

CONSIDERATION OF PROPOSALS FOR AMENDMENT OF APPENDICES I AND II

A. Proposal

Inclusion of *Platysternon megacephalum* in Appendix II in accordance with Article II 2(a) of the Convention, and satisfying Resolution Conf. 9.24, Annex 2a, Criteria A and B).

B. Proponent

People's Republic of China and United States of America, in accordance with the consensus recommendation of the CITES-sponsored Technical Workshop on Conservation of and Trade in Freshwater Turtles and Tortoises in Asia, held in Kunming, China in March 2002.

C. Supporting statement1. Taxonomy

1.1 Class: Reptilia

1.2 Order: Testudines

1.3 Family: Platysternidae

1.4 Genus and species: *Platysternon megacephalum* Gray, 1831

Subspecies: 5 subspecies have been described: *P. m. megacephalum* Gray, 1831, *P. m. peguense* Gray, 1870, *P. m. shiui* Ernst and McCord, 1987, *P. m. vogeli* Wermuth, 1969, *P. m. tristernalis* Schleich and Gruber, 1984

1.5 Scientific synonyms: *Platysternum megacephalum* (Gray, 1831) – a widely used but incorrect emendation.

1.6 Common names:

English:	Big-headed Turtle
French:	
Spanish:	
Burmese:	Leik kyet-tu-yway
German:	Großkopfschildkröte
Thai:	Tao pulu

1.7 Code numbers:

2. Biological parameters

2.1 Distribution

Platysternon megacephalum is a medium-sized turtle (up to 18 cm carapace) with a head so large that it cannot be withdrawn into the shell for protection (Ernst and Barbour, 1989). It lays only 1-2 eggs (Ernst and Barbour, 1989) or 2-4 eggs (see Weissinger, 1987; PPvD, *in litt.* to USFWS 2002) per clutch, presumably only a single clutch per female per year (see Weissinger, 1987; PPvD, *in litt.* to USFWS 2002).

Platysternon megacephalum is found in China, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China (Hong Kong SAR), Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam. China: In China, it is widespread in central and southern China, including Yunnan, Guizhou, Anhui, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Jiangxi, Hunan,

Fujian, Guangdong, Hainan, and Guangxi Provinces (Lau and Shi, 2000). Hong Kong SAR: In Hong Kong SAR, the species is fairly widespread in the central and eastern part of the New Territories and also occurs at Sunset Peak on Lantau Island (Lau et al., 2000). Lao PDR: The species likely occurs in appropriate stream habitats throughout Lao PDR, although probably in quite reduced populations (Stuart and Timmins, 2000). Myanmar: In Myanmar, this turtle is reported to occur in the hill streams of the Sittang and Salween River drainages (van Dijk, 1993 cited in Platt et al., 2000). Thailand: In Thailand, the species occurs in the mountains of northern, northwestern, and northeastern areas (van Dijk and Palasuwan, 2000). Viet Nam: The turtle occurs in northern and central Viet Nam (Hendrie, 2000).

2.2 Habitat availability

General: The Big-headed Turtle inhabits small streams in steep hill and mountain areas, at slopes of on average 45 degrees. These streams are characterized by exposed bedrock, areas of accumulated large boulders, small waterfalls and stream pools. The water is clear, ranging in temperature between 18 and 24 degrees Celsius in northern and northeastern Thailand and Hainan (Peter Paul van Dijk (PPvD) *in litt.* to United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) 2002, based on Doi Chiang Dao, Thailand, 1997; Phu Luang, Thailand, 1997 & 98; Hainan, 2001). China: In China, the species normally lives in unpolluted hill streams and the bordering riparian habitats; there are still many suitable streams left in China (Lau and Shi, 2000). Hong Kong SAR: In Hong Kong SAR, this turtle lives in unpolluted forest streams, and there are many suitable streams in Hong Kong SAR (Lau et al., 2000). Lao PDR: The species occurs in habitats similar to those where it is found in Viet Nam – mountainous streams and small rivers in forested areas. Myanmar: In Myanmar, the turtle is reported to occur in hill streams (van Dijk, 1993 cited in Platt et al., 2000). Thailand: In Thailand, *Platysternon* occurs above 800 m altitude only (PPvD, *in litt.* to USFWS, 2002). Streams inhabited by *Platysternon* may dry out for several weeks at the height of the dry season (monsoon climate area) and local park rangers assert that *Platysternon* migrate overland in search of streams still containing water (PPvD *in litt.* to USFWS 2002). Habitat availability in Thailand is considered “substantial,” and most areas of occurrence are in protected areas (van Dijk and Palasuwan, 2000). Viet Nam: In Viet Nam, the species occurs in mountainous streams and small rivers in forested areas (Hendrie, 2000).

