



Our ref.: SG/SA/2025/DOALOS/02

Your ref.: /

Ms. Elinor Hammarskjöld
Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs
and United Nations Legal Counsel
United Nations
New York, New York

Geneva, 05 May 2025

Dear Ms. Hammarskjöld,

I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your appointment as Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and United Nations Legal Counsel.

I have the pleasure of writing to you in response to your letter dated 19 March 2025, 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.

The CITES Secretariat has been closely following global developments on oceans and actively cooperated with the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (OLA/DOALOS) and other relevant UN Entities, especially through UN-Oceans. Considering the importance and increasing number of marine species included in the Appendices of the Convention, we envisage a further enlarged scope of this inter-agency cooperation and synergies.

The Convention provides a critical legal framework to ensure that priority marine species that are traded internationally are protected against illegal or unsustainable trade practices. It therefore contributes to the objectives of conservation and sustainable use of the oceans and their resources, as reflected in Resolutions on Oceans and the law of the sea adopted by the UN General Assembly and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular SDG 14.

We are pleased to provide information on activities that have been implemented since September 2024 under the CITES programme of work. This is based on the Resolutions and decisions of the 185 CITES Parties and includes information on the work of the CITES Standing Committee, the CITES Secretariat and the International Consortium on Combatting Wildlife Crime (ICWC).

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

Postal address:
CITES Secretariat
Palais des Nations
Avenue de la Paix 8-14
1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

cites.org

The 78th meeting of the CITES Standing Committee (SC78; Geneva, February 2025) was a milestone for CITES work on ocean matters this year, as it considered a number of issues related to marine species. The Standing Committee agreed to submit for consideration by the twentieth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP20; Samarkand, November 2025) the following:

- A new decision to consider the preparation of a revision of [Resolution Conf. 14.6 \(Rev. CoP16\)](#) on *Introduction from the sea*, with the aim to provide clarifications where required, as well as to integrate, as appropriate, additional elements on the implementation of the Convention for trade in species taken from areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ), considering global and national developments.
- A new Resolution on *Trade, conservation and management of **anguillid eel species*** (*Anguilla* spp.) and associated draft decisions.
- New decisions on **sharks and rays** (Elasmobranchii spp.) on sharing non-detriment findings (NDFs) and conversion factors, liaising with Regional Fishery Bodies and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and addressing the mismatches in the CITES Trade Database on trade in sharks and rays.
- Proposed amendments to [Resolution Conf. 19.5](#) on *Conservation of and trade in marine turtles*, which were made with a particular focus on strengthening compliance and enforcement aspects relevant to **marine turtles**.
- New decisions on **stony corals** including draft amendments to [Resolution Conf 11.10 \(Rev. CoP15\)](#) on *Trade in stony corals*.
- Revised and new decisions on **seahorses** (*Hippocampus* spp.).

Additionally, at SC78, the Standing Committee noted the reports submitted by the CITES Secretariat and Mexico on totoabas (*Totoaba macdonaldi*) and agreed on a new draft decision for consideration by CoP20, aiming to conserve and protect **totoaba and vaquita** and address poaching and illegal trade affecting these species.

The Standing Committee also reviewed a list of recommendations and implementation issues derived from the *Technical workshop on Non-detriment findings (NDFs) for specimens of Appendix-II species taken from areas beyond national jurisdiction* that was organized by the CITES Secretariat in April 2024. These will be considered in the revision of Resolution Conf. 14.6 (Rev. CoP19), should this be decided by CoP20.

In addition to the issues considered by the CITES Standing Committee, the Secretariat has continued providing support to various Parties in their implementation of the Convention with regards to Introduction from the Sea (IFS) and species taken in ABNJ, including newly listed species, such as sharks and rays. This included **technical support** on the legal interpretation of introduction from the sea and CITES certificates to be issued in such cases; NDFs and Legal Acquisition Findings (LAFs) for marine species; development of general 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 was provided to a number of Member States, including Costa Rica, Ecuador, Japan, Mauritius, Oman, Peru, and South Africa.

