

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES): An Introduction

What is CITES?

CITES is an international environmental agreement, or treaty, between 175 nations to ensure the global wildlife trade is managed responsibly and sustainably. Trade in wildlife products is estimated to be worth billions of dollars every year. CITES' purpose is to ensure international trade does not threaten species' survival. Trade in wildlife products is diverse and includes jewelry, curios, food, medicine, leather goods and musical instruments. CITES was formally accepted in 1973 by 80 member nations (or Parties) and entered into force in 1975. Other well-known environmental agreements are the Kyoto Protocol and Montreal Protocol.

What species are protected under CITES?

More than 5,000 species of animals and 25,000 species of plants are protected under CITES, including elephants, great apes, tigers, great white sharks, certain whale species, coral, sturgeon, mahogany and many others.

How does CITES work?

CITES operates by controlling the international trade in various wildlife products via a system of import and export permits. There are three Appendixes (or levels) within CITES in which species are listed, according to the trade control they require to survive.

- Appendix I: The most restrictive listing; species listed here are threatened with extinction and international commercial trade of them or any product made from them is banned and permitted only in exceptional circumstances.
- Appendix II: Requires countries to adhere to a system of export permits allowing trade in any product made from such species to be strictly monitored and controlled. This is the most common listing; more than 32,000 plants and animals are found in Appendix II.
- Appendix III: The least restrictive listing; includes species that are already protected domestically in a country. The country has asked other member nations of CITES for assistance to prevent exploitation of the species.

CITES is a voluntary, non-binding agreement and is designed to provide a framework for member nations. Each country must adopt domestic legislation to ensure CITES' requirements are implemented.

What is the Conference of Parties, or CoP?

The CoP is the triennial meeting of CITES. Member countries meet to vote on the inclusion of new species under CITES, and consider upgrading or downgrading species within the Appendixes. Countries will also consider proposals that change the text (within CITES, called resolutions) that governs the trade of listed species. In March 2010, the 15th Conference of Parties will be held in Doha, Qatar.

Why is SeaWeb attending this year's CoP?

SeaWeb's *Too Precious to Wear* campaign is seeking an Appendix II listing for red and pink corals, the most valuable and intensely traded of all deep-sea corals. Red and pink coral have been intensively fished for centuries for use in jewelry and home décor. The United States and Sweden, on behalf of the European Union, have co-sponsored a proposal to list red and pink coral (Family Coralliidae) under Appendix II of CITES. This proposal is not a ban on trade of these species, but it would provide much-needed monitoring and oversight of the international red coral trade, which is estimated at 30 to 50 metric tons annually. SeaWeb will attend the 15th Conference of Parties to make sure the member countries of CITES choose to protect red and pink coral. *Too Precious to Wear* is also working to create a demand for coral conservation by raising awareness of this issue among the fashion and jewelry industries.

What other marine species are being proposed for CITES protection at CoP15?

- Bluefin tuna (*Thunnus thynnus*), Appendix I, proposed by Monaco
- Dusky Shark (*Carcharhinus obscurus*), Great Hammerhead Shark (*Sphyrna mokarran*), Oceanic Whitetip Shark (*Carcharhinus longimanus*), Sandbar Shark (*Carcharhinus plumbeus*), Scalloped Hammerhead Shark (*Sphyrna lewini*), Smooth Hammerhead Shark (*Sphyrna zygaena*), Appendix II, proposed by the United States and Palau
- Porbeagle Shark (*Lamna nasus*), Appendix II, proposed by Palau and Sweden, on behalf of the European Union
- Spiny Dogfish Shark (*Squalus acanthias*), Appendix II, proposed by Palau and Sweden, on behalf of the European Union
- Polar bear (*Ursus maritimus*), movement from Appendix II to Appendix I, proposed by the United States.

Are any coral species currently listed under CITES?

More than 2,000 species of coral are currently listed under CITES Appendix II. An Appendix II listing requires producing countries to a) issue a non-detriment finding by a scientific body, which proves that trade is not detrimental to the species in question, and b) issue an export permit in order to track and monitor the international trade in a wildlife product. The majority of corals listed under CITES are shallow-water, stony corals (Order Scleractinia, roughly 1,400 species) often destined for the curio or aquaria trade. Blue and black precious corals have been listed under CITES Appendix II since the 1980s. The precious black coral trade is estimated at five metric tons, while the red and pink coral trade is estimated at 30 to 50 metric tons.

What is the FAO analysis for CITES species?

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has been addressing the legal and implementation issues associated with CITES in relation to commercial fisheries since 2006. Within the remit of this relationship, the FAO convenes an ad-hoc advisory panel on marine species proposed for CITES protection, to make recommendations as to whether or not these species should be protected under CITES. The FAO has a valuable and important role to play in the effective implementation of CITES; however, they recommended against the United States and European Union's Coralliidae proposal because of a flawed analysis of the listing criteria for Appendix II species. SeaWeb questions the FAO panel's interpretation in this instance—applying the listing criteria not to commercial fisheries, where the FAO's expertise lies, but to long-lived, slow-growing, attached marine organisms such as red and pink coral. For more details, read the letter from SeaWeb, WWF, Pew Environment Group and Oceana to CITES member countries at www.tooprecioustowear.org.