.T10089A46910143.en>. Downloaded on 22 May 2018

Pollom, R. 2017. *Hippocampus erectus*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2017: e.T10066A20191442. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2017-3.RLTS.T10066A20191442.en>. Downloaded on 17 May 2018.

Project Seahorse 2003a. *Hippocampus erectus*. In: IUCN 2011. IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2012.2. <www.iucnredlist.org>. Downloaded on 14 May 2013.

Notification No. 2004/033. 2004. Trade in seahorses: Implementation of Decision 12.54. Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)-Notification to the Parties. Geneva, Switzerland. 1p. <www.cites.org/eng/notif/2004/033.pdf>. [Accessed 10 June 2014].

UNEP-WCMC. 2018. UNEP-WCMC Species+ Database: Seahorses (*Hippocampus* spp.). On the World Wide Web at: (Hyperlink to UNEP-WCMC Species+ database listing for the genus *Hippocampus*)