

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



Sixty-fifth meeting of the Standing Committee  
Geneva (Switzerland), 7-11 July 2014

Interpretation and implementation of the Convention

Species trade and conservation

SNAKE TRADE AND CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat and the Animals Committee.
2. At its 16th meeting (CoP16, Bangkok, 2013) the Conference of the Parties adopted a number of decisions on *Snake trade and conservation management (Serpentes spp.)*, as follows:

***Directed to the Secretariat***

16.102 *The CITES Secretariat shall, where appropriate in consultation with the Standing Committee:*

- a) *subject to external funding, hire independent consultants in liaison with local scientists, and local research and academic institutions to:*
  - i) *undertake a study of production systems for Asian snakes listed in CITES Appendix II and the use of source codes; and develop guidance to assist Parties in monitoring and controlling captive-breeding operations and other production systems, including information to assess their biological feasibility and, where possible, economic viability (i.e. whether it is financially viable for commercial facilities to produce and export specimens as permitted by national authorities);*
  - ii) *compile information and develop guidance that can assist Parties in the making of non-detriment findings, management systems for wild populations and the establishment of export quotas for Appendix-II snake species in trade, by undertaking relevant research, consulting with relevant experts, examining suitable examples and case-studies, and building on the results of the International Expert Workshop on CITES Non-Detriment Findings (Cancún, 2008) and recommendations on the making of non-detriment findings from the Conference of the Parties;*
  - iii) *undertake a study of one or more high-value snake species in the pet trade (e.g. unique colour or morphological forms, or range-restricted endemics) to determine the impacts on wild populations of legal and illegal harvest for international trade, and to provide information required for making non-detriment findings for trade in these species; and propose actions to enforce the Convention as it relates to trade in these species; and*
  - iv) *undertake a study on methodologies to differentiate between wild and captive-bred CITES-listed snakes in trade, including parts and derivatives, ensuring that the work is carried out in line with recommendations of the Standing Committee concerning source;*
- b) *issue a Notification to the Parties encouraging Parties to engage with interested institutions to investigate the possibility of forensic identification of specimens of CITES-listed snakes in trade, and requesting Parties to inform the Secretariat about the results of such engagement;*

- c) *inform Parties of the results of the International Trade Centre (ITC) study on trade in python snakes in Asia, the UNCTAD Biotrade Initiative's Working Group on reptile skin sourcing, when these become available, and other relevant studies and information;*
- d) *present the outcomes of the activities mentioned in paragraphs a) and b) above, together with its recommendations, to the Animals Committee for review at its 27th or, as appropriate, 28th meeting, and make the final results available on the CITES website following review and approval by the Standing Committee pursuant to Decision 16.105;*
- e) *issue a Notification to the Parties requesting Asian Parties to report on their implementation of Decision 16.106 to the Secretariat, and submit a compilation of this information and its recommendations for consideration by the Standing Committee at its 65th meeting; and*
- f) *subject to external funding, conduct one or more interdisciplinary workshops for CITES and other relevant authorities and stakeholders of range States of Asian snake species in international trade on:*
  - i) *the use of guidance for monitoring and controlling captive-breeding operations and other production systems, as agreed by the Standing Committee pursuant to Decision 16.105;*
  - ii) *the use of guidance for making non-detriment findings and establishing export quotas for Appendix-II snake species in trade; and*
- g) *report on the results of these activities to the Standing Committee before the 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP17).*

**Directed to the Animals Committee**

16.103 *The Animals Committee shall:*

- a) *review the results of the activities indicated in Decision 16.102, paragraphs a) to c), as well as the results of the ITC study and other relevant studies on trade in python snakes in Asia and UNCTAD Biotrade Initiative's Working Group on reptile skin sourcing, when available; and, based on these studies and reports, develop guidance and recommendations for consideration by the Standing Committee;*
- b) *examine the study undertaken by the UNCTAD Biotrade initiative's Working Group on reptile skin sourcing mentioned in Decision 16.102, paragraph c), and any other relevant available information concerning:*
  - i) *existing marking and tracing systems and, where relevant, accompanying certification schemes of all kinds (and not necessarily limited to those currently in use for trade in wild species), which could provide best practices that might be applicable to snakes;*
  - ii) *a traceability system to confirm the legal origin of snake skins; and*
  - iii) *the economic feasibility of current technologies to implement such a traceability and marking system;*
- c) *advise the Standing Committee on the feasibility of implementing such a traceability system for snakes; and*
- d) *report on the status of this work at the 65th and 66th meetings of the Standing Committee.*

