

# CITES Podcast Series Transcripts

## Episode 1: CITES 101: Sharks' Big Hope

**Jo Benn:** (0:00) This is Joanna Benn of The Pew Charitable Trusts. I'm joined by Susan Lieberman, Pew's director of international environmental policy. And we're making the case for why the international community should protect seven species of sharks and manta rays at this March's Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna, also known as CITES. Sue, could you tell us what exactly is CITES, and why does it matter? (0:36)

**Susan Lieberman:** (0:37) CITES is an international treaty made up of 177 countries. Why it matters is international trade is one of the greatest threats to species, and in fact it's one of the threats that we can deal with. This treaty that is now 40 years old protects 30,000 species of animals and plants. Some of them, trade is banned because they are so endangered — such as elephants, tigers, and rhinos. And others, trade is regulated or managed at a level that the species can sustain. Why it matters is that it's a key to guarantee that these species survive, and are not traded, or not eaten or worn by people into extinction. Why it matters, it also has teeth — it's enforced. (1:23)

**JB:** (1:24) Well, what makes it stand out, from the pack of, of all the other tools for conservation that we have internationally? (1:29)

**SL:** (1:30) CITES has a role for some marine species that are listed in what's called Appendix One — that means trade is banned — such as almost all the whales and a few other species. But compared to the number of marine species in our, in our global ocean, there are very few protected by CITES. The basking shark, the whale shark, the great white shark are protected by CITES, they are, there is, trade is only allowed if it's sustainable. The humphead wrasse, all seahorses, all hard coral are also protected. But the sharks that are traded for the international fin trade really have no protection whatsoever, and that's why we're calling for, for CITES to protect these five species of sharks and two species of manta rays at this year's meeting in Bangkok. It's time to regulate this trade. (2:21).

**JB:** (2:22) Could you explain to us a little bit about which species exactly we are proposing to be regulated at this year's meeting? (2:29)

**SL:** (2:30) Sure, governments in fact are the ones who submitted their proposals. In fact, 37 governments — they didn't all submit all the proposals, but collectively — 37 governments submitted these proposals for the oceanic white tip shark, for the hammerhead sharks — people are probably really familiar with the hammerheads cause of their bizarre hammer-shaped head — and also the porbeagle shark. But

their proposal as well is for the two species of manta rays that are traded for their, for their gill plates for traditional Asian medicine. (3:01)

**JB:** (3:02) What are the gill plates, and how are they used? (3:05)

**SL:** (3:05) Well the gill plates of these sharks are used to filter out their food from the water — for the manta rays rather. These are not top predators; they are just filter feeders. They won't harm anyone. They are not top predators; they're just beautiful iconic species that swim in the ocean, filter out food. And these gill rakers, it is believed have some benefit in traditional medicine in East Asia. There is no evidence of the medicinal value, but if the trade is not regulated they won't be there for the future. Because they're being traded at enormously unsustainable levels. (3:41)

**JB:** (3:42) Why do you believe that CITES is the right tool to help conserve or protect these species? (3:46)

**SL:** (3:46) Well, for two reasons. First of all, it's the only tool. It is the only treaty out there that regulates international trade in wildlife species. Sharks and manta rays are wildlife just as much as rhinos and tigers on land are wildlife. CITES is the only tool available to governments to regulate this international trade. And the second reason is, all the governments that are members of CITES are required by the treaty to enforce it, to have laws that penalize people who break the rules. Which is why it's so important to finally have some rules to regulate this trade. The fin trade just doesn't have any international regulation whatsoever. It's time to do that. These listings won't solve all the problems. But they will for these species of sharks make a big difference. (4:37)

**JB:** (4:38) So it sounds like it's pretty high stakes — what is at stake here for the international community at this meeting? (4:44)

**SL:** (4:45) For sharks, for marine species, what's at stake at this meeting, is this treaty, which is now 40 years old, it was first negotiated and agreed in Washington D.C. in 1973, is does this treaty have what it takes? Do the member governments, the whole international community, have what it takes to do what is needed for sharks? And we believe, The Pew Charitable Trusts believe that they will do the right thing for sharks at this year's meeting. There are heavy stakes; there are opponents. You would think, well if the species are in trouble, and this is a treaty for conservation, who's going to oppose it? Unfortunately there's an East Asian block that's opposing it, that wants to import the shark fins, the manta ray gill plates, without any regulations. Even if it's short-term benefits, and long term it will wipe out these species. Hopefully there are more countries in the world that disagree with that view and will vote to protect the species in Bangkok in March. (5:45)

**JB:** (5:46) Well thank you very much a great and comprehensive summary of this year's meeting and what's at stake. We very much look forward to seeing what

happens on the ground, it's a two week meeting so there will be highs and lows I'm sure before we get to the final conclusion. But thank you Susan Lieberman, and to everyone listening (6:22)