



Guidelines for SSC Members on Engaging in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)

IUCN Species Survival Commission

1. IUCN's history in the Convention

IUCN's history in CITES stretches back to 1963 when the idea for a wildlife trade convention was first proposed at the 7th IUCN General Assembly in Nairobi. Since the Convention entered into force in 1975, IUCN has been a significant contributor and technical advisor to the Convention. Indeed, several Decisions and Resolutions of the Conference of the Parties (CoP) have specifically requested IUCN's assistance in working with the CITES Secretariat and the Parties¹.

2. IUCN's role in CITES

IUCN is classified as an International Governmental Organization observer within CITES, and is widely viewed within the Convention as a provider of credible and unbiased scientific and technical advice on species. IUCN offers a unique array of scientific and technical expertise to CITES, and can bring the diverse perspectives of its worldwide membership to bear on complex issues before CITES Parties, at global, regional and national levels. The best way to articulate IUCN's role in the Convention is one of treading a delicate line between being formally neutral, while informally trying to steer things towards particular conservation outcomes that it feels are warranted on the basis of the scientific evidence (especially from The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species and expertise from SSC members).

The primary objective of any Commission member's engagement in CITES is to ensure a positive outcome for the species concerned in line with IUCN's positions and ways of working. This is achieved by providing documented evidence as formal IUCN inputs to CITES deliberations. IUCN knowledge and expertise can also be conveyed verbally. This requires a delicate balancing act between, targeted, respectful, and open discussions that may be held in the corridors or in informal meetings between members and Party delegations, and more guarded, science-based neutrality (which need not be free from suggested recommendations per se) in formal (plenary or working groups) sessions or in any written statements.

The Global Species Programme coordinates IUCN's formal engagement with CITES. It supports, and works with, SSC Specialist Groups to ensure that the expertise from the network is used to effectively guide decisions making by the Parties. The Global Species Programme has a staff member dedicated to coordinating input into CITES and this person is the main focal point for the Specialist Groups.

3. Responsibilities of SSC Leaders

3.1 Specialist Groups dealing with species in international trade are encouraged to consider nominating an individual to serve as a "CITES focal point" on a quadrennial basis.

This focal point would be the named entry point for communication between the Global Species Programme and the Specialist Groups.

- **The Specialist Group Chair or designated CITES focal point in the SG should notify the relevant focal points in the Global Species Programme when (and before):**
 - **The Specialist Group intends writing directly to the CITES Secretariat** in the name of the Specialist Group on a sensitive or controversial matter² (e.g., a Specialist Group may receive information relating to non-compliance or enforcement that they wish to bring to the attention of the Convention);
 - **The Specialist Group is involved in preparing documentation or reports as may be called for in a Conference Resolution or Decision;**
 - **The Specialist Group or Specialist Group members have been involved in drafting a proposal to amend a CITES Appendix** (this has bearing on IUCN's role in the Analyses). SG Chairs are reminded that the "Welcome to the IUCN Species Survival Commission" document (effectively, the Terms of Reference for SSC members) specifically asks SSC members to "...inform SG Chairs and the GSP when they are asked to contribute to proposals to amend the CITES Appendices for CITES CoP meetings (assisting Parties in this regard, who submit the proposals)". Notifying the SG Chair and GSP should be done as early as is practically possible"
 - **The Specialist Group is approached formally by the CITES Secretariat on any issue** (as above, SG members approached in an individual capacity must notify SG Chairs and the GSP);
 - **The Specialist Group is approached by a Partner or external organization asking for the input, comments or advice of the SG on a potentially sensitive or controversial matter**

3.2. Compliance with the operational procedures of the Convention and IUCN's rules of engagement.

It can be complicated to navigate and understand the Conventions operating procedure but IUCN adopts a teamwork approach to draw on relevant expertise from across the SSC and Secretariat to ensure that we maximize effectiveness of the engagement regardless of the level of experience that a Chair, or appointed focal person may have. All SSC members should follow the guidance below:

- Members attending formal meetings should be sure to familiarize themselves with the Rules of Procedure (CoP³; SC⁴; AC⁵/PC⁶)
- **Specialist Groups wishing to have representation on the IUCN delegation at a meeting, should make their intentions known to the IUCN Secretariat focal points at least 90 days in advance of the meeting** in order for the IUCN Secretariat to send the necessary request letters to the CITES Secretariat well before registration deadlines.

