



A CITES priority:

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE:

A call for attention to the CITES Strategic Vision and Action Plan and some suggestions for its future development

TRAFFIC and WWF briefing document

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The first Strategic Plan for CITES, adopted in 2000, was scheduled to draw to a close in 2005. Preparing for CoP13, CITES member governments have had the opportunity to assess progress so far and design a process to set goals for the Convention's work for a new period of its development. So far, the response to this key opportunity to assess and steer the Convention's future has been disappointing. Important issues for consideration, include a need for greater attention to wider conservation and development policy context, more effective evaluation of the Convention's performance, enhancements to capacity-building and enforcement efforts, increased private sector engagement and review of the structure of current CITES institutions and decision-making.

TRAFFIC



At the 11th meeting of the Conference of the Parties in 2000, CITES member countries made the momentous decision to adopt a strategic plan, the first comprehensive statement of their ambition for the Convention's future since the original treaty came into force in 1975. Almost five years on, the Parties will consider at the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP13) the process they will follow to review progress so far and develop a revised strategic plan for the next period of the Convention's development.

Entitled the *Strategic Vision through 2005* and accompanied by a detailed Action Plan for the same period, the current CITES strategic plan establishes a series of clearly articulated goals and objectives for the Convention's future. Its stated purpose was threefold, to provide: guidance to the Parties (and the Secretariat) in their implementation of the Convention; a basis for measuring progress; and an educational and outreach tool to explain the Convention to wider audiences. The CITES Standing Committee was given the responsibility for monitoring progress towards achievement of the plan's goals.

Off to a poor start

The process of considering strategic goals for CITES beyond 2005 began in late 2003, when CITES Parties and interested organisations were asked to provide suggestions to the CITES Secretariat in preparation for the 50th meeting of the Standing Committee in March 2004. The response was underwhelming. Only one member government was reported to have provided any response in time for consideration, with TRAFFIC providing the only comments from observers. The Secretariat was instructed to prepare a draft resolution for consideration at CoP13 to extend the life of the current strategic plan through 2007 and to establish a Strategic Plan Working Group to develop a proposal to CoP14 for adoption of a new strategic plan for the period through to 2013.

The apparent lack of interest in the CITES strategic planning process is cause for considerable concern. With world governments focused on issues such as security, trade and poverty alleviation, environmental concerns struggle to gain or retain attention in national and international policy fora. Among environmental concerns, the focus CITES brings to the links between biodiversity conservation, resource use, sustainable development, and trade competes for visibility with issues such as climate change, pollution and the potential risks and benefits of genetically-modified organisms. Meanwhile, CITES meetings echo with choruses of "not enough resources are being allocated by governments," and "wildlife trade is not being treated as a priority by politicians."

This is a slightly incongruous situation given that CITES of all the multi-lateral environment agreements is best placed to demonstrate the value of biodiversity to livelihoods. Indeed, the current political preoccupation with poverty alleviation and the Millennium Development Goals provides an opportunity for CITES to play its role in sustainable development. This opportunity suggests a focussing of



Nile Crocodile, *Crocodylus niloticus*



Pitcher plant, *Nepenthes edwardsiana*

GOALS OF THE CITES STRATEGIC VISION THROUGH 2005

1. Enhance the ability of each Party to implement the Convention
2. Strengthen the scientific basis of the decision-making process
3. Contribute to the reduction and ultimate elimination of illegal trade in wild fauna and flora
4. Promote greater understanding of the Convention
5. Increase cooperation and conclude strategic alliances with international stakeholders
6. Progress towards full global membership
7. Provide the Convention with an improved and secure financial and administrative basis

attention on trade in Appendix II species and strong practical links with the Convention on Biological Diversity.

If CITES is to fight its case as a priority, or more accurately, if those responsible for CITES within its member countries are to fight their cases that this Convention is a priority, a good starting point would be full commitment to a process that promotes transparency, accountability, impact assessment and strategic leadership in the Convention's work. A strong strategic plan for CITES has potential to provide far more than guidance on the treaty's implementation. It should provide a clear statement of ambition for national and inter-governmental action on wildlife trade as part of a wider biodiversity conservation and sustainable development agenda.

