

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: 67021d Date DSA: 1/24/2020

DMA Contact: Kirstine Grab

Applicant: [REDACTED], Florida

Specimens and species: 200 Dwarf seahorse (*Hippocampus zosterae*); wild caught, live specimens

Source of Specimens: Wild caught (after permit is issued)

Recipient: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Netherlands

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 listed in CITES Appendix II in 2002, with an effective date of May 15, 2004 (UNEP 2020; CoP12 Prop. 37). International trade in seahorses is primarily for live specimens used in the aquarium trade, specimens used in traditional medicine and as curios (Project Seahorse 2003; Masonjones et al. 2017). At the 20th meeting of the Animals Committee (Johannesburg, 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 rating for this species is Least Concern and the population appears to be stable (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 (77 FR 26478). As of February 10, 2020, a final determination is still pending.

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 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.

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 is currently in the public review period and a final public hearing was to be scheduled sometime in February, 2016. To date (2/10/2020) there have been no changes to the commercial harvest quota of 400 individuals/day.

Basis for advice

- 1) The applicant, [REDACTED] requests authorization to export 200 live, wild-caught dwarf seahorses (*Hippocampus zosterae*) to [REDACTED] in [REDACTED], Netherlands. This export is for commercial purposes.
- 2) [REDACTED], of [REDACTED], Florida is a Federally Licensed Wildlife Importer/Exporter and is properly licensed in Florida with a valid SPL including the RS and MLD endorsements. They also hold current Florida Saltwater Products Wholesale and Retail licenses. In addition, they maintain a current Florida Saltwater Products Vessel Decal for each of their harvesting vessels. 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 several seahorse export permits from this office. Their current application

requests authorization to export no more individuals than are permitted by the state of Florida to be harvested from the wild in one day.

3) The specimens to be exported are native to the west-central Atlantic and Caribbean, and in the United States are native to Florida coastal waters. The specimens will be collected from the wild, in Monroe County Florida, under Florida permitting and licensing authority, only after this export permit has been issued. Collections should be made with special consideration given, as noted in the conditions, to avoiding collection of brooding males, to not deplete local populations during harvest, and to ensure only individuals meeting the required minimum size are harvested. Once collected, the specimens will be maintained at the [REDACTED] facility in [REDACTED] Florida for approximately one week prior to shipment.

Based on the above information, and the fact that this applicant has provided the reports required under previous permits, we conclude that the 200 specimens to be exported are wild-caught by a licensed and permitted fisherperson, and that their export will **not be detrimental** to the survival of the species, as long as the conditions stipulated in this finding are met.

PERMIT CONDITIONS (3)

1. The applicant may export only 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. 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. 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 (identifying the permit number with the trip ticket).
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.

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..

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Masonjones, H., Hayashida-Boyles, A. & Pollom, R. 2017. *Hippocampus zosterae*. *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* 2017: e.T10089A46910143.

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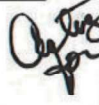
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