

# The 19th Conference of the Parties on CITES, Panama, 14 - 25 November 2022

## KEY FINDINGS

Both **legal and illegal wildlife trade** constitute **huge global markets** with significant impacts on biodiversity.

**Illegal wildlife trade is frequently linked to other serious crimes**, such as fraud, corruption, money-laundering and cross-border trafficking of drugs and arms. It is an issue that goes beyond the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and **needs to be mainstreamed with crime prevention**. There is also evidence that illegal trade is increasingly taking place online. Despite the high degree of political attention that illegal wildlife trade has attracted, **weaknesses hinder the global implementation of CITES**. Areas for attention include strengthening data gathering, enforcement and funding; combating corruption; implementing new methods to reduce demand, especially for illegal wildlife trade; and applying the One Health approach to address zoonoses linked to wildlife trade.

The EU has played a key role in supporting CITES around the world. Within Europe, an ambitious new **EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking** is needed to strengthen enforcement in Europe and to sustain global action, as emphasised by the European Parliament in October 2022.

The 19<sup>th</sup> meeting of the CITES Conference of the Parties (CITES COP19), to be held in Panama City in November 2022, provides an opportunity for Parties to review the implementation of the Convention, make recommendations to improve its effectiveness, discuss resources for stronger action, and consider amendments to improve the protection of key species.



## Background

### 1. Introduction to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)

In 2016, UNEP estimated the value of worldwide illegal trafficking of wild animals, plants and their products at USD 7 to 23 billion (EUR 7.5 to 24.5 billion), making it one of the top five global forms of environmental crime<sup>1</sup>. The legal

trade is even larger: a study for the European Parliament in the same year estimated the EU's legal trade at EUR 100 billion<sup>2</sup>. Since entering into force in 1975, [CITES](#) has regulated this global trade. CITES establishes



what is legal and illegal wildlife trade, and its 184 Parties must adopt legislation to implement and enforce its provisions.

Listing species under Appendices I or II requires a two-thirds majority of Parties present and voting (meaning Parties present and casting an affirmative or negative vote) during the CITES COP. Currently, [more than 38 700 species](#) – including approximately 5 950 species of animals and 32 800 species of plants – are protected under the three Appendices.

The institutional structure of CITES includes the Secretariat; the COP, which meets every two to three years; and the three permanent committees – the Standing Committee (Senior Committee) which takes decisions on the implementation and compliance of the Convention, and the animals and plants committees (Scientific Advisory bodies). The Parties in turn must establish their own management and scientific authorities<sup>3</sup>.

### The CITES Appendices

**Appendix I** lists species that are the most endangered: trade in live specimens, parts and derivatives is only allowed in exceptional circumstances.

**Appendix II** lists species that may be threatened unless trade is controlled: this is done via a system of permits and certificates.

**Appendix III** lists species protected in one country, at the request of that Party.

Source: [The CITES Appendices](#)

The CITES Secretariat has a budget of around EUR 6 million per year, which covers the costs of the staff and the official meetings of the three permanent committees; therefore, extra-budgetary funding is crucial for programmes and actions. In this respect, financial support from the EU and other donors has been vital<sup>4</sup>.

In the fight against illegal wildlife trafficking, the CITES Secretariat has joined forces with other international organisations, notably by forming the [International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime \(ICWC\)](#) with Interpol (the International Criminal Police Organization), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the World Customs Organization (WCO) and the World Bank to coordinate training, capacity building and other joint actions.

## 2. Implementing CITES in the EU

The EU is a major destination for both legal and illegal wildlife imports. The EU is also important in legal and illegal transit: for example, in 2017, a study estimated that 44 % of the illegal trafficking of pangolins and their products from Africa to Asia went through Europe<sup>5</sup>. In addition, the EU is a source of some illegally traded specimens: in 2017, a Europol operation reported that more than 10 tonnes of glass eels had been smuggled from the EU to China, with an estimated profit of EUR 10 million<sup>6</sup>.

All EU Member States and, since 2015, the European Union itself are Parties to CITES. The provisions of CITES and the majority of CITES Resolutions were incorporated into EU law through the EU Wildlife Trade Regulations, namely: [Council Regulation \(EC\) No 338/97](#), implemented through [Commission Regulation \(EC\) No 865/2006](#) and [Commission Implementing Regulation \(EU\) No 792/2012](#). In 2016, the European Commission adopted the EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking (see the section below on the current state of play of CITES implementation), superseding a 2007 Commission Recommendation on enforcement of wildlife trade.

