

**CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES
OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA**

Thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties

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Strategic and administrative matters

CONSERVATION OF *Saiga tatarica*

This document has been submitted by Ireland on behalf of the Member States of the European Community.

1. Species background

The Saiga antelope (*Saiga tatarica*) was included in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) on 16 February 1995. The listing proposal had been adopted unanimously by the 9th Conference of the Parties (Fort Lauderdale, Florida, November, 1994).

Range states of the species are Kazakhstan, Mongolia, the Russian Federation, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. However the numbers and the range of the Saiga antelope have declined considerably in recent decades, and its unfavorable conservation status is of great concern in many parts of its current range. Saiga antelope populations numbered over one million as recently as the early 1990s, but have been reduced to only a small fraction of that number over the last 4 years. The total population estimate for 2000 was 178,000. In Kazakhstan alone, there has been a complete collapse of the Saiga antelope population from about 800,000 in 1996 to about 25,000 in 2003. The decline in Saiga numbers in the Republic of Kalmykia in the Russian Federation has been even more dramatic—from around 220,000 in 1996 to only around 12,000 today. Population reductions have come about primarily as a result of excessive hunting. IUCN has recently determined that the species is critically endangered.

Poaching and illegal trade in horns and other products, uncontrolled hunting, destruction of habitats, and construction of irrigation channels, roads and other obstacles preventing natural dispersion and migration have all contributed to the recent declines of populations of the Saiga antelope.

Economic hardship, impoverishment of local communities, and poor landuse planning are root causes that need to be addressed to preserve the Saiga antelope. Furthermore continuing impoverishment of the rural population at a large scale have led to extensive poaching, including Saiga antelopes for meat and horns. This unfavourable development has to some extent been facilitated by the breakdown of the governmental anti-poaching system.

To improve the protection of the Saiga antelopes and their habitats within each Range State there is an urgent need of regional cooperation for its conservation, restoration and sustainable use, including international trade. Both Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation took already positive steps such as voluntarily suspending exports of specimens of Saiga. Nevertheless, populations have continued to decline, in some areas precipitously.

Coordinated and concerted national and transboundary actions by the authorities of the Range States responsible for conserving and managing Saiga antelope populations, sub-regional, regional and international organizations such as the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), trade and business associations, local populations, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders, are all needed to enhance the conservation, recovery and sustainable use of the Saiga antelope and of the habitats and ecosystems that are important for the species' long-term survival. These actions are of conservation urgency if the species is to recover and avoid the otherwise inevitable inclusion in CITES Appendix I.

2. Multilateral Actions

Due to excessive over-harvesting, poaching and illegal trade, the CITES Parties included the Saiga antelope in the review of significant trade in specimens of Appendix-II species, which culminated in the recommendation at the 45th meeting of the Standing Committee (Paris, June 2001) that trade of Saiga antelopes including their parts and derivatives from Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation shall be suspended. Both countries had already voluntarily suspended legal exports.

To further address this problem, an international workshop on saiga conservation was convened in May 2002 in Elista, Kalmykia, Russian Federation. The workshop was convened at the initiative of and was hosted by the Government of the Republic of Kalmykia of the Russian Federation. The Committee of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Ministry of Natural Resources of the Russian Federation assisted in bringing the Workshop to fruition. The workshop was held under the auspices of both the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and CITES, and was sponsored financially by a number of organizations, including Conservation Force, IUCN, WWF International, the Large Herbivore Initiative of WWF, the Safari Club of Houston, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The workshop achieved excellent cooperation among the five range States. A Memorandum of Understanding among four of the range States was drafted, as was an Action Plan concerning conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of saiga antelope. Many activities are listed in this Action Plan of which some are relevant to CMS, some to CITES and some to domestic management. It is of utmost importance that the range states sign this Action Plan and implement it as a matter of urgency. A summary Resolution of the International Workshop on Saiga Conservation was also issued by Workshop participants.

At the twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP12, October 2002), the United States of America had distributed following information document:

"*Saiga tatarica*: summary of the CITES-sponsored workshop in Kalmykia in May 2002 and presentation of the draft conservation action plan" (CoP 12, Inf. 39).

