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Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES): Conservation and trade in sea cucumbers

Chantal Conand¹

Introduction

Sea cucumbers are of increasing global interest. Following the FAO ASCAM workshop in China in 2003 (see SPC *Beche-de-Mer Bulletin* #19 and in this issue, Lovatelli et al. 2004), a number of conservation issues have been raised and the role of CITES has been discussed (Bruckner et al. 2003).

The issue of sea cucumber trade and conservation was first brought to the attention of CITES in 2002 through a discussion paper submitted at the 12th meeting of the Conference of the Parties in December 2002 (see document CoP12 Doc. 45 on the CITES Secretariat website at <http://www.cites.org>). CITES Parties adopted a decision stating that the CITES Secretariat should convene a technical workshop on the matter. Parties also instructed the CITES Animals Committee (a scientific advisory body) to review its outcomes and formulate follow-up recommendations.

CITES Technical Workshop

The technical workshop on the conservation of sea cucumbers in the families Holothuridae and Stichopodidae occurred in Malaysia in March 2004. It was attended by about 40 experts and representatives from exporting and importing countries, private industry, IGOs and NGOs. The workshop was supported by the USA, and was organised by the Department of Fisheries of Malaysia and TRAFIC Southeast Asia.

Objectives

The workshop objectives, as proposed by the CITES Secretariat, were to:

- 1) review information on the status, catch, bycatch and trade in specimens of sea cucumbers within the families Holothuridae and Stichopodidae,

and on domestic measures for their conservation, including considerations of the adequacy of these measures;

- 2) establish conservation priorities and actions to secure the conservation status of sea cucumbers within the families Holothuridae and Stichopodidae, addressing *inter alia* trade monitoring and controls, national legislation and regulations, fisheries management options, conservation management and research, enforcement and capacity building;
- 3) consider and review biological and trade information, and to assist in establishing conservation priorities and actions to secure their conservation status. The workshop considers species that are currently not listed under CITES, but for which CITES offers an important forum to address their conservation, management and regulatory needs.

During two initial workshop sessions, general background documents were presented on:

- 1) sea cucumber biology (including taxonomy, distribution, conservation status) (Conand 2004a),
- 2) utilisation and trade in sea cucumbers (including sea cucumber fisheries, levels of current international trade, illegal, unreported and unregulated trade, bycatch, socioeconomic characteristics) (Conand 2004b),
- 3) fisheries management and conservation (including management options and practices (Bruckner 2004), and
- 4) CITES and CITES listings (Sant 2004).

These general presentations were followed by country status reports.

In the final two workshop sessions, three working groups were established to address specific questions concerning national fisheries management,

1. Laboratoire d'Écologie Marine, Université de La Réunion

priorities for international conservation and protection, and potential CITES implementation issues (the terms of reference of the three working groups are found on the CITES website). Working group findings and recommendations were presented and commented upon in plenary.

Output and recommendations

Findings and recommendations (detailed on the CITES webpage <http://www.cites.org>) concern three main topics.

- 1) National fisheries management

General and specific recommendations concerning national fisheries measures for conservation and management of sea cucumbers in the families Holothuridae and Stichopodidae.
- 2) Priorities for international conservation and protection
 - a) General findings on international measures for conservation and management of sea cucumbers in the families Holothuridae and Stichopodidae,
 - b) Biogeographical “hot spots” for sea cucumbers in the families Holothuridae and Stichopodidae,
 - c) Taxa of conservation concern, and
 - d) International measures to enhance conservation and management of sea cucumbers in the families Holothuridae and Stichopodidae.
- 3) Potential CITES implementation issues
 - a) Evaluation of the benefits and constraints of including species of sea cucumbers in the families Holothuridae and Stichopodidae in the Appendices of CITES,
 - b) Recommendations for further CITES activities concerning the management and conservation of sea cucumbers in the families Holothuridae and Stichopodidae, and
 - c) Measures that States should consider in case

species of sea cucumbers are included in Appendices II or III.

Workshop participants also endorsed and built upon the recommendations made at the FAO ASCAM workshop. The findings and recommendations of the technical workshop on the conservation of sea cucumbers in the families Holothuridae and Stichopodidae should therefore be interpreted and applied in conjunction with the outcomes of the ASCAM workshop.