CITES and the EU Wildlife Trade Regulations are implemented by a range of public bodies at EU and Member State levels. The European Commission oversees the development of EU policy. Its role includes ensuring that Member State legislation is in place to effectively regulate wildlife trade, monitoring Member State actions, and submitting [biennial reports](#) to the CITES Secretariat. The Commission is supported by four groups with Member State representatives and experts. The [Committee on Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora](#) determines measures to improve the implementation of the EU Regulations. The [Group of Experts](#) advises the Commission on issues not addressed by the Committee. The [Scientific Review Group](#) examines all scientific questions related to the application of the EU Regulations. In cases where the Scientific Review Group believes that trade might have a negative impact, for example, imports from the country of origin

under question may be temporarily suspended. The [Enforcement Group](#) monitors enforcement policies and actions in the Member States, makes recommendations for improvement and provides a forum for information and cooperation.

The European Council decides on proposals to the COPs on behalf of the EU. The European Parliament has closely followed the work of CITES and its implementation. Its resolutions have encouraged stronger action on wildlife trafficking, including the following:

- In October 2022, the Parliament's [resolution](#) on EU strategic objectives for CITES COP19 highlighted a range of key issues, from organised crime to zoonotic disease, some of which are covered in the following sections.
- In November 2017, the European Parliament's resolution ([2017/2963\(RSP\)](#)) called on Madagascar to respect CITES obligations and strengthen enforcement of laws on illegal logging and trafficking.
- In September 2017, the Parliament's resolution on whale hunting ([2017/2712\(RSP\)](#)) called on Norway to withdraw its reservations concerning the CITES Appendix I listings of large whale species and to cease all trade in whale meat and whale products.
- In March 2017, the Parliament's resolution on EU Common Commercial Policy in the context of wildlife sustainability imperatives ([2016/2054\(INI\)](#)) welcomed the ongoing activity of ICCWC.
- In November 2016, the Parliament's resolution on the EU Action Plan against wildlife trafficking ([2016/2076\(INI\)](#)) provided a series of recommendations, for example calling on the EU to increase financial and technical support for developing countries.
- In September 2016, the Parliament's resolution on EU strategic objectives for CITES COP17 ([2016/2664\(RSP\)](#)) called for CITES to address corruption and to use sanctions against Parties that do not comply with key aspects of the Convention.
- In February 2016, the Parliament's resolution on the mid-term review of the EU's Biodiversity Strategy ([2015/2137\(INI\)](#)) stated that the omission of wildlife trafficking and the lack of action relating to EU involvement in CITES were serious gaps in the EU Biodiversity Strategy.

The Member States, as Parties to CITES, must designate one or more *Management Authorities* competent to grant permits or certificates on behalf of that Party and one or more *Scientific Authorities*. Moreover, each Member State must maintain records of trade in species listed in the Appendices: they transmit this information to the Commission for the EU's reporting to the CITES Secretariat. Each Member State is also required to designate at least one *enforcement body*: these include Customs, Police and (in some Member States) Wildlife or Environmental Inspectorates – enforcement roles and competences vary. The complete [list of Member States' authorities](#) has been published by the European Commission.

### 3. Overview of the key issues at stake at COP19 to the CITES

Key topics on the [agenda of COP19](#) include finance and resources for CITES; enforcement matters, including corruption, financial crime and demand reduction (see for example COP19 Agenda Document [33](#)); and



proposals for stronger protection of traded species including sharks, elephants and timber. The Parties have submitted a total of 52 proposals for updating the CITES Appendices (these have been reviewed by the CITES Secretariat in its [provisional assessments](#)). The EU's proposals, as well as issues and proposals for key species, are discussed below. A broad range of other issues will be discussed at COP19, such as a proposal to bring specimens produced through biotechnology under the scope of CITES (addressed in Agenda Document No. [47](#)), which – though not a key issue at present – could have major long-term implications<sup>7</sup>.

# The current state of play of CITES implementation

## 1. Key successes, challenges and opportunities

The [CITES Strategic Vision: 2021-2030](#), adopted at COP18, calls for “all international trade in wild fauna and flora [to be] legal and sustainable” by 2030 (the Vision is addressed in COP19 Agenda Documents No. [10](#) and [10 Add.](#)). While this represents an ideal rather than a practical goal, CITES has had areas of success in moving towards it. These include improving the monitoring of species and illegal trade and combating illegal trade of elephant ivory (see below, [Key groups of species needing protection](#)). Global recognition of the importance of organised crime in wildlife trafficking has grown steadily in recent years; one result is that many Parties have adopted stronger legislation against organised crime.

Nonetheless, serious challenges remain. For legal wildlife trade, many source countries, in particular developing countries, lack resources and capacity to gather the data necessary to assess sustainable levels of trade. Lack of resources and capacity are, likewise, an issue for tackling illegal wildlife trade in source, transit and destination countries. Legislation remains weak in many Parties.