3.3. Submission of information documents

- Information Documents that Specialist Groups want to submit to meetings of CITES must be sent to the IUCN Secretariat focal points as soon as possible and no later than **two weeks** in advance of a meeting in order to allow adequate time for review. The Head of Delegation may reject Information Docs for a variety of reasons, including if the forum is not considered appropriate or the document requires significant revision (with inadequate time available);

3.4. Serving on an IUCN delegation

- Commission members participating in an IUCN Delegation are subject to the IUCN Secretariat Procedures for IUCN's Policy Work⁷;
- The Head of the Delegation is responsible for all formal communications on behalf of IUCN, approving statements and press releases, and delegating responsibility to delegation members to speak on certain issues.
- IUCN delegates may only make formal interventions where discussed with, and agreed by, the Head of Delegation. Interventions made by delegates in a formal hearing should be respectful, firm, succinct, and grounded in scientific facts. In a formal intervention, the use of wording that draws attention to facts and evidence, rather than promulgates or argues for a particular line of action, should be the norm (e.g., phrases like "draw attention to" may be better than "urges..."), in line with IUCN's general "policy relevant" rather than "policy prescriptive" approach;
- It is the responsibility of all members of the delegation to ensure that the Head of Delegation is kept reliably informed on all potential matters of controversy relating to their particular focal area.

3.5. Serving on a non-IUCN delegation

- Commission members serving on a non-IUCN Delegation (for example, on the Delegation of an observer organization or of a Party) do not have authority to speak on behalf of IUCN, at least not formally (they, of course, have authority to speak on behalf of their respective Delegations);
- Commission members can only speak on behalf of the Specialist Group, when the Specialist Group Chair has expressly given delegated authority to do so.
In informal settings, Commission members can use their discretion in deciding when it is appropriate to speak on behalf of the Specialist Group (subject to receiving approval for this from the Chair of the Specialist Group before the meeting), but should endeavor to make clear the distinction.

3.6. The IUCN – Traffic analyses of CITES proposals

The [CITES Analyses](#) have the potential to influence Parties' decision-making before and during the CoP and are therefore one of IUCN's most critical products. Decisions on whether to add or remove a species from a CITES Appendix are based on biological criteria as well as other factors.

- The Specialist Group Chair, or CITES focal point for the Specialist Group, should assist the Analyses team in ensuring necessary impartial, unbiased, scientifically rigorous input from relevant Specialist Group members and identifying group members that would be able to review the draft Analyses, and to ensure that reviews are done in a timely and expedient manner. Note that the CITES Analyses must be completed within 60 days of the CoP (leaving a total of 90 days for the reviews to be conducted).
- Any Specialist Group Chair, or members of a Specialist Group directly involved in supporting Parties to draft or review proposals for amendments to CITES Appendices (or indeed

been directly responsible for initial drafting the proposals) must declare their involvement to the Global Species Programme. This helps IUCN to maintain the scientific rigour and neutrality of the Analyses by keeping the process ring-fenced from external subjective influences and managing any possible conflicts of interest.

- **Specialist Group members can only develop a listing proposal for a particular species in their personal / institutional capacity (i.e. independently of their IUCN affiliation).** Recognizing that the Specialist Group may subsequently become officially involved either pre-submission (e.g., if asked to review a draft proposal by a Party) or post-submission (in the Analyses), it is the responsibility of Specialist Group members to inform Specialist Group Chairs and the CITES focal point in the group, and the Analyses team if contacted, how they have been involved in such a process.

4. Participation in CITES

CITES Committees⁸ and Conference of Parties

SSC members may have the opportunity to participate in the formal meetings of the Convention in a variety of ways, as highlighted below. In such meetings, the only circumstance in which SSC members are able to represent the interests of IUCN is in those instances indicated below.

Table 1. Opportunities for participation by SSC members in formal CITES meetings noting circumstances under which members may formally represent the interests of IUCN

Meeting	Participation	Authority to speak on behalf of IUCN*
Standing Committee (SC)	As an invited representative on the IUCN delegation	Yes
	As representatives of Parties that are members of the SC, or as delegated observers sent by Parties not members of the SC	No
	As invited observers by the Chairman of the SC	No
Animals and Plants Committee (AC/PC)	As elected members (or alternate members) of the AC & PC	No
	As the elected Chairman or Vice-Chairman of either AC & PC	No
	Representing a Party as an observer	No
	As an invited observer by the Chairman of either AC & PC (TRAFFIC staff usually attend as observers)	No
	As an invited representative on the IUCN delegation	Yes
CITES CoP	As a representative of a Party to the Convention	No
	As a representative of a non-governmental or other inter-governmental organization	No
	As an invited representative on the IUCN delegation ⁹	Yes
	In a formal capacity within CITES at CoP (e.g., as Chairman of Committee I or II).	No

* Pending endorsement of the Head of the delegation

Inter-sessional processes

Inter-sessionally, IUCN Commission members may participate in CITES in any one of a number of activities, and opportunities to do so may be both reactive and proactive. **In all cases below, it is the duty of the Specialist Group Chair or designated CITES focal point in the Specialist Group to notify the relevant IUCN Secretariat focal points in the Global Species Programme before-hand.**