16.104 *The Animals Committee shall, at its 27th meeting, consider the final IUCN red list assessments for Asian snake species and, if available, incorporate new information and data and make appropriate recommendations, including recommendations to the Standing Committee.*

**Directed to the Standing Committee**

16.105 The Standing Committee shall:

- a) *consider the reports and recommendations from the Animals Committee and the Secretariat provided in accordance with Decisions 16.102 and 16.103 and, as appropriate, the results of the ITC study on trade in python snakes in Asia, the UNCTAD Biotrade Initiative's Working Group on reptile skin sourcing, and any other relevant available information;*
- b) *examine the study undertaken by the UNCTAD Biotrade Initiative's Working Group on reptile skin sourcing, and any other relevant available information concerning:*
  - i) *the socio-economic implications of such a traceability system; and*
  - ii) *the potential costs of the system at all levels along the supply chain, from producers to consumers;*
- c) *make recommendations to the Parties, the Animals Committee and the Secretariat as appropriate; and*
- d) *report on the implementation of Decisions 16.102, 16.104 and 16.105 at CoP17, with recommendations for consideration by the Parties, if deemed necessary.*

**Directed to Parties**

16.106 *Parties should eliminate the important illegal and unreported trade in specimens, whether live or parts and derivatives, of CITES-listed snake species by:*

- a) *ensuring that CITES permits and certificates are properly issued for trade in these specimens;*
- b) *including information on trade in these specimens in their CITES annual reports;*
- c) *ensuring that their annual reports are following the most recent version of the Guidelines for the preparation and submission of CITES annual reports, in compliance with Resolution Conf. 11.17 (Rev. CoP16);*
- d) *examining their enforcement efforts regarding trade in these specimens to ensure that adequate steps are taken to deter and detect illegal and unreported trade;*
- e) *undertaking education and outreach activities directed towards snake farms, buyers and sellers of live snakes, parts and derivatives, product manufacturers, shippers, brokers and staff from government agencies involved in controlling and monitoring this trade to ensure that snake specimens are traded in compliance with national laws and CITES provisions; and*
- f) *in the case of Parties in Asia, reporting on their efforts in all of these areas to the Secretariat in time for its reporting for the 65th meeting of the Standing Committee, in compliance with Decision 16.102, paragraph e).*

16.107 *In order to support the sustainable use of Asian snakes, Parties are as necessary invited to:*

- a) *in the case of range States with shared CITES-listed species in trade, develop comparable, or as far as possible standardized non-detriment finding methodologies, including the establishment of quota setting systems; and*
- b) *establish voluntary conservative annual catch and export quotas for CITES-listed snake species in trade, and to communicate the export quotas to the Secretariat.*

**Directed to ICCWC and ASEAN-WEN**

16.108 *The International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICCWC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN) are encouraged to take note of the concerns about the illegal and unreported trade in snakes and their parts and derivatives, and to take these into account when developing work programmes and, if funding is available, undertaking relevant activities.*

3. At its 64th meeting (SC64, Bangkok, 2013), the Standing Committee agreed that its Working Group on Snake Trade and Conservation Management would be continued, with the existing membership<sup>1</sup> and Switzerland as the Chair, in order to initiate the implementation of the CoP16 Decisions related to this subject in Decisions 16.102 to 16.108.

Decision 16.105

4. The tasks assigned to the Standing Committee in Decision 16.105 relate to: (i) the revision of reports and recommendations from the Animals Committee and the Secretariat; (ii) reptile sourcing and traceability systems; (iii) the making of recommendations as appropriate; and (iv) reporting at the 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP17). They are briefly commented upon below.

