

## What is CITES?

CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) is an international agreement between Governments. Its aim is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival.

Widespread information nowadays about the endangered status of many prominent species, such as the tiger and elephants, might make the need for such a convention seem obvious. But at the time when the ideas for CITES were first formed, in the 1960s, international discussion of the regulation of wildlife trade for conservation purposes was something relatively new. With hindsight, the need for CITES is clear. Annually, international wildlife trade is estimated to be worth billions of dollars and to include hundreds of millions of plant and animal specimens. The trade is diverse, ranging from live animals and plants to a vast array of wildlife products derived from them, including food products, exotic leather goods, wooden musical instruments, timber, tourist curios and medicines. Levels of exploitation of some animal and plant species are high and the trade in them, together with other factors, such as habitat loss, is capable of heavily depleting their populations and even bringing some species close to extinction. Many wildlife species in trade are not endangered, but the existence of an agreement to ensure the sustainability of the trade is important in order to safeguard these resources for the future.

Because the trade in wild animals and plants crosses borders between countries, the effort to regulate it requires international cooperation to safeguard certain species from over-exploitation. CITES was conceived in the spirit of such cooperation. Today, it accords varying degrees of protection to more than 30,000 species of animals and plants, whether they are traded as live specimens, fur coats or dried herbs.

CITES was drafted as a result of a resolution adopted in 1963 at a meeting of members of IUCN (The World Conservation Union). The text of the Convention was finally agreed at a meeting of representatives of 80 countries in Washington DC., United States of America, on 3 March 1973, and on 1 July 1975 CITES entered in force.

CITES is an international agreement to which States (countries) adhere voluntarily. States that have agreed to be bound by the Convention ('joined' CITES) are known as Parties. Although CITES is legally binding on the Parties - in other words they have to implement the Convention - 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 make sure that CITES is

implemented at the national level.

Not one species protected by CITES has become extinct as a result of trade since the Convention entered into force and, for many years, CITES has been among the largest conservation agreements in existence, with now 160 Parties.

## How CITES works?

CITES works by subjecting international trade in specimens of selected species to certain controls. These require that all import, export, re-export and introduction from the sea of species covered by the Convention has to be authorized through a licensing system. ('Re-export' means export of a specimen that was imported.)

The species covered by CITES are listed in [three Appendices](#), according to the degree of protection they need. (For additional information see [CITES Species](#).)

**Appendix I** includes species threatened with extinction. Trade in specimens of these species is permitted only in exceptional circumstances.

**Appendix II** includes species not necessarily threatened with extinction, but in which trade must be controlled in order to avoid utilization incompatible with their survival.

**Appendix III** contains species that are protected in at least one country, which has asked other CITES Parties for assistance in controlling the trade.

Each Party to the Convention must designate one or more Management Authorities in charge of administering the licensing system and one or more Scientific Authorities to advise them on the effects of trade on the status of the species.

A specimen of a CITES-listed species may be imported into or exported (or re-exported) from a State party to the Convention only if the appropriate document has been obtained and presented for clearance at the port of entry or exit. There is some variation of the requirements from one country to another and it is always necessary to check on the national laws, but the main conditions that apply for each Appendix are described below.

### Appendix-I Specimens

1. An import permit issued by the Management Authority of the State of import

is required. This may be issued only if the specimen is not to be used for primarily commercial purposes and if the import will be for purposes that are not detrimental to the survival of the species. In the case of a live animal or plant, the Scientific Authority must be satisfied that the proposed recipient is suitably equipped to house and care for it.

2. An export permit or re-export certificate issued by the Management Authority of the State of export or re-export is also required.

An export permit may be issued only if the specimen was legally obtained; the trade will not be detrimental to the survival of the species; and an import permit has already been issued.

A re-export certificate may be issued only if the specimen was imported in accordance with the provisions of the Convention and, in the case of a live animal or plant, if an import permit has been issued.

In the case of a live animal or plant, it must be prepared and shipped to minimize any risk of injury, damage to health or cruel treatment.

### **Appendix-II Specimens**

1. An export permit or re-export certificate issued by the Management Authority of the State of export or re-export is required.

An export permit may be issued only if the specimen was legally obtained and if the export will not be detrimental to the survival of the species.

A re-export certificate may be issued only if the specimen was imported in accordance with the Convention.

2. In the case of a live animal or plant, it must be prepared and shipped to minimize any risk of injury, damage to health or cruel treatment.

3. No import permit is needed unless required by national law.

In the case of specimens introduced from the sea, a certificate has to be issued by the Management Authority of the State into which the specimens are being brought, for species listed in Appendix I or II. For further information, see the text of the Convention, [Article III, paragraph 5](#) and [Article IV, paragraph 6](#).

### **Appendix-III Specimens**

1. In the case of trade from a State that included the species in Appendix III, an export permit issued by the Management Authority of that State is required. This may be issued only if the specimen was legally obtained and, in the case of a live animal or plant, if it will be prepared and shipped to minimize any risk of injury, damage to health or cruel treatment.
2. In the case of export from any other State, a certificate of origin issued by its Management Authority is required.
3. In the case of re-export, a re-export certificate issued by the State of re-export is required.

The Convention allows or requires Parties to make certain exceptions to the general principles described above, notably in the following cases:

- \* for specimens in transit or being transhipped;
- \* for specimens that were acquired before CITES provisions applied to them (known as pre-Convention specimens);
- \* for specimens that are personal or household effects;
- \* for animals that were bred in captivity (this term is carefully defined in [\*\*Resolution Conf. 10.16 Rev.\*\*](#));
- \* for plants that were artificially propagated (this term is carefully defined in [\*\*Resolution Conf. 11.11\*\*](#));
- \* for specimens that are destined for scientific research;
- \* for animals or plants forming part of a traveling collection or exhibition, such as a circus.

There are special rules in these cases and a permit or certificate will generally still be required. Anyone planning to import or export/re-export specimens of a CITES species should contact the national CITES Management Authorities of the countries of import and export/re-export for information on the rules that apply.

Some Parties have domestic legislation with trade controls stricter than those required by CITES. In these cases, compliance with CITES regulations may not be sufficient to ensure that trade is legal.

When a specimen of a CITES-listed species is transferred between a country that is a Party to CITES and a country that is not, the country that is a Party may accept documentation equivalent to the permits and certificates described above.