2.3 Population status

General: According to Rhodin et al. (2002), the Big-headed Turtle is considered Endangered in Lao PDR and Viet Nam due to specific trade demand; either Vulnerable or Endangered in China, its main range State; Vulnerable in Thailand (OEPP, 1997); and the situation in Myanmar is Data Deficient. China: The China Red Data Book of Endangered Animals considers the species to be “Endangered” in China (Zhao, 1998). Hong Kong SAR: Data on population status in Hong Kong SAR are lacking, although the species is regularly recorded in some stream systems in central New Territories, perhaps indicating that fairly stable populations exist (Lau et al., 2000). Lao PDR: According to Stuart and Timmins (2000), the species probably continues to survive in appropriate habitats throughout Laos, although populations are probably quite reduced. Myanmar: The status of populations in Myanmar is unknown (van Dijk, 1993 cited in Platt et al., 2000). Theobald (1868), as early as 1868, considered the species rare in Pegu. Thailand: Population status in Thailand ranges from uncommon to locally fairly common (van Dijk and Palasuwan, 2000). Viet Nam: The population status of this species in Viet Nam is unknown (Hendrie, 2000).

2.4 Population trends

China: According to Lau and Shi (2000), the Big-headed Turtle was previously common in Chinese food markets but now only low numbers of individuals turn up in markets, indicating that wild populations have declined drastically. Hong Kong SAR: Data on population trends for the species in Hong Kong SAR are lacking (Lau et al., 2000). Lao PDR: Data on population trends for this turtle in Lao PDR are lacking, although Stuart and Timmins (2000) have suggested that surviving

populations of the species are probably quite reduced. Stuart and Timmins (2000) further state that “evidence that turtle populations have declined considerably in Laos comes from an extreme paucity of field records during those 6 years [1993-1999] by wildlife biologists.” Myanmar: Population trends for the species in Myanmar are unknown (van Dijk, 1993 cited in Platt et al., 2000), but all currently available evidence indicates that most turtle populations are severely depleted, and some species may be on the verge of extirpation (Platt et al., 2000). Thailand: Population trends in Thailand are unknown but populations are assumed to be stable in areas where the species is no longer exploited (van Dijk and Palasuwan, 2000). Viet Nam: Population trends for the species in Viet Nam are also unknown, but it is considered unlikely that natural populations can sustain recent levels of collection (Hendrie, 2000).

2.5 Geographic trends

Geographic trends for this species are poorly known. It is believed that Big-headed Turtle populations are declining throughout the species’ range, such that only populations in remote areas or well-protected nature preserves are reasonably intact.

2.6 Role of the species in its ecosystem

This species is probably carnivorous in nature (Ernst and Barbour, 1989), feeding on a variety of fishes and invertebrates including snails, shrimps and crabs (PPvD, *in litt.* to USFWS 2002)

2.7 Threats

China: The main threat in China is over-collecting for the food trade, although deforestation, hydroelectric development and liming of streams cause habitat degradation and destruction (Lau and Shi, 2000). Hong Kong SAR: In Hong Kong SAR, low-elevation streams outside of protected areas may be affected by development projects (Lau et al., 2000). Illegal trapping and collecting targeted at *Cuora trifasciata* may also take some Big-headed Turtles (Lau et al., 2000). Lao PDR: The discussion in Stuart and Timmins (2000) strongly indicates that harvest for local subsistence, domestic trade, and international trade is one of the principal threats to this species in Laos. Myanmar: In Myanmar, the species should be regarded as threatened by levels of harvest that are almost certainly unsustainable (Platt et al., 2000). Thailand: In Thailand, threats are collection for consumption in relation to Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), for pet trade, and *ex situ* captive breeding programs, and habitat degradation (van Dijk and Palasuwan, 2000). Viet Nam: The primary threats in Viet Nam are collection and habitat loss; it is considered unlikely that natural populations can sustain recent levels of collection (Hendrie, 2000).