CoP 12, Inf. 39 contained as annexes the three documents from the Elista Workshop (**Annex 1**, Resolution of the International Workshop on Saiga Conservation; **Annex 2**, Draft Action Plan concerning Conservation, Restoration, and Sustainable Use of the Saiga Antelope (*Saiga tatarica tatarica*); and **Annex 3**, Draft Memorandum of Understanding). The document was intended to inform CITES Parties of the favorable outcome of the May 2002 Workshop.

Since CoP12, the United States of America submitted a document to the 19th meeting of the Animals Committee (AC19 Doc. 8.6) in August 2003 titled "Conservation of *Saiga tatarica*". That document included the aforementioned draft Action Plan and Memorandum of Understanding. The CITES Animals Committee discussed the issue at its 19th meeting in great detail, in particular the precipitous continuing declines in the species' population, and recommended among others the following unanimously:

- The Saiga antelope is a species of great conservation urgency;
- The conservation crisis around the Saiga antelope should be brought as a matter of urgency to the attention of the CITES Standing Committee, for action and follow-up.

- Consumer countries, and issues of demand, markets, and illegal trade, should be addressed by the Secretariat and the Standing Committee.
- Range states should be encouraged to sign the Saiga antelope MOU.
- The AC Chair and Secretariat were asked to evaluate those recommendations in the Action Plan that concern CITES, and send them to the Standing Committee as a matter of priority for action as appropriate.

The CITES Secretariat provided an oral update at 50th CITES Standing Committee meeting (15-19 March 2004). However, the SC did not take any specific action.

3. Recommendation

The issue of the conservation of the Saiga antelope is a matter of urgent concern. The population decline is an ongoing process despite the fact the species has been listed in Appendix II of CITES since the beginning of 1995. Therefore the conservation cannot be limited to the CITES Animals Committee's significant trade review, which deals with the appropriate issuance of non-detriment findings. It is rather a serious matter of enforcement, regional conservation, and the need for urgent conservation interventions. Only urgent action will prevent the species from being included in CITES Appendix I, or from declining further towards extinction.

Therefore it is recommended that the Conference of the Parties shall adopt following Decision:

- 1) Directed to all range states of *Saiga tatarica*:
 - a) All range states are urged to immediately sign the Memorandum of Understanding drafted at the workshop in Elista, Kalmykia in May 2002 and implement the Saiga antelope Action Plan in order to restore the habitat and populations of the antelope, and enhance transboundary and international cooperation through *inter alia* a regional conservation and management strategy;
 - b) Furthermore range states are requested to report about their actions and the results which were reached to the Secretariat and the Standing Committee;
 - c) All range states are urged to provide and circulate incentives about the legal use of Saiga-antelope and its respective derivatives;
 - d) Range states are requested to solve their implementation problems in close cooperation with the Secretariat, other competent Management authorities and Non Governmental Organizations.
- 2) Directed to the CITES Secretariat to:
 - a) The Secretariat should address the CITES-relevant aspects of the Action Plan and of the Memorandum of Understanding;
 - b) regularly assist with assessment of the implementation of the Action Plan and Memorandum of Understanding;
 - c) provide as required assistance to the Saiga range states as a matter of priority;
 - d) intensify the cooperation with the Secretariat of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), on issues pertaining to the Saiga-antelope, including but not limited to the implementation of the Saiga antelope Action Plan and Memorandum of Understanding between the two Conventions; and
 - e) report back to the subsequent meetings of the CITES Standing Committee and the 14th Conference of the Parties.
- 3) Requesting the Standing Committee to discuss the issue and recommend appropriate action, at its meetings between CoP13 and CoP14;

- 4) Requesting that importing parties with high volumes of Traditional Medicine trade provide in their biennial reports special information on steps they are taking to control illegal trade in parts and products of the saiga;
- 5) Urging that donor Parties, aid agencies, and non-governmental organizations assist the range states in any way possible with the conservation of this species, including the provision of:
 - a) funding;
 - b) enforcement and anti-poaching assistance;
 - c) training and capacity building;
 - d) equipment, particularly for anti-poaching activities;
 - e) assistance with education and public awareness;
 - f) assistance with population monitoring; and
 - g) gathering and exchange of scientific, technical, and legal information and expertise.