Funding is also a key challenge at global level, as extrabudgetary support is needed to implement new initiatives. The Parliament’s October 2022 resolution notes that many decisions taken at the CITES COP18 in 2019 are still unfunded. Funding will be needed for initiatives decided at COP19: for example, COP19 will consider a proposal to support national capacity building (see Agenda Document No. [16](#)). To strengthening financing, the CITES Secretariat is exploring potential new funding sources in discussion with the Global Environment Fund and other actors (see Agenda Document No. [7.5](#)).

Moreover, the management of legal wildlife trade and the fight against illegal trade needs to consider the livelihoods of rural communities, in particular in developing countries, that depend on the harvest and trade of species for income as well as food security (an issue to be addressed at COP19 in Agenda Document No. [14](#)). For example, some rural communities in Africa rely on trophy hunting (with trophies then exported by the hunters). In certain cases, the prohibition of wildlife trade could reduce economic opportunities or spur illegal trade. Consequently, a balance is needed between allowing legal and sustainable trade that benefits communities and restricting wildlife trade. Related to this, TRAFFIC, an NGO that focuses on wildlife trade, urges CITES to strengthen input from rural communities in its decision-making processes<sup>8</sup>: mechanisms for their input into work under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) could provide an example. It is important to understand how these communities perceive wildlife and how – with the right incentives – they can be better wildlife protectors (see Agenda Document No. [15](#)).

Among the opportunities, CITES can continue building links with other global initiatives, include global action on organised crime (discussed in the following section on wildlife trafficking). A key task will be to integrate CITES into the [Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework](#), to be discussed at the UN Biodiversity Conference in December 2022 (see Agenda document [17.1](#)).

The European Parliament’s [resolution](#) on COP19 notes that corruption is an obstacle to better implementation. Moreover, it recommends further actions to strengthen the implementation of CITES: for example, suggesting that Parties be held accountable for not implementing the Convention’s provisions, that annual illegal trade reports be made publicly available to ensure transparency, and that greater detail be provided in record-keeping for Appendix I species. The Parliament’s resolution also calls for the protection of whistle-blowers, journalists, wildlife rangers and environmental and human rights’ defenders.

Greater and more targeted efforts to reduce demand for illegal products are also required<sup>9</sup>. Several international actions have been implemented already: for example, the EU has supported a project in China to reduce demand for pangolins and rosewood. Demand reduction techniques are not limited to awareness raising campaigns: there are also behaviour changing techniques based on social science that can be used



to develop demand reduction activities. COP19 will discuss guidance for governments to develop strategies using the latest scientific thinking (see Agenda Document No. [38](#)).

## 2. Global action against organised crime in wildlife

Wildlife trafficking is truly a [global issue](#) affecting some of the world's most endangered species. Countries in Africa and Latin-America are the key source countries, whereas countries in Europe and North America are major destinations. Countries in Asia are important as both source and destination countries<sup>10</sup>. Between 2018 and 2019, TRAFFIC conducted a [series of interviews with convicted offenders](#), who stated that they participated in a range of activities, sometimes fulfilling more than one role along the illegal wildlife supply chain, including the harvest, transport, storage and processing, and sale of commodities to domestic or international intermediaries.

Illegal wildlife trade needs to be mainstreamed with crime prevention, as it is not just an environmental issue<sup>11</sup>. UNODC's [2020 World Wildlife Crime Report](#) notes that illegal wildlife trade is increasingly recognised as a specialised area of organised crime. It involves a range of individuals acting as poachers, smugglers, resellers, and buyers<sup>12</sup> and it is linked to other serious crimes, such as fraud, corruption, and money-laundering, as well as cross-border trafficking of drugs and arms<sup>13</sup>. There is evidence that wildlife crime can be linked to [terrorism](#). Financial investigations<sup>14</sup> can help to tackle illegal wildlife trade but are still rarely used<sup>15</sup>.

A key step is to strengthen national penalties. In 2016, CITES COP17 recommended that Parties make illegal wildlife trafficking involving organised groups as a 'serious crime'. In particular, COP17 recommended making trafficking punishable by penalties of at least four years or more. In the same vein, [ICWC](#) has called on countries to recognise wildlife and forest crime as a serious transnational organised crime. In 2018, UNODC – in collaboration with the CITES Secretariat and other international organisations – developed a [Guide on Drafting Legislation to Combat Wildlife Crime](#). UNODC has also established the World WISE Database on wildlife seizure incidents.

In 2021, the UN General Assembly called on parties to use the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) to tackle illegal wildlife trafficking. The [European Parliament's resolution of October 2022](#) calls for the preparation and adoption of a protocol on environmental crime under UNTOC, including a provision obliging Parties to criminalise the import of and trade in wildlife that has been taken illegally from its country of origin.