3. Utilization and trade

3.1 National utilization

China: The Big-headed Turtle is recorded in food trade in China (Lau and Shi, 2000), and the food and pet trades in Hong Kong SAR (Lau et al., 2000). It has been recorded in the turtle markets of Guangzhou and Shenzhen (McCord, 1997; Artner and Hofer, 2001) and Shanghai (WCS and CITES China, 2000) in China. Hong Kong SAR: Trade in turtles and turtle parts is widespread in Hong Kong SAR, but the great majority of turtles in the food and pet trades are considered to originate from outside Hong Kong SAR (Lau et al., 2000). Nonetheless, illegal turtle traps have been found both inside and outside of protected areas in Hong Kong SAR, so some local harvest is taking place (Lau et al., 2000). Lao PDR: As of 1999, no data were available on volumes of domestic turtle trade in Lao PDR, as no monitoring studies had been conducted (Stuart and Timmins, 2000). The discussion in Stuart and Timmins (2000) strongly indicates that there is substantial harvest for local subsistence use and domestic trade in Laos. Myanmar: Market surveys have not been conducted in Myanmar, but large numbers of live turtles have been observed at trading establishments in Mandalay (A. Rabinowitz, *pers. comm.*, cited in Platt et al., 2000), as well as in Rakhine State and

Magwe Division (Platt et al., 2000). Nearly every village that Platt and his colleagues visited during fieldwork in 1999-2000 had at least one individual who purchased turtles regularly (Platt et al., 2000). Thailand: In Thailand, there is "modest" collection for the pet trade and attempts at captive breeding (van Dijk and Palasuwan, 2000). Viet Nam: In Viet Nam in past years it is likely that most Big-headed Turtles encountered were consumed locally, however most turtles collected at present are probably sold to traders (Hendrie, 2000).

3.2 Legal international trade

China: China has suspended exports of native species of Testudinata for commercial purposes (except *Chinemys reevesii* and *Trionyx sinensis*) according to the CITES Management Authority of China (*in litt.* to CITES Secretariat, 17 November 2001, cited in AC18 Doc. 7.1). China has been and remains a major importer of live turtles, both legal and illegal. Except for CITES-listed species which are likely to have been imported illegally, it is almost impossible to differentiate legal international trade from illegal trade in other species (Lau and Shi, 2000). Major turtle markets exist in Guangzhou, Nanning, Shanghai, and Shenzhen. In a year-long survey of several food markets and pet outlets in Guangzhou and Hong Kong SAR, Ades (2002) found many Big-headed Turtles in both food and pet markets. Hong Kong SAR: Hong Kong SAR is a major importer and re-exporter of live turtles for the food and pet trades (Lau et al., 2000). It has been estimated that over 9 million live chelonians were imported into Hong Kong SAR in 1998 alone (Lau et al., 2000); most of these animals were re-exported to China for food. A year-long survey conducted by TRAFFIC East Asia in 1998-1999 recorded 84 species of chelonians, both for food and pets, from 12 markets in Hong Kong SAR (Chan, *in press*, cited in Lau et al., 2000). The Big-headed Turtle was recorded as being used for both food and pets, and was consistently recorded in the food trade (Lau et al., 2000). Myanmar: There appears to be little legal international trade from Myanmar; most international trade is illegal (Platt et al., 2000). Thailand: There is no legal international trade in this species from Thailand, because the species is specifically protected from exploitation under the WARPA law (Wild Animals Reservation and Protection Act B. E. 2535) (van Dijk and Palasuwan, 2000). Viet Nam: International trade in certain turtle species is permitted under certain conditions, which includes licensing of exports (Hendrie, 2000). Vietnamese CITES Management Authority records indicate that 50 Big-headed Turtles were legally exported between 1994 and late 1999 (Table 3 in Hendrie, 2000).

