

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

Thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties
Bangkok (Thailand), 2-14 October 2004

Interpretation and implementation of the Convention

Species trade and conservation issues

CONSERVATION OF AND TRADE IN ASIAN BIG CATS

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat on its own behalf and on behalf of the Standing Committee.

Background

2. At its 12th meeting (Santiago, 2002), the Conference of the Parties adopted the following Decisions:

12.30 Each range State Party should consider ways in which local communities might be encouraged to play a part in, and benefit from, the conservation of Asian big cats and their habitats, for example through eco-tourism. Each range State should prepare a report on its approach to this matter for the 49th meeting of the Standing Committee, so that concepts and initiatives can be shared among relevant Parties.

12.31 The Standing Committee shall continue to review the progress in range and consumer States that were earlier subject to CITES Technical and Political Tiger Missions to ensure that recommendations made by the Missions continue to be implemented.

12.32 The Standing Committee shall report at the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties upon the progress made by the range and consumer States of Asian big cat species. The report may contain recommendations regarding appropriate measures where no progress has been made.

Work by the Secretariat and the Standing Committee

3. The subject of Asian big cats was discussed at the 49th meeting (Geneva, April 2003) of the Standing Committee, at which time the Committee noted document SC49 Doc. 10 submitted by the Secretariat. However, so few Parties had submitted reports in relation to Decision 12.30 that the subject was placed on the agenda for the 50th meeting of the Committee (Geneva, March 2004).
4. At its 50th meeting, the Committee noted document SC50 Doc. 16 submitted by the Secretariat. By that time, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation and Thailand had submitted reports in relation to Decision 12.30. The Secretariat identified India and Nepal as particularly good examples of countries where local communities were being encouraged to play a part in, and benefit from, the conservation of Asian big cats and their habitats. It also noted that conflicts between cats and humans and livestock were a common problem reported by range States.
5. Pakistan and Viet Nam submitted reports after the 50th meeting of the Standing Committee. At the time of writing (April 2004), the Secretariat was still waiting for reports from Cambodia, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Sri Lanka and Uzbekistan. It will report orally at the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP13) on progress regarding submissions.

6. In relation to implementation of the recommendations made by the CITES Technical and Political Tiger Missions, the Secretariat and the Standing Committee noted that killing and illegal trade in Asian big cats remained a significant problem, which Parties were seeking to address in a variety of ways. The Secretariat identified the establishment of specialized enforcement units and the need for greater support to enforcement in general as being the two most important areas in relation to combating poaching and illicit trade.
7. However, the Secretariat did not believe that there were any Parties that could be described as failing to make progress. Consequently, the Standing Committee decided that it was not necessary to make specific recommendations at the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties in terms of Decision 12.32.

Non-commercial trade in specimens of Appendix-I species

8. In the report of its mission to Thailand (Annex to document CoP12 Doc. 33), the CITES Tiger Mission Technical Team made the following observations:

Whilst considering the general issue of captive-breeding and licensed keeping of endangered species, the team was struck by the fact that Thailand, and no doubt other countries, has registered as zoological gardens facilities that may not deserve to be described in such terms. Sriracha Tiger Zoo, for example, is highly unlikely to meet the criteria for admission to some of the regional and international zoo associations but is rather essentially a place of public entertainment. The team also had in mind some recent violations of the Convention where illicit trade in specimens of CITES-listed species, including some highly endangered Appendix-I species, has occurred where the trade purported to be of a scientific nature but had significant commercial aspects. The team met an individual in Thailand with considerable knowledge of zoo operations in Asia who said that unwillingness by zoos in North America and Europe to participate in scientific exchanges with Asian zoos had led several Asian zoos to acquire specimens for exhibition, to help increase visitor numbers, without caring greatly whether the specimens were of a legal origin or not.

The team believes the fraudulent or improper acquisition by zoos of specimens of CITES-listed species, particularly those in Appendix I, should be a matter of concern to the Convention. It also believes that some facilities that are currently registered or regarded as zoos do not deserve this status and may exploit it to abuse the provisions of the Convention and Resolutions relating to primarily non-commercial imports under Article III of CITES.

*The team suggests that the CITES Secretariat should discuss this issue with relevant bodies, such as the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums and the Animals Committee. In particular, it suggests that the role of wildlife dealers who facilitate the acquisition of specimens for 'zoos' should be examined, perhaps with a view to considering whether the registration of such dealers might be appropriate and whether additional guidance should be incorporated in Resolution Conf. 5.10 (Definition of 'primarily commercial purposes'). **(Recommendation 5)***

9. The Secretariat has conducted work in relation to the Team's recommendation. It believes that there is some justification for the Team's concerns and has noted instances where imports have taken place that it does not believe have followed the guidance in Resolution Conf. 5.10. It is of the opinion that the guidance in Resolution Conf. 5.10 remains both valid and relevant but that it is perhaps not known widely enough by the Parties, particularly since it is now many years since it was adopted by the Conference of the Parties. The Secretariat suggests that it may be helpful to publish a Notification to the Parties drawing attention to the guidance and encouraging Parties to follow it.
10. The Secretariat acknowledges that the term 'zoo' can cover a wide variety of facilities. It does not believe it is necessary for the Conference of the Parties to try and define what the term should mean. It recognizes that there are probably hundreds of facilities around the world that have been considered by Parties as zoos, in terms of their national legislation or policies, and it would be unhelpful to recommend that their status be altered. Instead, it believes the focus when determining whether trade should be authorized should continue to be on the purpose of the import and that Management Authorities determine whether a facility's acquisition of specimens of Appendix-I species is for a primarily non-commercial purpose, using the guidance in Resolution Conf. 5.10.

11. The Secretariat is aware that the activities of some professional dealers in specimens of Appendix-I species give cause for concern, as mentioned by the Tiger Mission Technical Team. It does not believe, however, that registration of such persons would be an effective way in which to tackle such concerns. For example, it is aware of dealers who are based in countries that are neither range States of the species concerned or importing countries and that such dealers simply act as 'middlemen', facilitating the acquisition of specimens. In such cases, it would be very difficult for the Management Authority where the dealer was based to monitor his or her activities, especially if the dealer never takes possession of specimens and makes applications for export and import permits to authorities elsewhere in the world. Consequently, the Secretariat has addressed this specific issue by the issuance of an Alert, bringing the attention of Parties and law enforcement agencies to the activities of and methods used by unscrupulous dealers.