



INTRODUCTION

The international trade of wild animals and plants is a multibillion-dollar business that involves hundreds of millions of wildlife specimens—including fish and other marine life. Wildlife trade in combination with habitat loss, habitat degradation and other ecological pressures can threaten populations with over-exploitation or extinction. In order for land and ocean resources to be available in the future, it is crucial that plants, animals and the products derived from them are traded in a sustainable and legal way. CITES—the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora—was created for this purpose.

CITES is an international treaty among 175 governments, including the United States, that entered into force in 1975. Countries, referred to as Parties, join voluntarily but then are legally bound to implement the Convention. What Parties agree to do under CITES does not replace domestic laws. Instead, it provides a framework for ensuring that domestic legislation is drafted in accordance with CITES. The Convention offers protection to more than 30,000 species around the globe and has been instrumental in preventing the extinction of numerous plants and animals. CITES is widely recognized as one of the best-enforced international conservation agreements.

CITES AND MARINE LIFE

Historically, CITES has focused more on terrestrial species, although for many years it has included a number of important marine species (whales and sea turtles, for instance). That focus is slowly shifting as scientists increasingly recognize the risks of unsustainable trade of marine and aquatic animals.

Over the years, the science has become too strong to ignore, and fishery management failures can no longer be left unaddressed. CITES Parties agreed recently to add to their list of protected species basking sharks, whale sharks, great white sharks, seahorses and humphead wrasses. At their next meeting, in March 2010, CITES Parties will be faced with a record number of proposals to provide protection to commercially exploited marine species, including such distinguished species as hammerhead sharks and Atlantic bluefin tuna.

The Atlantic bluefin is one of the most majestic fish in the sea. It races across the ocean, reaching speeds of up to 100 kilometers per hour (60 mph). It can dive up to 1,000 meters—3,000 feet—and migrate thousands of kilometers a year. But studies show that the species has declined by more than 80 percent since 1970. Overfishing has brought populations of these ocean giants precariously close to commercial extinction. Swift action is needed to conserve Atlantic bluefin tuna so they do not disappear from our seas forever.

A large number of shark species are in even worse shape than bluefin, with population declines of more than 90 percent. Approximately 73 million sharks are killed annually—including distinctive hammerheads, primarily to use their fins for the Asian delicacy shark fin soup. Vulnerable shark species such as the porbeagle and spiny dogfish are killed in large quantities for their meat. Sharks grow slowly, mature late and produce few young over long lifetimes, leaving them exceptionally vulnerable to overfishing and slow to recover from depletion. The loss of these key predators, which have been on the planet for 400 million years, risks the health of entire ocean ecosystems.

THE CITES APPENDIX SYSTEM

CITES includes three appendices, which afford different levels of protection.

- The Principality of Monaco has proposed listing Atlantic bluefin tuna in CITES **Appendix I**, which would prohibit international commercial trade in the species. Appendix I is the highest level of protection that CITES offers, and it includes the most endangered species of plants and animals, including the tiger, mountain gorilla and all sea turtles.
- Eight species of sharks (three hammerhead species, oceanic whitetips, spiny dogfish, porbeagles, sandbar sharks and dusky sharks) have been proposed for a CITES **Appendix II** listing. These proposals were submitted by the United States, Palau and the European Union. Appendix II includes species that are not threatened with extinction but may become threatened by international trade without strict monitoring and control. This listing also offers protection for “look-alike species” that are frequently confused in trade with the species of concern. International trade in species listed on Appendix II is possible, but export permits must

be issued for any transactions once it is confirmed that trade is legal and will not be detrimental to the species’ survival. Examples include the American alligator and bobcat, which despite their Appendix II listing are traded in significant commercial quantities.

- Of all the appendices, **Appendix III** includes the fewest restrictions. An Appendix III listing offers CITES Parties the opportunity to identify native wild animal and plant species in need of international trade controls. This appendix requires that an export permit be issued for wildlife products exported from the country that proposed the Appendix III listing. All other countries must issue a certificate of origin showing that it is not from the country that listed the species, but other scientific findings are not required. An example is the U.S. listing in Appendix III of the alligator snapping turtle and the listing by Canada of the walrus.

WHAT’S NEXT?

Species can be added or removed from Appendix listings only by a two-thirds majority vote at the Conference of the Parties (CoP), which occurs every two-and-a-half years. The next meeting, March 13-25, 2010, will be the 15th CoP and will be held in Doha, Qatar.

