

CITES CoP14 Ministerial Round Table

Explanatory Note

Introduction

The Netherlands is proud to host the 14th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). To mark this momentous occasion, and for the first time in the history of CITES, the Government of the Netherlands is organising a Ministerial Round Table on 13 June 2007 in The Hague during the CoP14 Conference.

The Government of the Netherlands feels that we have reached a crossroads in the history of CITES, when we need to address daunting challenges in order to make a significant contribution to achieve global environmental and development goals. CITES has the structure, mechanisms and means to contribute successfully to these challenges. Its extensive experience and good track record have produced concrete results over the last decade. Using these achievements as a basis, the Government of the Netherlands would like to explore how CITES' potential can be fully realised.

Over the last decade we have made much progress in the implementation of the Convention. At the same time several developments make it necessary to consider how we might give further impetus to this implementation at political level.

At the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002 the world political leaders recognised the seriousness of the threats to biological diversity worldwide. They agreed to the important but ambitious *target to achieve by 2010 a significant reduction in the current rate of loss of biological biodiversity*.

The Dutch Government has taken this initiative within the broader framework of achieving internationally agreed development goals. This includes the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), implementation of the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development and the plan for Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, bearing in mind the Monterrey Consensus of the International Conference on Financing for Development. Achieving these goals is not only vital for our biodiversity in itself (MDG-7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability), it also contributes to poverty alleviation and food security (MDG-1: Eradicate Extreme Hunger and Poverty).

The current Strategic Vision¹ of CITES states clearly how the effectiveness of the Convention depends on a coordinated process of implementation that guarantees the achievements set out in the Convention in the long term. One element is to strengthen the enforcement capacity of the Parties and to improve cooperation among government agencies and with stakeholders. Goal 3 focuses on the contribution to the reduction and ultimate elimination of illegal trade in wild

¹ http://www.cites.org/eng/cop/11/doc/12_2.pdf

fauna and flora. The illegal trade in wild animals and plants is a major factor in the depletion of the world's natural resources in exchange for commercial gain. It undermines the conservation efforts of developing countries, affects income of rural populations and has driven several species to the brink of extinction.

To ensure better implementation of CITES, public support and participation must be enhanced through continuous educational processes that not only raise the profile of the Convention but also recognise its beneficial contribution to conservation through sustainable trade management. Involvement of local communities, NGOs, relevant trade associations, media and the general public is essential to heighten an understanding of the Convention.

Experience has shown that CITES enforcement would greatly benefit from a greater degree of coordination among the authorities and enforcement agencies among member states. Heightened local awareness of and involvement in wildlife protection activities can further national efforts in combating illegal trade.

The proposed new Strategic Vision² for CITES, which will be discussed during CoP14, clearly states: the ambition is to contribute particularly to the achievement of the WSSD-targets of significantly reducing the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010 and meeting the UN MDGs. In addition the Strategic Vision calls for greater attention to be paid to international trade in timber and aquatic species.

Recently, several regional and international meetings of ministers of Environment reemphasised the need to strengthen our cooperation to combat illegal activities within the framework of CITES and create effective partnerships in order to address the serious threats from illegal trade in wildlife.

Purpose of the Ministerial Conference

The purpose of this Ministerial Conference is twofold:

- Increase political awareness about CITES and the degree of political attention given to its implementation and enforcement;
- Within the CITES mandate, discuss ways and means to strengthen its role within the broader development agenda, including its potential contribution to sustainable use of natural resources, like forestry and fisheries.

The realisation of these two aims is critical to ensuring that CITES makes an important and effective contribution to significantly reducing the rate of biodiversity loss. It could also broaden our understanding and sensitivity to key issues that are at stake.

To make our discussions more concrete the Dutch Government has proposed that ministers focus on those timber and marine species which are covered, or could be covered, by CITES, with the aim of generating more general recommendations, as well as specific recommendations for timber and marine species.

It is anticipated that at the conclusion of our discussions a declaration will be adopted which will hopefully strengthen our political commitment to the implementation of the Convention.

² <http://www.cites.org/eng/cop/14/doc/E14-11.pdf>

Implementation and Enforcement

Enforcement is one of the main pillars underlying the effective functioning of CITES. Adequate implementation and enforcement of the CITES regulation is essential to promote mutually supportive relationships between sustainable use and environmental protection and to this end further facilitate legal trade as well as taking action to prevent trade in illegally acquired animals and plants and their products.