Performance to date

When adopted in 2000, the CITES Strategic Plan noted that, "Measurable performance indicators should be established for each of the seven goals to help identify progress toward their completion". So – how has the Convention and the work of its Parties progressed? Based on public record, this is not at all easy to assess. It appears that performance indicators were not developed or agreed by the Parties and, aside from review of a limited range of action items by the Plants Committee, there has been no systematic assessment of action taken or results.

Nevertheless, there have clearly been some areas of very significant progress in the Convention's work over the past five years. Based purely on perceptions and anecdotal information, some key examples include:

- increased membership (20 new Parties since the beginning of 2000);
- improved national implementing legislation, promoted through the CITES National Legislation Project;
- greater emphasis on capacity-building for Scientific Authorities;
- increased capacity at the CITES Secretariat;
- stronger management and scientific measures promoted through the CITES Significant Trade Project;
- agreement of ground-breaking approaches to policy assessment for elephant trade and conservation through the MIKE and ETIS;
- successful engagement of bilateral and regional collaboration between Parties in addressing priority wildlife trade problems;
- increased profile of the Convention's work in the media;
- some improvement in engagement and collaboration with other multi-lateral trade and environment institutions.

There have also been some frustrating challenges over the same period, particularly in terms of the imbalance between the high level of ambition of the Parties and the relatively low level of financial investment they have been willing to make in the Convention's work, both through the Secretariat and in many cases at a national level.

Overall, steady progress is being made, but it has to be asked whether this is really enough? Is CITES winning the battle it was established to fight? Do we even have the mechanisms in place to assess the answers to these questions?

Heading into the future

Based on their long association with CITES and its continuing efforts to help address wildlife trade challenges worldwide, TRAFFIC and WWF would like to highlight some issues of importance to the future of CITES, offered for the Parties' consideration as they begin to consider their ambition for the next period of the Convention's development.

Hanging CITES in the institutional web Governments should greatly increase their efforts to rationalise the policies and practices they advocate under different multi-lateral

economic and environmental institutions. CITES policy needs to be cognisant of wider biodiversity conservation and sustainable development goals and processes. The environmental standards for trade pursued under CITES need to be supported in fora such as the WTO and in the work of regional economic agreements. The fit between CITES and other natural resource management measures, especially those relating to fisheries and timber, needs to be firmly established. The work related to CITES must be integrated nationally, regionally and internationally with the conservation work pursuant to the CBD.

The use and abuse of the CITES Appendices Despite on-going work to refine CITES listing criteria and review the Appendices, there is a good case for the CITES Parties to take an analytical look at the performance of CITES listing overall as a basis for a more strategic approach in future. It is difficult to judge whether any CITES listing has achieved its intended purpose, largely because the Parties fail to identify explicit conservation goals for any listing at the time it is made, at least at the international level. Without tangible means to judge its performance over time, CITES will struggle to justify greater resource investment. Other aspects of CITES listings would also benefit from review, including the increasingly convoluted use of annotations to dictate terms for trade in listed species and the costs and benefits of controlling trade in a significant number of what are in effect domesticated forms of various plant and animal species.

Practice makes perfect - national action for CITES success The driving force of CITES' performance is the national-level action taken by each of its member governments. A wide range of national case studies and reviews such as the CITES Significant Trade and National Legislation projects have pointed to some of the key challenges for national implementation of the Convention. They include lack of policy coherence, weak or inappropriate laws, poor inter-agency co-operation, gaps in scientific and conservation management knowledge and under-investment in key administrative and enforcement roles. Capacity-building efforts by the CITES Secretariat, TRAFFIC, WWF, and others have helped, but to be more effective their scale needs to be rapidly increased with significant financial backing from sources such as the GEF. Capacity building and training need to be undertaken at a far greater scale. Ambitious targets for national implementation performance should be set and regular performance reviews carried out to assess progress.

