



Our ref.: SG/SA/2025/DOALOS/01

Your ref.: /

Mr. Stephen Mathias  
Acting Under-Secretary-General for Legal  
Affairs and United Nations Legal Counsel  
United Nations  
New York, New York

Geneva, 8 January 2025

Dear Mr. Mathias,

I have the pleasure of writing to you in response to your letter dated 12 December 2024 in which you invited the Secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) to submit a contribution to the report of the Secretary-General on oceans and the law of the sea. We are pleased to outline below the activities under the CITES programme of work, which is based on the decisions of the 184 CITES Parties, related to the theme of “Capacity building and transfer of marine technology: New developments, approaches and challenges”, ahead of the twenty-fifth meeting of the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea.

Considering the importance and increasing number of marine species of wild fauna and flora included in the three Appendices of the Convention, the Secretariat has undertaken several activities over the last years aimed at strengthening Parties’ capacities to implement the Convention regarding marine species, including in areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ).

Our contribution to the report covers capacity building activities undertaken by the Secretariat since the 19<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (CoP19, Panama City, Panama, 14-25 November 2022).

The CITES Secretariat and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) jointly organized a series of workshops on legal aspects of CITES and fisheries, which included capacity-building on trade from ABNJ. Following two subregional workshops for Pacific Island countries and English-speaking Caribbean countries, held in 2021 and 2022 respectively, a third workshop for Latin American and Spanish-speaking Caribbean countries was hosted by the CITES Management Authority of Ecuador in Manta,

Secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)

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Ecuador, from 8 to 11 May 2023. The workshop aimed at raising awareness and strengthening the understanding of CITES requirements and their implementation in the fisheries sector; introducing and training participants on the use of the [FAO-CITES Legal Study and Guide](#); training participants on the use of the “Rapid Guide for the Making of Legal Acquisition Findings”; and identifying countries’ needs and interests for a better implementation of CITES in the fisheries sector.

In April 2024, the Secretariat organized a technical workshop on *Non-detriment findings (NDFs) for specimens of Appendix-II species taken from areas beyond national jurisdiction*. NDFs are scientific-based sustainability assessments to ensure the export of specimens of a particular species will not impact negatively on the survival of that species in the wild. The workshop considered how NDFs might best be achieved for the introduction from the sea (IFS) of specimens of CITES Appendix-II listed species that are commercially exploited and are taken by multiple Parties in ABNJ. The workshop benefited from a presentation by DOALOS on the Fish Stock Agreement and the Agreement on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement) and their links to CITES, as well as presentations and participation by the Secretariats of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) and the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT).

Since Cop19, the Secretariat has supported various Parties in their implementation of the Convention with regards to IFS and species taken in ABNJ (Decisions 19.140 & 19.141), including newly listed species. Such support ranges from technical support on the legal regime of introduction from the sea and CITES certificates to issue in such cases; the making of NDFs and Legal Acquisition Findings (LAFs); the development of guidance; awareness-raising; and questions related to transit and transshipment. As reported in [document SC78 Doc. 49](#), such technical support and guidance relating to IFS have been provided to Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Japan, Mauritius, Oman, Peru, and South Africa.

The CITES Secretariat has been also following closely the developments regarding the adoption and ratification of the BBNJ Agreement. The Secretariat has participated and presented potential synergies between the BBNJ Agreement and CITES in four Regional Workshops in 2024 on promoting a better understanding of the BBNJ Agreement organized by the United Nations Office of Legal Affairs, Division for Oceans Affairs and the Law of the Sea for: North East and South-East Asia; small island developing States in the Caribbean region; Latin America; and States of the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts of Africa.