- A Specialist Group chair, or member, may be contacted by the CITES Secretariat (or a contractee of, such as UNEP-WCMC) to review documents, provide expert advice or undertake contracted work related to CITES decisions. In recent years, SSC members have contributed to formal processes, such as the Review of Significant Trade (RST) and the Periodic Review process;
- IUCN Commission members may participate in CITES inter-sessional working groups. IUCN representation on inter-sessional working groups is coordinated by the SSC Network Support Officer for CITES in the GSP with Specialist Group chairs, or members, acting as focal points for different issues;
- Specialist Group members may also become involved in a range of CITES-relevant activities that are not necessarily directly requested by the CITES Secretariat or originate in CITES technical meetings. These include activities related to capacity building and non-detriment findings which are usually conducted with Parties;
- Specialist Group may report incidents or cases of non-compliance to the CITES Secretariat, including direct observations of illegal trade or concerns regarding other non-compliance.

5. Strategic collaborations

A number of Partner organizations may fulfil functions relative to the Resolutions of the Convention that require expert input or the input of Specialist Groups or individual Specialist Group members:

- IUCN is part of a strategic collaboration for action on wildlife trade with TRAFFIC and WWF. The formal agreement aims to harness the joint resources of the three organizations to address critical conservation challenges and opportunities related to trade in wild animals and plants. IUCN, TRAFFIC and WWF hold joint meetings on daily basis during CITES meetings.
- UNEP-WCMC often undertakes technical analyses for the CITES Secretariat and require the input of IUCN. UNEP-WCMC, are aware of the need to keep IUCN Secretariat focal points and Specialist Group Chairs informed on all communications; others may not be, and as noted above it may be prudent to notify the IUCN Secretariat focal points if you are approached by an external organization on a potentially sensitive matter.

6. Responsibilities of the IUCN Secretariat

The IUCN Secretariat is responsible for the overall coordination of the Union's engagement in CITES, CMS and CBD. The IUCN Secretariat has assigned focal points to serve as the primary liaison with Specialist Groups. It is the responsibility of the IUCN Secretariat focal points to:

- Ensure and maintain good communications with Specialist Group Chairs, or their designated CITES focal points, on all CITES matters, including notifying Groups of any CITES-related matters relevant to species within their remit whether or not on the formal agenda of a forthcoming meeting;
- Extend to Specialist Groups a formal invitation to serve on the IUCN Delegation at forthcoming meetings
- Provide each Delegate with an opportunity to contribute to IUCN's preparation document in advance of any meeting
- Provide each Delegate with a meeting pack, which includes guidance on how the delegation is organised
- Ensure IUCN's general compliance with CITES procedures, and to assist Groups, and in partic-

ular any individuals new to the CITES process, with understanding and complying with CITES procedures

- Coordinate IUCN's preparations in advance of formal CITES meetings
- Involve and consult Specialist Groups in the CITES Analyses. In such cases, the Analyses team will interact with one person in the Specialist Group, either the CITES focal point or the Specialist Group Chair (who should recommend suitable Specialist Group members as potential reviewers to the Analyses team). It is the responsibility of the Analyses team to seek a disclosure of any conflict of interest from that Specialist Group member directly (advised, where able, by the Chair or CITES focal point)
- Liaise with the CITES Secretariat to develop and administer project grants for Commission members to assist in the implementation of decisions

¹ For example, the original CITES rhino Resolution 9.14 (subsequently revised) was drafted by the SSC African and Asian Rhino Specialist Groups at the request of the CITES Secretariat, presented to the CoP by a Scientific/Programme Officer from each group, and subsequently approved with minor modifications.

² Note that such a notice should invariably be made by the Chair of the Group, and if not the Chair then with the Chair's knowledge and consent. See also "Speaking on behalf of the Specialist Group" in "Guidelines for IUCN SSC Specialist Group and Task Force Chairs"

³ <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/cop/E17-CoP-Rules.pdf>

⁴ <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/sc/E-SC70-RoP-2018.pdf>

⁵ <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/ac/E-AC30-RoP-2018.pdf>

⁶ <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/pc/E-PC24-RoP-2018.pdf>

⁷ [IUCN Global Policy](#) (last version 7th May)

⁸ See <http://www.cites.org/eng/disc/sc.php> and http://www.cites.org/eng/disc/ac_pc.php

⁹ For example, in the case of the AfrSG, the Scientific Officer attended CoP 15 as part of the IUCN Delegation, while seven other AfrSG members attended representing range States and non-governmental and international governmental organizations.