Crime and punishment Trade in wildlife resources, like that in almost any commodity of high value, attracts criminal activities. Illegal activity undermines the conservation security afforded by wildlife trade controls and the benefits that should accrue to those with legitimate claims over resource value. Consciously or not, criminals tend to balance the potential benefits of their activities against the risk of being caught and punished. All too often, wildlife poachers and smugglers face no more than moderate risk of detection and a generally low risk of suffering significant sanction if caught. CITES Parties should look hard at the motivations driving both poaching and illegal trade, and the efficacy of the deterrents they are applying. Sharing of experience with penalty structures and levels could be extremely beneficial. New approaches to enforcement work, such as application of modern forensic techniques and use of remote tracking devices should be further promoted. Nevertheless, effective law enforcement will need adequate investment. There is no replacement for old-fashioned hard police work.

Economics and business - the missing links Wildlife trade regulations, and more specifically CITES trade controls, are usually developed by administrators and legislators with very little reference to the economic incentives at the heart of the business decisions made by those at each step along the trade chain. Without being responsive to the trade structure for any given commodity, or of the drivers influencing the behaviour of harvesters, traders, processors, retailers or consumers, traditional approaches to wildlife trade regulation have a limited chance of success. Greater attention to such factors should be an essential element of future thinking about the development of CITES. Private sector roles and responsibilities need to become central to CITES decision-making. Far more should be done to encourage business to internalise the costs of regulating its own activities, whether through levies to regulatory bodies or through voluntary measures such as third-party certification.



White rhinoceros
Ceratotherium simum simum



Talang Mamak people, Bukit Tigapuluh, Sumatra Indonesia



Corals for sale



Form for function - the future for CITES institutions With almost 30 years of the Convention's history behind them, the CITES Parties should look hard at the governance systems that have evolved up to this point, as well as those that might be developed to take the treaty through the coming decades. Does the Conference of the Parties strike the right balance between democracy and efficiency? Could more technical implementation issues be delegated to subsidiary bodies? What can be done to place science and regulatory expertise more firmly at the centre of decision-making? What level of executive power should be delegated to the Standing Committee? How should the role of the Secretariat develop in future? How can the full range of civil society be enlisted to help achieve the Convention's goals? There are strengths in current arrangements, particularly in the level of transparency in CITES institutions, but improvements could be made, particularly to breakdown the current dependence on the Conference of the Parties to manage so many detailed aspects of the Convention's business.

Measuring progress

In pursuing these and other ideas for the next Strategic Plan, it is essential that the Parties make some effort to learn from their achievements and failures over the past five years. Some simple retrospective evaluation of "what worked, what didn't and why?", against the goals and objectives of the *Strategic Vision through 2005* at national and global levels should reveal some crucial lessons for the next planning period.

Then looking forward to the plan through 2013, it is clearly important that the Parties take a far more serious approach to the monitoring of the Convention's performance. Early adoption of some basic targets and indicators and allocation of resources to support on-going evaluation should be treated as absolutely essential needs if the Convention is to prove its worth in the years ahead. The seventh CoP of the CBD adopted such measures in February 2004. The same governments should make sure that CITES follows suit.

In fact there could be a case for some alignment of progress assessment between the CBD and CITES. Given that CBD CoP7 initiated the adoption of a list of species indicators, it would seem sensible for CITES to buy into this process. Negotiations on how the CBD indicators will be developed will take place up to CBD CoP8 in Brazil in 2006. As part of the revitalised and extended co-operation between CBD and CITES work on a common set or subset of species indicators would be valuable to both conventions.

The whole and the parts

Planning is not necessarily the most attractive or rewarding task for the many professionals in government and civil society taking action day-to-day to tackle the challenges of wildlife trade regulation, resource management and biodiversity conservation addressed by CITES. Nevertheless, one cannot necessarily assume that individual actions, however much sense they make in a local context, will add up to meaningful results on a wider scale. The effectiveness of such actions, the level of resources allocated to support them and ultimately the level of impact of the Convention itself, stand to benefit immensely from the inspiration, direction and evaluation framework that can be provided by a CITES Strategic Plan for the coming years. But only if it has the full participation and support of all those concerned with the Convention's success.

TRAFFIC and WWF are ready and willing to assist the Parties in this endeavour, both at meeting in Bangkok and between COP13 and COP14.

WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable resources is sustainable and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.

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TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network, works to ensure that trade in wild plants and animals is not a threat to the conservation of nature.

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