

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



Sixty-first meeting of the Standing Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 15-19 August 2011

Interpretation and implementation of the Convention

Species trade and conservation

Sturgeons

MONITORING OF PROGRESS

1. This document has been prepared by the Chair of the Animals Committee.*
2. In Resolution Conf. 12.7 (Rev. CoP14) on *Conservation of and trade in sturgeons and paddlefish*, the Conference of the Parties:

DIRECTS the Animals Committee, in collaboration with the Secretariat, interested Parties, international organizations and relevant experts, to monitor progress on the relevant provisions of this Resolution and to carry out on a three-year cycle starting in 2008, and using information from preceding years, an evaluation of the assessment and the monitoring methodologies used for stocks of Acipenseriformes species subject to the provisions under RECOMMENDS further, paragraph a),...

and

DIRECTS the Animals Committee to provide to the Standing Committee its recommendations on actions to be taken based upon the above-mentioned monitoring of progress and three-year cycle evaluation.

3. At its 58th meeting (Geneva, July 2009), on the basis of recommendations from the Animals Committee, the Standing Committee *inter alia*:
 - a) *urged the range States concerned to consider all recommendations in document AC24 Doc. 12.2, including those provided in the Appendices, in working with the Commission on Aquatic Bioresources to continue to improve the sturgeon stock assessment and Total Allowable Catch (TAC) determination methodology;*
 - b) *asked the Caspian range States to implement the above recommendations and report at the 25th meeting of Animals Committee (AC25) on progress made in improving the existing sturgeon stock assessment and Total Allowable Catch (TAC) determination methodology through a detailed report describing how the recommendations in document AC24 Doc. 12.2 have been implemented and whether they have been accepted by all range States. This report should be submitted to the Secretariat four months prior to AC25 for the purposes of external review;*
4. Following the decision of the Standing Committee in paragraph 3 b) of the present document, the Secretariat reminded the Caspian littoral States in November 2010 to provide a report describing how the recommendations in document AC24 Doc. 12.2 have been implemented and whether they have been

* *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.*

accepted by all range States by 18 March 2011. No replies were received by the deadline, although Azerbaijan replied on 5 April 2011.

5. In accordance with a request by the Animals Committee, the Secretariat contracted a review of the reports. This was undertaken by Dr Alexi F. Sharov, Program Chief, Maryland Department of Natural Resources, United States of America (an outside experts who contributed to document AC24 Doc. 12.2), with technical oversight provided by FAO. Funding for this exercise was provided by the European Commission.
6. In view of the poor response of the Caspian littoral States to the call for information, Dr Sharov was asked to provide expert analysis of the stock assessment and TAC determination for sturgeon species in the Caspian Sea more generally. His report can be found in the Annex of document AC25 Doc. 16.2.
7. In Resolution Conf. 12.7 (Rev. CoP14), the Conference of the Parties directs the Animals Committee to draft recommendations on actions regarding progress on the relevant provisions of Resolution Conf. 12.7 (Rev. CoP14) and its evaluation of the assessment and the monitoring methodologies used for shared stocks of Acipenseriformes species, for the consideration of the Standing Committee. Having considered the report mentioned in paragraph 6 of the present document, the Animals Committee presents its recommendations in the Annex to the present document.
8. The Standing Committee is requested to consider these recommendations and act upon them.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ANIMALS COMMITTEE

1. To take note of the range states of the Caspian Sea commitment to improving the current status of the sturgeon conservation and to ensure sustainable use of the resource.
2. To agree that insufficient sturgeon stock assessment expertise in the region and appropriate institutional structure to support such activities are the major impediments to the progress in implementation of FAO recommendations for improving the stock assessment methodology and TAC estimation.
3. To request CITES, FAO and other international organizations to provide financial and technical support in stock assessment activities, including training and capacity building.
4. To recommend to the Caspian Sea range states to establish a regional sturgeon stock assessment committee under the existing institution that will be responsible for data analysis, stock assessment and development of management recommendations. The committee should include sturgeon biologists and stock assessment scientists. Creation of such committee is critical for establishing a transparent and objective process of collegial data review, analysis and management advice. The tasks for the committee should include those provided below.
5. To request CITES and FAO support in providing stock assessment experts that could serve on such committee as independent experts, providing objective technical assistance to this group at the initial stage.
6. To recommend to the range states to hold regular regional workshops to develop common stock assessment methodology and approaches to IUU fishing, fishery management and restoration of stocks.
7. To recommend to the Caspian Sea range states to provide progress report on an annual basis starting with the next Animal Committee meeting.
8. Take note that the Caspian Sea range States with exception of Azerbaijan have not responded to the communication from the Secretariat as noted in document AC25 Doc. 16.2, paragraph 6, and urges the Caspian Sea range States to report to the Secretariat on the progress in implementing the report.
9. To instruct the Secretariat to better assist the Caspian Range States in implementation of Resolution Conf. 12.7 (Rev. CoP14) through fund raising and technical support, specifically regarding combating illegal catch and trade, increasing public awareness and encouraging fishery community involvement in management and conservation of sturgeon.
10. To urge the Parties involved in caviar trade to reinforce their control of such trade due to serious concern of the legality of sturgeon products on the market.

TASKS FOR THE STOCK ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

Develop a three phase work plan.

Phase 1

1. Complete data inventory, improve of existing survey methodology, develop of clear management goals, establish biological reference points and stock rebuilding plans.
2. Improve the existing assessment methodology based on trawl survey by:
 - Developing time series of average catch per trawl by species as an index of relative abundance.
 - Evaluating trends in relative abundance (catch per trawl or unit area). Calculate confidence limit intervals for mean catch per trawl and coefficient of variation.
 - Analyzing accumulated data with respect to possible changes in survey design to improve survey precision (consider stratified random, systematic, cluster designs, etc).
 - Evaluating survey precision and required sample size for various levels of precision

- Considering uncertainty in current estimates of catchability coefficient and ways of reducing the uncertainty.
- Considering design of a new study for catchability coefficient estimation.

Phase 2

1. Develop a rebuilding plan for each stock that is considered overfished.
 - Specify the rebuilding time frame.
 - Specify target stock biomass for rebuilding period.
 - Establish a monitoring procedure to control progress on rebuilding and make appropriate adjustments.
2. Develop biological reference points and establish a management control rule for each stock.
 - develop target and limit reference points for stock biomass.
 - develop target and limit reference points fishing mortality.
3. Review candidate assessment models and select those applicable given data availability. Candidate models included but not limited to, are production models, age structured VPA/ statistical catch at age, equilibrium dynamic pool models (YPR and SPR analysis), etc. Once a suite of models is selected for the analysis, the committee will conduct a data workshop and a stock assessment workshop to produce estimates of mortality and population size and evaluate the status of stocks in relation to reference points.
4. Whenever the stock status is considered satisfactory to allow commercial harvest, develop TAC on a precautionary basis.
5. Initiate regional cooperation for population (stock) identification using molecular genetics tools.

Phase 3

1. Upon successful completion of these tasks, review progress and revise the work plan according to the recommendations listed above as well as in document AC25 Doc. 16.2 and following the outcomes of the committee's work and emerging needs.
2. Report progress to the range states which in turn should report to the CITES.