

**Global biodiversity mechanisms:
a thematic review of recent developments and future evidence needs**

Strand Palace Hotel, London 20th May 2009

MEA Briefing

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species

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Briefing Note: Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species

The Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) is one of the oldest MEAs, having been agreed in Washington DC in 1973. It entered into force in 1975, with the UK becoming a Party in 1976. Currently 175 countries are a Party to CITES, and work collectively to ensure that international trade in wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. 33,000 species are listed on its Appendices and benefit from regulation in their trade. CITES held its 14th Conference of the Parties in 2007 in the Hague, the Netherlands. Around 1600 participants attended the meeting, including a sizeable number of international NGOs. CITES COPs occur every 3 years, the next is due in March 2010.

Inter-sessionally, it works through a Standing Committee, and two Scientific Committees (the Animals and the Plants Committees). A range of decision making functions and the furtherance of working groups established by the COP are delegated to these Committees.

In addition to considering the listing, and protection via a complex permitting regime, of numerous species of plants and animals the CoP14 agenda included items on:

- Introduction from the Sea
- Livelihoods
- Enforcement
- Capacity Building
- Invasive alien species

At CoP14, and a parallel Ministerial session, consideration was given to the issues and benefits associated with CITES increasingly regulating the trade in marine and timber species. Subsequently the Standing Committee, at its 57th meeting in 2008 sought to take forward the working groups on livelihoods, introductions from the sea, as well as workshops to consider enhanced enforcement; internet trade; and took decisions restricting or allowing trade (most notably elephant ivory).

A large volume of CITES listed species are traded with or through the UK and/or the EU, and thus we have a potentially significant footprint on ecosystems and people. Most recently the UK has been active in considering the impacts of CITES-listing decisions on the livelihoods of poor people, to ensure assessments of such effects are robust and where necessary mitigation measures are considered. CITES species are often sourced from biodiversity rich but economically poor regions of the world including Overseas Countries & Territories and Small Island Developing States.

The control of trade in endangered animals and plants has the potential to impact negatively on poor people's livelihoods and thus their ability to protect the ecosystems in which the species play various roles. If managed poorly such trade can additionally increase pressures

from invasive alien species and spread wildlife diseases. For example, as a result of concerns about the spread of avian influenza, the EU introduced in 2006 a ban on the import of wild-taken birds. CITES addresses concerns about alien invasive species through Res. Conf. 13.10 which, amongst other things, encourages consultation with importing countries if potentially invasive species are being exported by CITES Parties.