3.3 Illegal trade

China: Many CITES-listed species have been observed in south China food markets; it is most likely that these were imported into China illegally, particularly Appendix-I species such as *Batagur baska* (Lau and Shi, 2000). Many non-CITES species in Chinese food markets have likely also been imported illegally, attesting to the documented illegal exports from other countries such as Myanmar and Viet Nam. Hong Kong SAR: Market surveys have documented CITES-listed species without the required possession license in markets (Chan, *in press*, cited in Lau et al., 2000). Myanmar: The majority of turtles collected in Myanmar are destined for illegal export markets (Platt et al., 2000). The existence of a large illegal turtle trade from Myanmar into China has been suspected for a long time (Jenkins, 1995 cited in Platt et al., 2000). Estimates of numbers traded into China are not available, but the large number of Myanmar endemics found in Chinese markets in recent years suggests that the trade is extensive (Kuchling, 1995 cited in Platt et al., 2000). Much of the trade enters southern China along the old Burma Road (Thorbjarnarson et al., 1999 cited in Platt et al., 2000); some live turtles destined for the pet trade are smuggled into Thailand through Tachilek, Myawadi and Mae Sot, and Three Pagoda Pass (P.P. van Dijk, *pers. comm.* cited in Platt et al., 2000). Thailand: The magnitude of illegal trade from Thailand is unknown, but the potential for collection to supply the TCM demand to the north is "undeniable" (van Dijk and Palasuwan, 2000). Lauprasert et al. (presentation CITES at CITES Technical Workshop on Conservation of and Trade in Freshwater Turtles and Tortoises in Asia, held in Kunming, China, March 2002) referred to a seizure including 6 Big-headed Turtles at Bangkok Airport, 17 April 1996. Viet Nam: In northern Viet Nam this species has been relatively common in seizures of illegal

wildlife shipments along ground transportation routes, particularly during the spring and early summer months (Hendrie, 2000).

3.4 Actual or potential trade impacts

China: According to Lau and Shi (2000), over-collecting of turtles for food markets has been the main cause of the decline of this species to endangered status in China. Lau and Shi (2000) further state that the continual harvest of large numbers of slow-growing chelonians with low reproductive rates from the wild is clearly unsustainable and must have a deleterious effect. Myanmar: In Myanmar, the species should be regarded as threatened by levels of harvest that are almost certainly unsustainable (Platt et al., 2000). Thailand: In Thailand, potential trade impacts are severe, given the limited size of individual populations and the difficulty in recolonizing depleted areas (van Dijk and Palasuwan, 2000). Viet Nam: Potential trade impacts in Viet Nam are considered so great that they could lead to depletion of wild populations and compromised viability of surviving populations (Hendrie, 2000).

3.5 Captive breeding for commercial purposes (outside country of origin)

Captive breeding for commercial sale is claimed to occur on Chinese turtle farms, but this requires verification (Shi and Parham, 2001; PPvD, *in litt.* to USFWS 2002. Captive breeding occurs on a extremely limited, barely successful scale in Thailand (van Dijk and Palasuwan, 2000)

