



Four Paws position for the upcoming 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CITES CoP19

Summary

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is an international agreement which aims to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten the survival of the species. The EU became a Party to the CITES in 2015.

The Conference of Parties (CoP) meets every two/three years, to review progress in the conservation of species and to discuss recommendations and decisions. The next CoP will take place in Panama City, from 14 to 25 November.

The Commission adopted the [proposal for a Council Decision](#) to be taken on behalf of the EU in preparation of the CoP19.

The European Parliament is currently working on a resolution on the CITES Cop19. The EU has a clear role to play to better protect big cats and to address the relationship that exists between pandemics, zoonoses and the trade in wild animals.

1. Strengthening the EU's role in the global fight against wildlife trafficking

In recent years, wildlife trafficking became a priority for the EU and its Member States. The Commission recently published the Biodiversity for Strategy for 2030 and committed to renew the EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking, which will be published in September 2022. FOUR PAWS welcomes this positive commitment to step up efforts to combat wildlife trafficking and hopes the Commission will be ambitious in its plans.

Although it is crucial to continue efforts to tackle the illegal trade, it is also vital to address the legal trade in wildlife, that has become highly unsustainable¹. The exploitation of wild animals for commercial trade is driving wild populations towards extinction, as consumer demand for endangered species puts pressure on free-living populations.

Recommendations:

- It is imperative for the EU to recognise the manifest link between illegal trade and legal trade and to address the adverse effects of the legal trade which can serve as a cover for illegal trade activities, provides ample laundering opportunities and complicates enforcement.

2. Big Cats

Big cats are facing unprecedented issues such as illegal trafficking and keeping, poaching, habitat loss, due to human influence.

Although CITES prohibits the trade in wild species listed in Annex I of the Convention, there is also an interpretation in the Convention that a captive-bred specimen of an Appendix I species can be traded as Appendix II, therefore can be traded with permits.

While it is forbidden to trade wild tigers, it is allowed to trade captive-bred tigers and their parts. EU Wildlife trade regulations do not prevent this loophole, even though CITES recommendations opposes the commercial breeding and trade in tigers for their parts. Member States continue to import, and export live tigers and tiger parts registered under the CITES code of commercial trade.

FOUR PAWS research shows that the legal commercial trade in captive-bred species such as tigers and other big cats is highly detrimental as it stimulates demand, complicates enforcement, and provides ample laundering opportunities².

Recommendations:

- Tiger farms should be closed and all commercial trade in captive-bred tigers and their parts needs to be banned at the CITES CoP19.
- Parties that have clear commercial entities that breed big cats should transition away from commercial exploitation models and only breed and/or trade for strict conservation purposes.
- All Parties should consider converging existing international trade agreements (Decisions and Resolutions) and to develop new international trade agreements that include all big cats (i.e., the 5 species under the Panthera genus) with no separation of the species. With all big cats in decline and trade being a cause of the decline, new Decisions are needed from Parties to protect the 5 big cat species.

3. Role of CITES in reducing risk of future zoonotic disease emergence associated with international wildlife trade

The COVID-19 pandemic is widely believed to have been transmitted from wildlife to humans. The SARS-CoV-2 virus has caused economic rampage, panic and confusion and impacted millions of people worldwide.

Whether legal or illegal, the wildlife trade potentially leads to the introduction and transmission of zoonotic diseases that can be harmful to humans and other animals. Scientists estimate that 75% of emerging infectious diseases that have affected people over the past three decades originated from animals³.

The FOUR PAWS Future Study on Pandemics⁴ stresses that wildlife trade, encroachment into wildlife habitats, and wildlife farming are some of the triggers or drivers of zoonotic diseases. The close contact between humans and different species of wild animals can facilitate the animal-to-human spill over of new viruses that are capable of infecting diverse host species.

Recommendations:

- The EU and all Parties should adhere to the precautionary principle and incorporate the One Health principle into the CITES; The EU and all Parties should pay particular attention to species that are elevated risk of zoonotic diseases.

4. Enforcement

There are a number of enforcement issues related to CITES that need to be addressed. Currently, there is no centralised database of big cats in the EU and legislation and enforcement differs from country to country. It is possible to move animals from border to border without proper regulation and checks. Often, paperwork can be forged, and training is needed to help spot criminal activity and non-compliance.

Recommendations:

- All Parties should implement effective national legislation to implement the Decisions and Resolutions adopted through the Convention itself.
- Better record-keeping is needed for Appendix I (including captive bred) specimens bred and kept in captivity. Including the development of risk indicators in relation to environment, security and husbandry practices including, for example greater detail on how records are kept, data management and reporting done; greater detail in terms of how the stock/inventory system is run and how it is audited; security in terms of transport, storage, and disposal.
- The EU and all Parties should implement dissuasive sanctions in case of non-compliance.

4. Transparency and reporting

Finally, but yet importantly, transparency and reporting need to be improved. Some Parties do not submit their annual report on time, or which poses a problem in terms of enforcement and undermines efforts to tackle illegal trade and corruption.

Recommendations:

- The EU and all Parties should submit annual reports to the CITES Secretariat on illegal trade, permits and certificates granted, quantities and types of specimens, names of species as included in Appendix I, II, III, in a timely manner.
- All Parties and the EU should ensure that data is uploaded to the CITES Trade Database in a timely manner and that greater efforts are made to ensure discrepancies in export and import permits are minimised.
- Greater transparency is needed in making annual reports from Parties available for civil society.
- Greater transparency is needed in the commercial trade of Appendix I species (including captive-bred) in efforts to fight corruption, illegal trade, trafficking and laundering of specimens.

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Endnotes

1 IPBES (2020) Workshop Report on Biodiversity and Pandemics of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. Daszak, P., Amuasi, J., das Neves, C. G., Hayman, D., Kuiken, T., Roche, B., Zambrana-Torrel, C., Buss, P., Dondarova, H., Feferholtz, Y., Földvári, G., Igbinosa, E., Junglen, S., Liu, Q., Suzan, G., Uhart, M., Wannous, C., Woolaston, K., Mosig Reidl, P., O'Brien, K., Pascual, U., Stoett, P., Li, H., Ngo, H. T., IPBES secretariat, Bonn, Germany, DOI:10.5281/zenodo.4147317

2 FOUR PAWS (March 2020) 'Europe's second-class tigers, Revealing the out-of-control captive tiger numbers and commercial trade' available at: https://media.4-paws.org/4/1/e/b/41ebc3113a32239fa-6ca2405f610c22fd86a4b23/Report_Europes-second-class-tigers_EN_FP-2020_1.pdf

3 UNEP (2020) 'Preventing the next pandemic - Zoonotic diseases and how to break the chain of transmission', available at: <https://www.unep.org/resources/report/preventing-future-zoonotic-disease-outbreaks-protecting-environment-animals-and>

4 How to prevent the next pandemic? Results of the FOUR PAWS Future Study "COVID-19 and the interconnection between human wellbeing, animal welfare, the environment, and pandemics", October 2021, available at: https://media.4-paws.org/0/f/a/f/0fafab297790f41ccb97b741c72188be99d582f/FOUR-PAWS_Pandemic-Future-Study-Brochure_EN_211019.pdf