Much of the illegal trade in wildlife is sophisticated and organised. It can be very lucrative with the chance of being caught very slim and sanctions relatively low. There have been excellent examples of success in enforcement which are to be commended, but in general the response of the CITES community does not meet the same standard of sophistication or organisation. In strengthening enforcement of the Convention commitments should be given to undertake more effective enforcement action. Efforts have to be made in several areas, such as:

- Effective national legislation;
- Ensuring greater resources for enforcement, including adequate funding, adequate and sufficiently trained enforcement staff;
- National, regional and international cooperation, coordination and communication focussing on organised crime;
- Mutual technical assistance, capacity building and technology transfer, including the exchange of information;
- Raising of awareness within civil society and local communities;
- Ensuring that adequate penalties are in force and applied in practice to act as deterrent against illegal trade;

These issues require strong political support and commitment.

Timber and marine species

Many international commercial species run the risk of becoming endangered. This is partly because of illegal and unregulated harvesting and subsequent international trade.

CITES has an effective international regulatory structure with an operational export/import permit scheme and institutional system. CITES can play a supportive role in linking international organisations that strive for the conservation of biodiversity and for natural resource management.

The challenge is to explore how CITES can play an effective role in protecting these commercially important species likely to become endangered if the current rate of extraction is maintained. CITES could be used at an earlier stage as a complement to management agreements and regimes for timber and marine species.

Timber species

Forests, covering nearly one-third of Planet Earth, are closely associated with human well-being and environment. They provide multiple economic, social and environmental benefits derived from goods and services. Increasing concern has been expressed about continued deforestation and forest

degradation and the resulting adverse impact on economies, the environment, including biological diversity, and the livelihoods of at least a billion people and their cultural heritage. Emphasis is given to the need for more effective implementation of sustainable forest management at all levels.

Forest biodiversity is being lost due to rapid deforestation, fragmentation and degradation of all forest types. According to the FAO's Forest Resources Assessment 2007, there has been an annual net loss of 7.3 million hectares (0.2 per cent annually) in the period 2000 - 2005, of which most was natural forest in the tropics. One of the most important factors associated with forest and biological diversity decline are human-induced, including unsustainable forest management and trade.

Logging for industrial wood products is one of the causes of global deforestation. Much of this logging takes place in violation of laws designed to protect forests against indiscriminate felling. Ways and means of combating illegal logging and illegal trade has become an important item on the agenda of many multilateral organisations, such as UNFF, FAO, EU, the World Bank, WTO, and ITTO.

Not only do we need to regulate the use of forest species for environmental reasons (prevent biodiversity loss) but also for social and economic reasons. Forest biodiversity provides a wide array of goods and services and thus contributes to the livelihoods of many; in addition, forests play an important role as carbon sink in mitigating climate change.

Marine species

At the World Summit on Sustainable Development world leaders committed themselves to achieving sustainable fisheries, to include maintaining or restoring stocks to levels that can produce the maximum sustainable yield by 2015. In addition they committed to maintaining the productivity and biodiversity of important and vulnerable marine and coastal areas.

With regard to marine species there is strong evidence that several relevant commercially traded species are in rapid decline and are becoming possible candidates for CITES listing. This is partly because of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and subsequent trade. According to the FAO, more than 75% of global fish stocks is fully exploited, overexploited or depleted³.

CITES' strengths are particularly relevant in the following areas:

- Reliable government certification of Non-Detriment Finding and legal acquisition;
- Monitoring of trade, using of CITES certificates, and related reporting;
- Enforceable requirements of a legally binding instrument.

³ FAO; State of the World Fisheries & Aquaculture, FAO Press statement 5, March 2007: "This situation is even worse on the high seas with more than half of some straddling fish stocks ranking as overexploited or depleted, including stocks of species such as hakes, Atlantic cod and halibut, orange roughy, basking shark and bluefin tuna."

In order to make the fullest possible use of the potential benefits provided by the CITES Convention, efforts should be aimed at ensuring synergy and close cooperation between: the CITES-Secretariat, National CITES authorities, national, regional and international agencies charged with fisheries management.

The Dutch Government would like to focus on the following questions:

Question 1: Which enforcement actions or measures achieve the maximum effect, given the limited availability of resources?

Question 2: How can CITES be engaged at an earlier stage in the rapid decline of traded timber species before they are commercially extinct?

Question 3: How can the role of CITES be intensified in support of fisheries management bodies in order to prevent marine species from becoming endangered?

The Hague, March 2007