Regarding **queen conch** (*Strombus gigas*), the CITES Secretariat, in collaboration with the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI), developed simplified NDF guidelines for queen conch, which was presented in [document AC33 Doc. 43](#). The development of the guidance followed a consultation process that involved multiple range States and stakeholders. The CITES Secretariat supported the pilot phase of a project involving the University of Rhode Island and GCFI to assess genetic variation of queen conch across the Caribbean with the aim of identifying illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing of queen conch. Queen conch range States also participated in a workshop to improve regional capacity building towards queen conch fisheries management and sustainability held online on 28 and 29 October 2024. The workshop focused on improving landings statistics, queen conch conversion factors and an introduction to the simplified NDF guidance for queen conch.

Regarding marine **ornamental fishes**, the CITES Secretariat organized a technical workshop on marine ornamental fishes in May 2024 in Brisbane, Australia. The workshop considered the conservation priorities and management needs related to the trade in non-CITES listed marine ornamental fishes worldwide, with a particular focus on data from importing and exporting countries. The results of the workshop are reported to the Animals Committee in [document AC33 Doc. 44, Rev. 2](#).

The Secretariat considers that the above information demonstrates that important developments have occurred around capacity building on ocean issues, including through inter-agency cooperation, targeting developing countries in particular, including the least developed countries, and small island developing States.

Capacity building goals of CITES are reflected in the CITES Strategic Vision: 2021-2030, in particular through Objectives 3.2. *“Parties and the Secretariat develop, adopt and implement adequate capacity-building programmes”* and 3.3. *“Sufficient resources are available at the national and international levels to support necessary capacity-building programmes and ensure compliance with and full implementation and enforcement of the Convention”*.

Despite these activities and efforts and the progress achieved, including with support from the Secretariat, as outlined above, gaps and challenges remain at country level, especially regarding the knowledge and data which is needed for sustainable, legal and traceable international trade, in accordance with the CITES provisions. These challenges are even more important in ABNJ, where data and information are scarcer and unequally distributed.

With an increasing number of marine species included in CITES Appendices, Parties must produce NDFs and LAFs for a wider range of species, and report trade-related data to the Secretariat, thus providing opportunities for the generation and use of additional data and information. The Secretariat strives to capitalize on this additional knowledge and support exchanges of experiences and best practices among CITES Parties at regional and sub-regional levels, aiming at strengthening national capacities, especially in the implementation of IFS.

Challenges also exist in some countries’ technical capacities, especially for marine species living in ABNJ, i.e., for making NDFs, which is a prerequisite for international trade of CITES-listed species. Technological developments provide new opportunities that can help countries strengthen their capacities, and in this respect, transfer of marine technology is promoted by the Secretariat, in line with Objective 3.8 of the CITES Strategic Vision: 2021-2030: *“Parties take full advantage of emerging technological developments to improve the effective implementation and enforcement of the Convention”*.

In these efforts, continued coordination and cooperation among UN entities with relevant mandates on ocean-related matters including, where appropriate, through UN-Oceans, is crucial, as it can provide multi-dimensional support to the countries in addressing their challenges.

The Secretariat will continue supporting CITES Parties in accordance with their priorities, including through capacity building activities, to fulfil their obligations on ocean related matters, in particular their obligations related to new listings of marine species, as well as on the prevention, combatting and eradication of illicit trafficking in protected species of wild fauna and flora, highlighted also in Resolution A/RES/79/144 on *Oceans and the law of the sea*, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 12 December 2024.

The CITES Secretariat appreciates the opportunity to provide input to the report of the Secretary-General under this specific theme on behalf of the CITES Parties and agrees to the posting of the present letter on the website of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea.

We look forward to reflecting the implementation of the activities of the CITES Parties’ work programme in the second report highlighting major developments in the field of ocean affairs and the law of the sea.

Any enquiries regarding the above can be directed to [stavros.antoniadis@un.org](mailto:stavros.antoniadis@un.org), with a copy to [info@cites.org](mailto:info@cites.org). The CITES Secretariat remains at your disposal as may be needed.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ivonne Higuero', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ivonne Higuero  
CITES Secretary-General

cc: Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea of the Office of Legal Affairs  
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