*Decision 16.105, paragraph a) (review of reports and recommendations)*

5. Concerning the four studies mentioned in Decision 16.102, paragraph a), the Secretariat has secured external funding from Switzerland and the European Union to undertake the research activities. The Secretariat is particularly grateful for this support. At the time of writing (May 2014), a Small-Scale Funding Agreement with independent consultants was being finalized, and research expected to be initiated very soon.
6. The Secretariat has issued a Notification to the Parties No. 2014/024 of 2 June 2014 concerning the studies and requests mentioned in Decision 16.102, paragraphs b) and c), with relevant information to be reviewed by the Animals Committee at its 28th meeting (AC28, 2015).
7. Some funding has also been secured for conducting the capacity-building activities specified in Decision 16.102, paragraph f), which can be undertaken when guidance on the monitoring of snake production systems and the making of non-detriment findings for trade in snakes are finalized and agreed.
8. The Animals Committee discussed the implementation of Decisions 16.102 and 16.103 at its 27th meeting (AC27, Veracruz, 2014). Regarding Decision 16.102, paragraph c), the Secretariat explained that it was not yet in a position to provide the outcomes of the activities referred to in Decisions 16.102, paragraphs a) and b), with its recommendations, to the Animals Committee for review. It believed, however, that it would be able to provide the Animals Committee with a set of comprehensive and well-researched studies by AC28 (see document AC27 Doc. 19.1).
9. Regarding Decision 16.103, paragraph a), the Animals Committee agreed at AC27 that its working group on snake trade and conservation should work intersessionally to review the studies and outputs mentioned in Decision 16.102, paragraphs a) to d), as they become available, and make appropriate recommendations for consideration by the Animals Committee at AC28, particularly with respect to:
  - Production systems for Asian snakes listed in CITES Appendix II (use of source codes; guidance for monitoring and controlling production systems);
  - Guidance for the making of non-detriment findings for Appendix-II snake species in trade;
  - Methodologies to differentiate between wild and captive-bred CITES-listed snakes in trade;

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<sup>1</sup> *[The regional representatives of Asia (the Islamic Republic of Iran) and Europe (the United Kingdom) at the time the working group was formed; the regional representatives of Asia (Japan), Central and South America and the Caribbean (Colombia), Europe (Ukraine) and North America (the United States), and China, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Switzerland, the European Union, IUCN, Animal Welfare Institute, Conservation International, Eurogroup for Animals, Humane Society International, International Alligator/Crocodile Trade Study, Pro Wildlife, SSN and TRAFFIC]*

- High-value snake species in the pet trade; and
  - Forensic identification of specimens of CITES-listed snakes in trade.
10. Regarding Decision 16.103, paragraphs b) and c), the Animals Committee made recommendations to the Standing Committee that are discussed below.
  11. The International Trade Centre (ITC) study on trade in python snakes in Asia (Kasterine, A., Arbeid, R., Caillabet, O. and Natusch, D. 2012. *The Trade in South-East Asian Python Skins*) can be found at <http://www.intracen.org/The-Trade-in-South-East-Asian-Python-Skin/>. The study emanating from United Nations Conference on Trade and Development's (UNCTAD) Biotrade Initiative Working Group on reptile skin sourcing (Ashley, D. 2013. *Traceability Systems for a Sustainable International Trade in South-East Asian Python Skins*) can be downloaded from the UNCTAD Biotrade webpage ([www.biotrade.org/Additional\\_Resources\\_VC.html](http://www.biotrade.org/Additional_Resources_VC.html)). Other relevant information that the Standing Committee may wish to examine in connection with reptile sourcing and traceability systems can be found in document AC27 Doc. 19.4.

*Decision 16.105, paragraph b) (reptile sourcing and traceability systems)*

12. UNCTAD's study on reptile skin sourcing, which focuses on python skins from South-East Asia, is referred to in paragraph 11 above.
13. At this stage, the Secretariat has no relevant information to share with the Standing Committee on the socio-economic implications of a traceability system for snake skins, or the potential costs of such a system along the supply chain. These aspects may become better understood in the course of further discussions on, and the development of, a traceability system.
14. At AC27, the Animals Committee initiated the implementation of Decision 16.103, paragraphs b) and c) [see documents AC27 Doc. 19.2 and AC27 WG4 Doc. 1 (Rev. 1)], and agreed to report the following recommendations to the Standing Committee on the feasibility, development and implementation of a traceability system for snakes:
  - a) Concerning stockpiles, the Animals Committee made the following recommendations in view of the problems related to large stockpiles of python skins in South-East Asian countries:
    - The Standing Committee may consider recommending that such stockpiles be inventoried and tagged by the countries concerned, and that this information be provided to the Secretariat as a baseline before any traceability system is implemented;
    - The inventory should contain information on the species concerned, the stage of processing of the skins (crust, dried, etc.), and the corresponding quantities and tag numbers; and
    - The Standing Committee may also wish to consider how such stockpiles may enter into international trade; and
  - b) Concerning traceability, the Animals Committee suggested that the Standing Committee consider implementing a traceability system for snake skins comprising the following characteristics:
    - For the formulation of relevant provisions, the Standing Committee may draw upon Resolution Conf.11.12 (Rev. CoP15) on *Universal tagging system for the identification of crocodylian skins* as a template;
    - In particular, the traceability systems should commence as close to the point of harvest of the animal or production of the skin as possible. It should be made mandatory up to and including finished skins. Any use of the tagging information further on in the trade chain is optional; and
    - The identification of skins should make use of devices that are tamper proof, affordable, uniquely serially numbered and contain the following minimum information: species, country of origin (where relevant regional code), year of harvest or production, unique serial number, source code. In addition, Parties are encouraged to add other information they deem necessary.

