

## Delete the zero quota for wild specimens traded for commercial purposes from the Appendix II listing of the population of Mexico of Morelet's Crocodile *Crocodylus moreletii*

### Proponent: Mexico

**Summary:** Morelet's Crocodile *Crocodylus moreletii* is a small to medium-sized crocodylian that occurs in freshwater lagoons, swamps, streams and backwaters in forested areas or those with dense waterside vegetation in Belize, Guatemala and Mexico. It was included in Appendix I in 1975. In 2010 the populations of Mexico and Belize were transferred to Appendix II with a zero quota for wild specimens for commercial purposes. The population of Guatemala remains in Appendix I.

Surveys indicate that Mexico's population has continued to increase since its transfer to Appendix II, from an estimated 54,000 (of which almost 13,500 were adults) in 2010 to ca. 100,000 (of which some 19,000 were adults) in 2015. The population structure is pyramidal, generally accepted as reflecting a healthy population. The species is present throughout its natural range in Mexico of around 400,000km<sup>2</sup> of which 25,277km<sup>2</sup> is considered optimal habitat.

Management is based around Wildlife Management Units known as UMAs which must have seven basic elements: registration with the CITES Management Authority; an approved management plan; management and conservation of habitat; monitoring of the harvested wild populations; submission of regular reports and inventories; technical supervision visits; and marking or labelling (in line with the universal tagging system in *Res. Conf. 11.12 (Rev. CoP15)*).

The Supporting Statement indicates that Mexico's population of *C. moreletii* may have the potential to be harvested in all size classes. However, the current intention is that wild harvest will be restricted to eggs with the resulting hatchlings raised in UMAs. No quotas or harvest limits are mentioned in the proposal, although the Supporting Statement notes that many programmes in use around the world for different species of crocodylians suggest that 50-80% annual removal of eggs can be sustainable<sup>1</sup>.

The Mexican Government is developing a pilot project on sustainability, production systems and traceability for *C. moreletii* skins in collaboration with RESP (Responsible Ecosystem Sourcing Platform). The programme aims to involve local communities in the conservation of the species and its habitat through ranching. The CITES Scientific Authority of Mexico (CONABIO) is funding the development of a ranching protocol in conjunction with experts to support the implementation of the pilot project. This protocol will include aspects of population monitoring and nests; monitoring and habitat management; estimation of sustainable harvest rates for ranching; management of nests, extraction and transfer of eggs; incubation (including details on the infrastructure, equipment and materials); and care of offspring from birth to sale. This will be available as an Information Document at CoP17.

Because the population of *C. moreletii* was not transferred to Appendix II for ranching in accordance with *Res. Conf. 11.16 (Rev. CoP15)* Mexico intends to export specimens with the source code "w" (wild) although initially eggs will be harvested from the wild and raised – that is effectively ranched.

Since 2011 Mexico has implemented a monitoring programme for the species over its entire range, which includes the monitoring of 73 permanent sites in Mexico. Monitoring within Mexico is considered to be sophisticated and sufficient to detect any adverse impacts of harvesting on the population<sup>1</sup>.

**Analysis:** There are no explicit guidelines in *Res. Conf. 9.24 (Rev. CoP16)* for assessing removal of a zero quota for wild specimens from an Appendix-II listed species. However, such removal may be seen as analogous to a transfer from Appendix I to Appendix II. Mexico's population of *Crocodylus moreletii* evidently does not meet the criteria for inclusion in Appendix I: it is not small nor does it have a restricted range, and it has been increasing for at least the past 10 years.

The precautionary measures set out in Annex 4 of *Res. Conf. 9.24 (Rev. CoP16)* can be met in various ways, including the Parties being satisfied with the range State's implementation of the Convention, particularly Article IV, and with its enforcement controls and compliance with the Convention, or if an integral part of the amendment proposal is a special measure approved by the CoP, based on management measures described in the Supporting Statement, provided that effective enforcement controls are in place.

In this case, the intent only to harvest eggs from the wild population in the coming years could be taken as such a special measure. Management measures and enforcement controls described in the Supporting Statement appear to be sufficient to ensure that such harvest will not have an adverse impact on the population. Further details should be provided in the ranching protocol under development.

**References:**

Information not referenced in the Summary section is from the Supporting Statement.

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<sup>1</sup> IUCN SSC Crocodile Specialist Group (2016) *In litt.* to the IUCN/TRAFFIC Analyses Team, Cambridge, UK.