



CITES

Last Updated: July 2022

What is CITES?

- The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is an **international agreement** to which States and regional economic integration organizations adhere voluntarily.
- **CITES was drafted as a result of a resolution adopted in 1963** at a meeting of members of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
 - The IUCN is a membership Union uniquely composed of both government and civil society organisations.
 - It provides public, private and non-governmental organisations with the knowledge and tools that enable human progress, economic development and nature conservation to take place together.
- **CITES entered into force in July 1975.** Currently there are 184 Parties (include countries or regional economic integration organizations).
- **Aim:** Ensure that **international trade** in specimens of wild animals and plants does **not threaten their survival.**
- **The CITES Secretariat** is administered by UNEP (The United Nations Environment Programme) and is **located at Geneva, Switzerland.**
 - It plays a coordinating, advisory and servicing role in the **working of the Convention** (CITES).
- The Conference of the Parties to CITES, is the **supreme decision-making body** of the Convention and comprises all its Parties.
- **The last CoP (17th)** was held at Johannesburg (South Africa), in 2016. India hosted CoP 3rd in 1981.
- Although CITES is **legally binding on the Parties**, it does not take **the place of national laws.**
 - Rather, **it provides a framework to be respected by each Party**, which has **to adopt its own domestic legislation** to ensure that CITES is implemented at the national level.
- World Wildlife Day has been **celebrated every year** on the **3rd of March since 2013.**
 - The date chosen coincides with the day of the **[Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora \(CITES\)](#)** which was signed in 1973.
 - The **UNGA (General Assembly) resolution also designated the CITES Secretariat** as the facilitator for the global observance of this special day for wildlife on the **[UN \(United Nations\)](#)** calendar.

What are the Functions of the Convention?

- The CITES works by subjecting international trade in specimens of selected species to certain controls.
- **All import, export, re-export and introduction** from the sea of **species** covered by the Convention has to be authorized **through a licensing system.**
- **Each Party** to the Convention must **designate** one or more **Management Authorities** in

charge of **administering that licensing system** and one or more **Scientific Authorities to advise** them on the effects of trade on the status of the species.

- **Appendices I, II and III to the Convention** are **lists of species** afforded different levels or types of **protection from over-exploitation**.

- **Appendix I**

- It lists species that are the **most endangered** among CITES-listed animals and plants.
- Examples include **gorillas, sea turtles, most lady slipper orchids, and giant pandas**. Currently **1082 species are listed**.
- They are threatened with extinction and CITES **prohibits international trade** in specimens of these species **except when the purpose of the import is not commercial**, for instance for scientific research.
- In these exceptional cases, trade may take place provided it is authorized by the granting of both an import permit and an export permit (or re-export certificate).

- **Appendix II**

- It lists **species** that are **not necessarily now threatened with extinction but that may become so unless trade is closely controlled**.
- **Most CITES species are listed in this Appendix**, including American ginseng, **paddlefish, lions, American alligators, mahogany** and **many corals**. Currently **37,420 species are listed**.
- It also includes so-called "**look-alike species**", i.e. species whose specimens in trade look like those of species listed for conservation reasons.
- **International trade** in specimens of Appendix-II species may be **authorized by the granting of an export permit or re-export certificate**.
- **No import permit is necessary** for these species under CITES (although a permit is needed in some countries that have taken stricter measures than CITES requires).
- Permits or certificates should only be granted if the relevant authorities are satisfied that certain conditions are met, above all that trade will not be detrimental to the survival of the species in the wild.

- **Appendix III**

- It is a **list of species included at the request of a Party that already regulates trade** in the species and that **needs the cooperation of other countries** to prevent unsustainable or illegal exploitation.
- Examples include **map turtles, walrus** and **Cape stag beetles**. Currently **211 species are listed**.
- **International trade** in specimens of species listed in this Appendix is **allowed only on presentation of the appropriate permits or certificates**.

- Species may be **added to or removed from Appendix I and II**, or moved between them, **only by the Conference of the Parties**.

- However, species may be **added to or removed from Appendix III at any time and by any Party unilaterally**.

What have the contributions of CITES been?

- The CITES **regulates international trade in close to 35,000 species** of plants and animals -
 - with international commercial trade generally **prohibited for 3%** of these species,
 - and with international commercial trade for the **remaining 97% regulated** to ensure the trade is legal, sustainable and traceable.
- CITES has been at the cutting edge of the debate on the sustainable use of biodiversity for the **past 42 years** and it has records of over **12,000,000 international trade transactions in its data-bases** for that period - trade which on many occasions has **benefitted local communities**,

such as with the vicuña in South America.

- The Appendix II of CITES permits the international trade of wool cloth, and other manufactured products (luxury and knitted handicrafts) from the **shearing of live vicuñas**.
- **Illegal trade** is estimated by it to be worth between **USD 5 billion and USD 20 billion per year-**
 - illegal activity that is driving many species **towards extinction**, and depriving local people of development choices and governments of potential revenue.
- **The International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC)**, a consortium of the **CITES Secretariat, INTERPOL** (International Criminal Police Organization), the **UN Office on Drugs and Crime**, the **World Bank** and the **World Customs Organization** has been established **to tackle illegal wildlife trade**.
 - It brings together the entire enforcement chain to assist national enforcement authorities and regional bodies to combat illicit trade in wildlife.

CITES and India: What is the Scenario?

- India is one of the recognized **mega-diverse countries** of the world, harbouring nearly **7-8% of the recorded species** of the world, and representing **4 of the 34** globally identified biodiversity **hotspots** (Himalaya, Indo-Burma, Western Ghats and Sri Lanka, Sundaland).
 - India is also a vast repository of **traditional knowledge associated with biological resources**. So far, over 91,200 species of animals and 45,500 species of plants have been documented in the ten biogeographic regions of the country.
 - **Inventories of floral and faunal diversities** are being progressively updated with several new discoveries through the conduct of continuous **surveys and exploration**.
- **India, being a CITES Party**, actively **prohibits the international trade of endangered wild species** and several measures are in place to control threats from invasive alien species (e.g. **certificates for exports, permits for imports**, etc.).
- India has proposed to **remove rosewood (Dalbergia sissoo) from Appendix II** of CITES. The species grows at a very fast rate and has the capacity to become naturalised outside its native range, it is invasive in other parts of the world as well.
 - The regulation of trade in the species is not necessary to avoid it becoming eligible for inclusion in Appendix I in the near future.
- India has also proposed to transfer **small clawed otters (Aonyx cinereus)**, **smooth coated otters (Lutrogale perspicillata)**, **Indian Star Tortoise (Geochelone elegans) from Appendix II to Appendix I**, thereby **giving more protection to the species**.
- The proposal also includes inclusion of **Gekko gecko** and **Wedgefish (Rhinidae)** in Appendix II of CITES.
 - The Gekko gecko is traded highly for Chinese traditional medicine.