4. Conservation and Management

4.1 Legal status

4.1.1 National

China: Several freshwater turtles and tortoises are listed in the People's Republic of China Wild Animals Protection Law are state major protected wildlife grade I, while others are grade II protected (Shi and Lau, 2000; van Dijk, 2002). However, the Big-headed Turtle is neither grade I or grade II. The Wild Animals Protection Law also covers important economic and scientific species, though the actual species are not listed. For terrestrial species, the State Forestry Administration is responsible for the administering and enforcing of this law, while the Fisheries Ministry is responsible for the aquatic species (van Dijk, 2002). The collecting of state major protected species is only allowed for scientific research, captive breeding, exhibition and other special reasons. Permission from the Forestry or Fisheries bureau in the central government is needed for the collecting of grade I protected species; permission from the Forestry or Fisheries Department in the provincial government is required for grade II protected species (van Dijk, 2002). The transport of state major protected species across county boundary needs the permission from the provincial Forestry or Fisheries Department. The import and export of these state major protected species and CITES-listed species need the permission from the Forestry or Fisheries bureau in the central government and a certificate issued by the Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora Import and Export Administrative Office (Shi and Lau, 2000 cited in van Dijk, 2002)). Regarding imports and exports of turtles, China has tightened its regulations considerably in recent years (van Dijk, 2002). The Notice of Strengthening the Live Reptile Import and Export Management (China CITES Authority No.[2000] 51) was issued by the State Endangered Species Import and Export Administration Office in June 2000 (van Dijk, 2002). This was augmented by Notice of Strengthening the Trade Management on Turtles and Tortoises, issued by the State Endangered Species Import and Export Administration Office on June, 17, 2001 (van Dijk, 2002). Under these Notifications, commercial imports of turtle species listed on Appendix II of CITES are only accepted from Parties that set an annual export quota, all commercial imports of all turtles from Indonesia, Cambodia and Thailand are suspended, all imports of turtles into China need to be accompanied by export permits

or certificates from the exporting country, turtle imports are restricted to a small number of designated airports, and local wildlife authorities are instructed to co-operate closely with customs authorities (van Dijk, 2002). In addition, China suspended the export of native species of Testudinata for commercial purposes (except *Chinemys reevesii* and *Trionyx sinensis*, thus including *Platysternon megacephalum*) on 6 June 2000 (CITES Management Authority of China, *in litt.* To CITES Secretariat, 17 November 2001, cited in AC18 Doc. 7.1).

Hong Kong SAR: All wild chelonians are legally protected in Hong Kong SAR by the Wild Animals Protection Ordinance which prevents the collection, removal, destruction, disturbance and possession of any wild turtle or possession of any hunting or trapping equipment. (Lau *et al.*, 2000 cited in van Dijk, 2002). The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, being the Management Authority of CITES in Hong Kong SAR, is also responsible for administering and enforcing the Animals and Plants (Protection of Endangered Species) Ordinance which gives effect to CITES. Import, export, trade and possession of listed species, whether native or exotic, is only allowed with permission from the AFCD. The maximum penalty for breaking this ordinance is HK\$ 5,000,000 (about US\$ 62,500) and two years imprisonment. (Lau *et al.*, 2000 cited in van Dijk, 2002). In addition, all animals including turtles are protected within the Country parks in accordance with the Country Parks Ordinance. (Lau *et al.*, 2000).

Lao PDR: Wildlife legislation is under review in Lao PDR (van Dijk, 2002); current legislation in force (Decree of the Council of Ministers No. 118/CCM on the Management and Protection of Aquatic Animals, Wildlife and on Hunting and Fishing, 1989) does not, in effect, protect freshwater turtles from exploitation (Stuart and Timmins, 2000; van Dijk, 2002)). Although 3 local names of turtles were listed in the Lao Wildlife Management Categories, no scientific names of turtles were listed in wildlife protection legislation (Stuart and Timmins, 2000). Lao PDR is not a CITES Party.

Myanmar: The Burma Wildlife Protection Act, 1936, was the main law extending protection to listed species (van Dijk, 2002). In 1991, the only listed species were mammals and birds, and no turtle species were included in this law (Gaski and Hemley, 1991 cited in van Dijk, 2002). The new "Protection of Wildlife, Wild Plants and Conservation Law," enacted in 1994, replaces the Burma Wildlife Protection Act of 1936 (Moe *et al.*, 2002). Myanmar law prohibits the commercial exploitation of natural resources, including tortoises and freshwater turtles, but allows collection for subsistence use (van Dijk, 2002; Moe, 2002). Thus, the commercial trade of tortoises and freshwater turtles is illegal (Platt *et al.*, 2000). Turtles are protected by fisheries and forestry laws, and all wildlife is protected in wildlife sanctuaries and national parks (Platt *et al.*, 2000). The Department of Fisheries does not issue permits for the harvest of turtles and Law 34 provides stiff penalties for those engaged in turtle trading (Platt *et al.*, 2000). Myanmar became a CITES Party in 1997.

