

Endangered Species Advisory Committee

**Summary Report of Engagement in
International Meetings, Workshops and Trainings
1/7/2022 – 10/11/2023**

Purpose

This paper provides a summary report on the active participation of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) in international meetings, workshops and trainings pertaining to implementation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (“CITES”) from 1 July 2022 to 10 November 2023 for the information of members.

Introduction

2. Throughout the reporting period, representatives from professional and technical grades of AFCD actively participated in a total of 11 international meetings, workshops, and training sessions related to the implementation of CITES. The ensuing paragraphs briefly describe the outcomes that demonstrate our extensive networking with diverse authorities and organisations, and our commitment in the implementation of CITES and relevant enforcement work.

Meetings of Convention Bodies

i) The 19th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (“CoP 19”)

3. CITES Parties meet every two to three years in the CoP, which is the ultimate decision-making body of the Convention, to review the listing of endangered species in its Appendices and discuss matters related to its implementation. At CoP19 held from 14 to 25 November 2022 in Panama City, Panama, two AFCD officers participated in the meeting as part of the Chinese delegation. The officers worked closely with Mainland delegates on various topics such as listing of sharks, freshwater turtles and roseroots by studying and assessing the corresponding proposals, and made necessary lobbying and intervention during the meeting to convey the views and concerns of China (including Hong Kong SAR).

4. AFCD officers also took the opportunity to have side meetings with delegates from other Parties such as members of the European Parliament to discuss illegal wildlife trade issues; Indonesia's Management Authority to strengthen collaboration in monitoring the trade of Humphead Wrasse; Singapore's Management Authority to exchange knowledge in forensic techniques and explore opportunities to strengthen the collaboration between Hong Kong and Singapore.

ii) CITES Meetings (Animals Committee and Plants Committee)

5. Animals Committee and Plants Committee were established to fill gaps in biological and other specialised knowledge regarding species of animals and plants that are (or might become) subject to CITES trade controls. Their role is to provide technical support to decision-making about these species. The Animals Committee and Plants Committee meet twice between meetings of the CoP. Two AFCD representatives, in the capacity of members of the Chinese delegation, were assigned to attend the 26th meeting of the Plants Committee and the 32nd meeting of the Animals Committee respectively.

(a) 26th meeting of the Plants Committee ("PC26")

The meeting was held on 5 to 9 June 2023 in Geneva, Switzerland. About 250 scientific experts joined this meeting to discuss on rosewoods, orchids, medicinal plants and aromatic plants etc. A total of eight in-session working groups were established to delve deeper into a range of topics and the Chinese delegation actively participated in six of them. AFCD officer contributed by representing the Chinese delegation in the meeting and conveyed their views and concerns on relevant issues. For example, AFCD officer presented China's continued commitment to collaborate on the production of the checklist of *Taxus* species. Also, AFCD officer commented on the trade data of *Mammillaria* species which was exported from China during the discussion on the review of significant trade in specimens of Appendix II species.

(b) 32th meeting of the Animals Committee ("AC32")

The meeting was held on 19 to 23 June 2023 in Geneva, Switzerland. AFCD officer attended the AC32 as a member of the Chinese delegation. The Committee discussed various topics related to animals including the trade in sharks and seahorses which are relevant to the trade in Hong Kong. AFCD officer served as a Chinese delegate and contributed in the discussion on relevant issues. For example, AFCD officer voiced support for the CITES Secretariat to provide technical guidance to range states of shark species in conducting non-detrimental findings to ensure the sustainability of trade in sharks, and reiterated China's (including Hong Kong) committed effort in combating illegal wildlife trade including sharks and seahorses.

CITES Workshops

6. CITES Secretariat, scientific bodies and management authorities organised workshops to discuss technical issues and exchange experience in various aspects of CITES implementation. AFCD actively participated in workshops that are relevant to the trade in Hong Kong to keep abreast of the current international practice and maintain liaison with CITES management authorities. AFCD attended two workshops and co-organised one workshop.

i) Implementing CITES for seahorses – Asia region workshop

7. The workshop focused on the CITES implementation related to seahorses. It covers topics including fisheries management, population monitoring, licensing and enforcement. The meeting was held from 14 to 17 March 2023 in Cebu, Philippines. Participants exchanged experience in the implementation of CITES regulations on seahorses, with the focus on the making of non-detrimental findings and enforcement. Participants also visited a local fishing village and met with fishers, traders, and village leaders to learn about the area's long history of seahorse fisheries and trade, and discussed the future of seahorse fisheries. AFCD officer shared the experience in enforcement against smuggling of seahorses, and acknowledged that an effective fishery management is crucial for a sustainable trade of seahorses.

ii) CITES-ESCAP regional workshop on electronic CITES permitting systems in Asia (Hybrid)

8. The objective of electronic CITES or eCITES permitting systems is to improve the implementation of the CITES by using information technologies to simplify the compliance process of the trade and to combat illegal trade. The meeting was held from 17 to 18 July 2023 in Bangkok, Thailand. Participants from CITES management authorities shared their experience and current progress in adopting electronic permitting system in their own jurisdiction. The CITES Secretariat shared the relevant technologies and latest development in electronic permit and information exchange for enhanced security and efficiency. AFCD officer shared the latest development in enabling CITES licensing application through Trade Single Windows for enhanced facilitation and efficiency to business.

iii) Training workshop on sharks, rays, and sea cucumber identification

9. AFCD, National Parks Board of Singapore (NParks), Bloom Association and Wildlife Conservation Society jointly organised a training workshop on sharks, rays and sea cucumber identification which was held in Singapore, from 17 to 18 October 2023. The training

workshop provided training to frontline officers on the identification of sharks, rays and sea cucumber species that will be regulated under CITES after CoP19. NParks showcased the Fin Finder, which is an AI-based mobile application for shark and ray fin identification. Participants also visited the NParks's Centre for Wildlife Forensics to learn about the latest molecular technology for species and provenance identification. AFCD provided specimens including shark fins and dried sea cucumber for demonstration and training and its representative also shared experience in enforcement and prosecutions. AFCD and NParks reiterated the continuous collaboration between the two places in the implementation of CITES regulations and AFCD planned to donate more specimens to NParks in support of wildlife forensic studies.

