The listing of three sea cucumber species in CITES Appendix II enters into force

Marie Di Simone,[1] Arnaud Horellou[1] and Chantal Conand[2]

Introduction

At the last meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (CoP 18) in August 2019, three species of teatfish were added to CITES Appendix II: *Holothuria nobilis*, *H. fuscogilva* and *H. whitmaei* (Di Simone et al. 2020). The international trade in these species is now regulated and controlled in accordance with the provisions of Appendix II: CITES permits and certificates will be required for international movements, attesting to the legality and sustainability of shipments. In the absence of these documents, the shipments must be seized as they are expected to be illegal trade (CITES Secretariat 2020).

Appendix II controls and regulates trade to ensure that it is based on the management (methods and volumes) of sustainable takes. Transactions will also be tracked and compiled in the Parties' annual trade reports and recorded in the CITES trade database (CITES Secretariat 2020).

An entry into force of listing: Why a delay?

This listing entered into force on 28 August 2020 after a 12-month delay in implementation agreed to by Parties at the last CoP (CITES Secretariat 2020).

This delay was intended to allow range States of these species and importers to prepare and effectively enforce the listing, including the establishment of adequate procedures for management, identification, monitoring and permitting procedures (CITES Secretariat 2020). Indeed, this amendment posed significant implementation issues that would certainly not have been resolved in the 90-day period after which a CITES Appendix listings become legally binding (CITES Secretariat 2020).

Sea cucumbers support important industries and are the basis of livelihoods for communities in remote areas with few alternatives for economic activity. It was, therefore, agreed on by the Parties that regulations should be put in place to ensure the survival of these species in the wild (CITES Secretariat 2020).

Implementation of listing: Establishment of a non-detriment findings

A listing to CITES Appendix II leads to the establishment of a non-detriment findings (NDF). The NDF is issued after a scientific risk assessment – based on an analysis of the mode of exploitation, its effects on the population, the measures and the risks – so as to determine if the removal of a species in its natural environment is detrimental or not (SPC 2010).

Thus, an NDF must include the following main information:

1. populations: levels, trends, environments, densities, locations and resilience;
2. management and harvesting: fished sites vs non-fished sites, fishing methods, conservation programmes and quotas; and
3. control measures.

This includes determining the state of a population by assessing stocks, setting catch quotas and spatial and temporal closures of fisheries, and enforcing these measures, which ensure and commit the Party to the sustainable exploitation of these three species (Shedrawi et al. 2019).

Challenges encountered in establishing an NDF

Sea cucumbers represent a novelty for CITES Parties, particularly the methods of implementation and acquisition of skills.

There remains a lack of scientific information on sea cucumber biology, ecology and population dynamics. However, this information is essential to establishing comprehensive management plans capable of ensuring sustainable harvesting and conservation of these species (CITES 2019). The data required to carry out an NDF are, therefore, difficult to assess in the absence of this information (CITES 2019).

Also, the existing data most often concerns all sea cucumber species, and individual species are rarely differentiated in trade statistics or trade reports (CITES 2019).

[1] French CITES Scientific Authority, National Museum of Natural History, Paris, France. Email: marie.di-simone@mnhn.fr and arnaud.horellou@mnhn.fr
[2] National Museum of Natural History, Paris, France. Email: chantal.conand@mnhn.fr

Finally, the capacities of a country's management body and scientific authority are sometimes insufficient to collect the information required to assess the risk of international trade for the survival of the species in its territory (Shedrawi et al. 2019). For example, Pacific Island countries and territories are already facing difficulties in implementing effective and sustainable management measures due to economic and technical constraints (Shedrawi et al. 2019).

What next?

The listing of these three sea cucumber species in CITES has opened the door for potential new species listings (Di Simone et al. 2020). According to Purcell et al. (2012), there are 58 species of sea cucumbers of commercial interest in the world. This number can only increase: species with a high commercial value are becoming rare or even depleted, and harvesting efforts will target other species that are not yet traded (i.e. those with a low commercial value) which were not previously listed (Purcell *et al*. 2012).

For the next CoP, the European Union plans to make a proposal to list all European sea cucumber species in Appendix II.

In addition, the CITES Secretariat is finalising a study that will serve as the basis for a toolkit that Parties can use to ensure the implementation of new rules that affect the trade in these sea cucumbers. These efforts are supported by funding from the European Union (CITES Secretariat 2020).

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