CITES Animals Committee meeting

The Animals Committee has been directed to review, with the assistance of experts as may be needed, workshop outcomes and other available information concerning the biology, catch and bycatch and trade in sea cucumbers in the families Holothuridae and Stichopodidae, and to develop appropriate recommendations. The Committee will also prepare, for consideration at the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (Bangkok, 3–15 October 2004), a discussion paper on the biological and trade status of these sea cucumbers to provide scientific guidance on the actions needed to secure their conservation status.

The summary of the discussions and recommendations is detailed on CITES webpage under AC20 WG7 Doc 1 (<http://www.cites.org/common/cttee/ac/20/WG/E20-WG07-01.pdf>). It was suggested that conservation and sustainable use of sea cucumbers might also be achieved through CITES coordination with FAO and with regional fisheries management bodies.

The committee however agreed that further CITES considerations for certain countries or species should be examined in the future and the effects assessed. In this regard, the Animals Committee pro-



Participants to the Technical Workshop
(Picture: Pourkazemi)

poses the adoption of several recommendations that are directed to Parties, the CITES Secretariat and the Animals Committee (Doc 37.1 at: <http://www.cites.org/eng/cop/13/docs/index.shtml>).

Recommendations to Parties

Parties should endorse the recommendations formulated at the FAO Advances in Sea Cucumber Aquaculture and Management Workshop (Lovatelli et al. 2004) and should urge their fisheries agencies to:

- 1) conduct research on sea cucumber biology, fisheries and trade,
- 2) conduct research to resolve taxonomy and identification difficulties concerning sea cucumbers,
- 3) monitor the status and trends of sea cucumber stocks,
- 4) consult with the fishing industry and other stakeholders in the development and adoption of voluntary conservation guidelines for sea cucumbers, and
- 5) establish national management plans for sea cucumbers, and regional cooperation in management and conservation of sea cucumbers, particularly for acquisition and sharing of fisheries and trade data.

Parties should urge their CITES Scientific and Management Authorities to improve coordination with their fisheries management agencies on monitoring, assessment, and management of sea cucumber fisheries and the trade.

Recommendations to the CITES Secretariat

In coordination with the Animals Committee, the CITES Secretariat shall encourage FAO to continue and, as far as possible, increase its efforts to address the challenges of managing sea cucumber fisheries for sustainability, as identified in the FAO Advances in Sea Cucumber Aquaculture and Management Workshop (Lovatelli et al. 2004) and the CITES Technical Workshop on the Conservation of Sea Cucumbers in the Families Holothuridae and Stichopodidae (Kuala Lumpur, 2004).

The CITES Secretariat shall, in consultation with FAO:

- 1) collate information on and evaluate voluntary measures taken by countries to monitor the sea cucumber trade,
- 2) where appropriate, control sea cucumber exports, and
- 3) make recommendations as appropriate, for instance at meetings of the FAO Subcommittee on Fish Trade or the FAO Committee on Fisheries.

In consultation with the FAO Secretariat, and in evaluating actions taken by the Parties to manage and conserve sea cucumber populations, the CITES Secretariat shall consider the necessity of a follow-

up workshop on sea cucumber biology, fisheries, trade, management and conservation prior to the 14th meeting of the Conference of the Parties, and take action accordingly.

Recommendations to the Animals Committee

In consultation with FAO and the CITES Secretariat, the Animals Committee shall: 1) review the recommendations of the FAO Advances in Sea Cucumber Aquaculture and Management Workshop (Lovatelli et al. 2004) and of the CITES Technical Workshop (Kuala Lumpur, 2004), and 2) formulate advice on the proposed recommendations, and communicate its findings to FAO and the CITES Secretariat for follow-up as appropriate. The findings should also be considered at a further CITES workshop on sea cucumbers in the event that such a workshop is organised prior to the 14th meeting of the Conference of the Parties. The Animals Committee may monitor the implementation of the decisions relating to the conservation of and trade in sea cucumbers, and report on progress at the 14th meeting of the Conference of the Parties as appropriate.

The 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties will be held in Bangkok between 3 and 15 October 2004.

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