Enforcement Meetings

10. The Government is committed to combatting illegal wildlife trade. As wildlife trafficking happens on a global scale, it is crucial that we maintain close liaison with other enforcement agencies from different parts of the world for knowledge and intelligence exchange, and discuss enforcement matters and explore opportunities for international collaboration, so as to demonstrate our dedication and contribute our efforts in this global fight against wildlife crime.

11. AFCD actively participates in regular meetings of enforcement networks led by INTERPOL and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime ("UNODC"), and other *ad hoc* meetings in which input from Hong Kong SAR is sought. In the reporting period, AFCD participated in four international enforcement meetings.

i) INTERPOL Wildlife Crime Working Group (WCWG) meeting

12. The INTERPOL WCWG convenes annually bringing together law enforcement agencies in member countries as well as civil societies and academia to share knowledge, expertise and lessons for devising strategies and enforcement initiatives to maximise the global efforts in addressing wildlife crime. AFCD has been an active participant in the WCWG.

13. The 33rd WCWG meeting held from 5 to 9 December 2022 in Singapore was the first in-person INTERPOL meeting since the COVID-19 pandemic. Representatives from enforcement agencies from different parts of the world were brought together in this meeting to share their experience and had focal discussions on specific areas of concerns, such as the trade in songbirds in Southeast Asia and the illegal global eel trade. The participation of academics also allowed for an in-depth discussion on the application of wildlife forensics in

trafficking investigations. At the meeting, in addition to the connections made with other enforcement agencies, connection was also made with the Shell Bank, a global marine turtle genetic database that aims at identifying the source of smuggled sea turtles to facilitate focused enforcement efforts at source. Following the discussion at the meeting, Hong Kong has been in talk with the Shell Bank for a donation plan of confiscated sea turtle specimens.

ii) Wildlife Inter-Regional Enforcement (WIRE) meeting 2022 and 2023

14. Organised by the UNODC, the Wildlife Inter-Regional Enforcement (WIRE) initiative seeks to bring together law enforcement and criminal justice officials from selected countries in Africa and Asia to intensify co-operation in the investigation of transnational criminal networks involved in the trafficking of wild fauna and flora. The main features of the meeting were the thematic discussions among country representatives from the same field of expertise: wildlife investigators, customs officials and prosecutors, as well as the dedicated bilateral discussions where delegates from different countries could discuss sensitive information related to wildlife cases, or establish contacts for future co-operation.

15. The 6th WIRE meeting was held from 30 November to 2 December 2022 in Bangkok, Thailand, and was attended by representatives from AFCD and the Customs and Excise Department (“C&ED”). In the thematic discussion session for wildlife investigators, approaches towards the investigation process were discussed, which included open-source investigation, forensics, financial investigation options and digital investigation. Hong Kong SAR also had two bilateral meeting sessions with Namibia and South Africa respectively.

16. The 7th WIRE meeting was held from 7 to 10 November 2023 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. AFCD representative and a representative from the Department of Justice attended the meeting alongside with the Director General of the Anti-Smuggling Bureau, General Administration of Customs of People’s Republic of China. Building upon the connections previously established, further bilateral discussions were also made with Namibia and South Africa.

iii) INTERPOL Regional Investigative and Analytical Case Meeting on Wildlife Smuggling in Shipping Containers from Africa to Asia

17. This *ad hoc* meeting was held from 29 to 31 August 2023 in Singapore by INTERPOL in response to their observation on the trend in wildlife smuggling in shipping containers from Africa to Asia. The aims of the meeting were to share information, map out the supply chains and identify priority targets for joint investigation against the trafficking network behind the

large-scale seizures of ivory and pangolin scales across Africa and Asia observed in the last decade using the sea route.

18. Invited participants to the meeting included enforcement agencies from the places identified in the trade routes in the list of seizure cases as well as relevant NGOs. An officer each from AFCD and C&ED attended the meeting. Detailed discussion on specific matters related to the cases was conducted both in the form of group discussion and break-out group sessions, and a list of follow-up actions was compiled.

Timber Identification Training

19. In order to equip enforcement officers with essential techniques and knowledge in timber identification, a timber identification training course was organised by China CITES Management Authority and the Research Institute of Wood Industry, Chinese Academy of Forestry in Beijing from 11 to 15 September 2023. A total of five officers (one professional and four technical grade) have participated in the training course.

20. This timber identification training course, held for the first time after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, allowed the attending officers to learn about the macroscopic and microscopic anatomical traits of timber species, practical skills in the preparation of wood samples, and the key features of some endangered timber species that are common in international trade. Also, this course also served as a platform for AFCD to share and review the recent efforts in regulating the trade of endangered timber through discussion with China CITES Management Authority and experts from the Research Institute of Wood Industry, Chinese Academy of Forestry. Detailed demonstration of some new technology that could assist in enforcement of endangered timber was also conducted during the course, e.g. iWood – an automated wood identification system.

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