Thailand: In Thailand, the Big-headed Turtle is specifically protected from exploitation under the Wild Animals Reservation and Protection Act B. E. 2535 (WARPA), which was revised in 1992 (van Dijk and Palasuwan, 2000, van Dijk, 2002). The WARPA Law controls hunting, trade, possession, import, export, and commercial breeding of wildlife. It also includes provisions for the implementation of CITES. Thailand has been a CITES signatory since 1983.

Viet Nam: Ministerial decree No 18 of the Council of Ministers Stipulating the Categories of rare and precious forest fauna and flora, and their management and protection, dated 17 January 1992, includes two species of non-marine turtles, *Indotestudo elongata* and *Pelochelys bibroni* (= *P. cantorii*), under category II. Thus utilization of these two species is restricted to scientific research, establishing breeding populations, and international

exchange. Any such activities require a collection permit from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (Hendrie, 2000). The list of species protected by Decree 18 is currently under review and more turtle species may be included. Directive 359 (1996) restricts trade in wildlife and animal parts, including prohibiting the sale of wildlife in restaurants. Commerce and trade regulations require a permit issued at the provincial level for trade in any commodity, including wildlife (Hendrie, 2000). Circular 62/2001/TT-BNN issued on 05 of June 2001 by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to guide imports and exports of goods and commodities managed by the Ministry for the period of 2001-2005 stipulates that Viet Nam prohibits exports of all wild animals and rare and precious plants. Thus export of all native turtle species is prohibited. Viet Nam became a Party to CITES in 1994.

4.1.2 International

The Big-headed Turtle is not currently listed in the CITES appendices.

4.2 Species management

4.2.1 Population monitoring

No specific population monitoring programs for this species, or for Asian freshwater turtles in general, have been identified. Various site-specific surveys have been conducted (Stuart, 1999; van Dijk, *in litt* to USFWS 2002).

4.2.2 Habitat conservation

Appropriate stream habitat for this species has likely been conserved in protected areas throughout the species' range. For example, Kadoorie Farm & Botanic Garden, a privately-run sanctuary in Hong Kong SAR, has established secondary forests and hill streams that support populations of the Big-headed Turtle (Lau et al., 2000). In Thailand, a number of National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries are confirmed to contain viable *Platysternon* populations (van Dijk, *in litt*, 2002) No specific habitat conservation measures for this species have been identified.

4.2.3 Management measures

The Cuc Phuong Conservation Project in Viet Nam established a Turtle Conservation and Ecology Project in 1998. This project receives and maintains turtles, including Big-headed Turtles, that have been confiscated. No other specific management measures for this species have been identified. A conservation breeding program, of undetermined utility, is underway for the species in Thailand (van Dijk & Palasuwan, 2000).

4.3 Control measures

4.3.1 International trade

China: China has recently taken several legal/regulatory measures to control imports and exports of freshwater turtles (see Section 4.1.1). Viet Nam: Viet Nam recently adopted CITES-implementing legislation, which should help control international trade.

4.3.2 Domestic measures

No specific domestic control measures for this species have been identified.

5. Information on Similar Species

This is the only living species of an ancient family of extinct turtles (Rhodin et al.). Thus, the species cannot realistically be confused with any other living turtle species.

6. Other Comments

The species' status on the IUCN 2000 Red List is: Endangered (A1d+ 2d). Note that the 'd' category represents 'actual or potential levels of trade', i.e. the species is not considered threatened by habitat impacts.

All range countries were consulted by mail regarding this proposal.

The consensus recommendation from the CITES-sponsored Technical Workshop on Conservation of and Trade in Freshwater Turtles and Tortoises in Asia, held in Kunming, China from March 25-28, 2002, is that the Big-headed Turtle is one of the 11 highest-priority taxa for an Appendix-II CITES listing at COP 12. Governments of all range countries for the species were represented at the Kunming Workshop (with the exception of Lao PDR, a non-CITES country which was nonetheless invited to participate in the Workshop).

7. Additional Remarks

Anders G. J. Rhodin of the Chelonian Research Foundation has recommended that the species be considered for listing in Appendix II.

8. References

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