*Decision 16.105, paragraphs c) and d) (recommendations as appropriate; reporting to CoP17)*

15. The Standing Committee may wish to consider making recommendations, as appropriate, at the present meeting on its reporting on the implementation of Decisions 16.102, 16.104 and 16.105 at CoP17.

#### Decision 16.104

16. At AC27, the Animals Committee considered the IUCN Red List assessments of Asian snake species and new information and data, as directed in Decision 16.104 (see documents AC27 Doc. 19.3, AC27. Inf.3 and AC27 Inf. 7).
17. The Animals Committee agreed to consider at AC28 the list of species provided by IUCN in document AC27 Inf. 7 that, based on IUCN's analysis, may require consideration by the Standing Committee for potential inclusion in the CITES Appendices, together with additional information that may become available from studies underway on snake species in the pet trade (by ITC) and the analysis of snake species that are traded in high volumes. This will allow the Animals Committee to make recommendations to the Standing Committee based on a more complete set of sources.

#### Decision 16.106

18. The Secretariat issued a Notification to the Parties (No. 2014/024) requesting Asian Parties to report on their implementation of Decision 16.106 to the Secretariat (see paragraph 6 above). For logistical reasons, however, this Notification was not issued in time for submitting and compiling information that the Standing Committee could consider at its 65th meeting. The Secretariat therefore proposes that this matter be discussed at the 66th meeting of the Standing Committee, in 2015.

#### Decision 16.107

19. Decision 16.107 is directed to the Parties that trade in Asian snakes. In line with its mandate agreed at SC64, the Standing Committee Working Group on Snake Trade and Conservation Management may consider whether implementation of this Decision has been initiated. The Secretariat notes that the guidelines on the making of non-detriment findings, and the associated capacity-building activities that are envisaged under Decision 16.102 will greatly assist Parties in implementing this Decision.

#### Decision 16.108

20. Decision 16.108 is directed to the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICCWC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN). In accordance with its mandate, the Standing Committee Working Group on Snake Trade and Conservation Management could evaluate whether implementation of this Decision has been initiated and how it is progressing, for example through its Asian members or the Representatives of the Asian region of the Standing Committee.
21. Upon recommendation from the Secretariat on behalf of ICCWC,<sup>2</sup> snakes and their parts and derivatives were included as targets for Operation COBRA II<sup>3</sup>, a month-long global operation to combat illegal wildlife trade, which ended on 27 January 2014. The operation significantly supported the implementation of Decision 16.108, and resulted in several seizures of snake specimens. This included the seizure of 1,254 snakes (792 Indochinese rat snakes and 462 cobras) hidden in plastic baskets and transported by car. The three suspects who were arrested during this incident alleged that they were hired to transport the specimens from Phichit province in Thailand to the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.cites.org/eng/prog/ICCWC.php>

<sup>3</sup> [http://cites.org/eng/news/sundry/2014/20140210\\_operation\\_cobra\\_ii.php](http://cites.org/eng/news/sundry/2014/20140210_operation_cobra_ii.php)

## Recommendations

22. The Standing Committee is invited to note this document, and the progress in the implementation of Decisions 16.102 and 16.103, as reported by the Secretariat and the Animals Committee.
23. In accordance with Decision 16.05, the Standing Committee is invited to:
  - a) consider the present interim reports and recommendations from the Animals Committee and the Secretariat provided in accordance with Decisions 16.102 and 16.103 and, as appropriate, the results of the ITC study on trade in python skins in Asia, the UNCTAD Biotrade Initiative Working Group on reptile skin sourcing, and any other relevant available information;
  - b) examine the study undertaken by the UNCTAD Biotrade Initiative Working Group on reptile skin sourcing, and any other relevant available information concerning:
    - i) the socio-economic implications of such a traceability system; and
    - ii) the potential costs of the system at all levels along the supply chain, from producers to consumers;
  - c) determine whether, at this stage, any recommendations should be made to the Parties (and particularly those in the Asian region), the Animals Committee (in support of, or directing, the intersessional work that it is undertaking, as reported in paragraphs 9 and 17), and the Secretariat;
  - d) consider timeframes for, and the organizing of, its reporting on the implementation on Decisions 16.102, 16.104 and 16.105 at CoP17; and
  - e) agree to consider the implementation of Decision 16.102, paragraph e) and Decision 16.106 at its 66th meeting in 2015.