A series of introductory webinars intended to familiarize Parties with the **CITES NDF guidance**, including a module on aquatic species, were held in August 2024 and February 2025. Participants from 50 Parties registered across the four webinars held in English, French and Spanish.

The CITES Secretariat has been following closely the developments regarding the adoption and ratification of the **BBNJ Agreement**. In 2024, the Secretariat participated and presented potential

synergies between the BBNJ Agreement and CITES in four Regional Workshops on promoting a better understanding of the BBNJ Agreement organized by OLA/DOALOS 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.

In the framework of the application of Article XIII in **Ecuador and Peru** related to trade in specimens of sharks and rays, the Secretariat undertook technical assessments and fact-finding missions to both countries from 24 September to 4 October 2024. The Secretariat's findings from these missions were reported to the Standing Committee in document [SC78 Doc. 33.6](#).

In line with the Standing Committee recommendations, the Secretariat is currently carrying out consultations with relevant Parties, to collect information on trade in **oceanic whitetip shark** (*Carcharhinus longimanus*) and report to the 79th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC79, Samarkand, November 2025).

The CITES Secretariat keeps the CITES webpage dedicated to Introduction from the Sea ([IFS webpage](#)) up to date. This webpage includes practical guidance on implementation of IFS provisions, as well as a living document on the most [frequently asked questions on IFS](#).

Regarding **queen conch** (*Strombus gigas*), range States 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.

With regards to **efforts to combat wildlife crime related to marine species**, several activities have taken place, notably on the totoaba (*Totoaba macdonaldi*) and vaquita (*Phocoena sinus*): In the framework of the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC), the CITES Secretariat, INTERPOL and UNODC worked jointly to support the organization of a closed working group for representatives from China, Mexico and the United States in the margins of the 8th Wildlife Inter-Regional Enforcement (WIRE) meeting in South Africa in November 2024. This meeting provided an opportunity to strengthen collaboration on matters related to totoaba specimen trafficking, which pose a threat to the vaquita, as well as to consider and agree on follow-up activities and joint actions. Further details on Secretariat's work related to totoaba specimens were reported to the SC78 in document [SC78 Doc.33.12.1](#).

The CITES Secretariat has also maintained its longstanding effective cooperation with **FAO** for a better implementation of CITES in the fisheries sector, regarding commercially exploited aquatic species listed in CITES Appendices. This cooperation includes the ongoing maintenance and update of **CITES-LEX**, serving as a repository of legal and policy instruments relevant to CITES implementation, as well as joint actions in support of common objectives. The CITES Secretariat is also working with FAO to update the *Database of measures on conservation and management of sharks* to ensure that relevant information on CITES-listed sharks and rays are easily accessible to the CITES Parties.

The CITES Secretariat will continue supporting Parties in accordance with their priorities, including through scientific and legal advice and capacity building activities, to fulfil their obligations on ocean related matters, especially related to newly listed species.

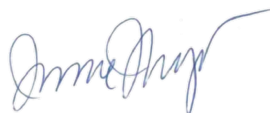
The CITES Secretariat will also pursue strengthened cooperation at regional and global levels with the aim to prevent, combat and eradicate illicit trafficking in protected species of wild fauna and flora, as highlighted in Resolution A/RES/79/144 on Oceans and the law of the sea, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 12 December 2024.

As demonstrated through examples of successful cooperation outlined above, the achievement of ambitious ocean-related targets in an efficient manner calls for enhanced synergies across relevant UN entities. In this respect, UN-Oceans can play an increasingly important role in strengthening coordination, coherence and effectiveness of activities among its members.

The CITES Secretariat appreciates the opportunity to provide inputs to the report of the Secretary-General on oceans and the law of the sea 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.

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

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ivonne Higuero', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke 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
Emails: doalos@un.org; ruth.valenzuela-hijar@un.org