The CITES Secretariat has supported capacity building on enforcement – a key need in many Parties – via workshops, a [compliance assessment programme](#) (supported by EU funding) and [training materials](#). Many countries have introduced penalties for wildlife trafficking involving organised groups<sup>16</sup>. Nevertheless, as underlined by [UNODC](#), the recognition of wildlife crime as a 'serious crime' is a first step that needs to be followed by national legislation, its proper enforcement and then action through national criminal justice systems: around the world, further efforts are needed.

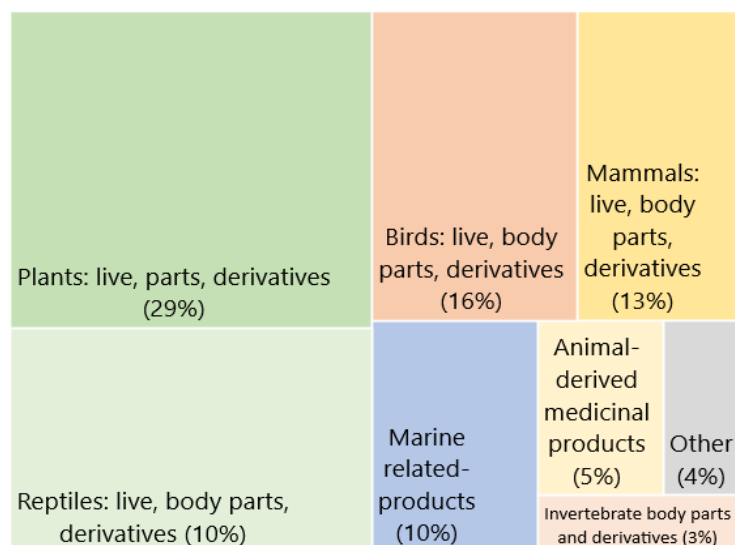
In addition, a growing global concern is that wildlife trafficking has increasingly [used the Internet](#). In 2019, COP18 agreed to strengthen CITES action against online wildlife crime<sup>17</sup>. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the growth of online wildlife trafficking<sup>18</sup>. In 2020, INTERPOL, in cooperation with the CITES Secretariat, developed [practical guidelines](#) to assist law enforcement agencies to combat wildlife crime linked to the Internet (see Agenda Document No. [37](#)).

### 3. Implementation of the revised EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking 2016-2020

EU Member States reported almost 4 000 seizures of illegal wildlife specimens in 2019. Plants were the largest share, followed by birds, mammals and reptiles (Figure 1<sup>19</sup>). One concern, however, is that seizures vary greatly among Member States, which may indicate differences in enforcement levels<sup>20</sup>.

The [EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking](#) for 2016 to 2020 has sought to strengthen efforts inside the EU as well as reinforce the EU's role in the global fight against trafficking. The Action Plan is based on three priorities: (1) prevention, addressing root causes, (2) the implementation and enforcement of existing rules along with greater action against organised wildlife crime, and (3) strengthening global partnerships of source, consumer and transit countries.

Figure 1: Illegal specimens seized by EU Member States, 2019



Source: EU-TWIX database, compiled by TRAFFIC (2020)

The fight against trafficking has increasingly been mainstreamed, and the Action Plan has been implemented at EU level by Commission services as well as by the European External Action Service, Europol and Eurojust. Moreover, since 2018, illegal wildlife trade is included in the [European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats \(EMPACT\) policy cycle](#) under environmental crime<sup>21</sup>. The 'Wise Persons Group', convened by the European Commission's DG Taxation and Customs Union, has reviewed ways to strengthen customs enforcement. The 2021 European Commission's [Organised Crime Strategy](#) addresses environmental crime, including wildlife trafficking.

The EU has also played an important role in supporting global action. In 2020 and 2021, for example, the EU contributed about EUR 5.8 million for CITES extra-budgetary programmes<sup>22</sup>, including support for the global monitoring of wildlife trafficking and the work of ICCWC to coordinate international bodies. EU technical assistance has moreover built capacity in many source countries.

The European Commission's 2018 [progress report](#) on the implementation of the Action Plan concluded that, despite progress both at European and national levels, wildlife trafficking was still thriving. TRAFFIC has emphasised that greater enforcement action at Member State level is needed<sup>23</sup>.

In 2021, the Commission launched a public consultation for the evaluation and revision of the Action Plan. The [summary of this consultation](#), published in March 2022, showed a divergence of views between public authorities and companies, on the one side, which more frequently consider actions taken to implement the Action Plan as effective and sufficient, and citizens and NGOs on the other side suggesting that, whilst the Action Plan continues to be needed, its implementation by Member States has not been fully effective. This divergence in opinions was also seen regarding actions to reduce demand for illegal wildlife products and to promote sustainable economic activities benefiting rural communities living in or near wildlife habitats. [TRAFFIC and WWF](#), for example, have criticised the lack of resources for the Action Plan and called for greater policy attention to wildlife trafficking in some Member States<sup>24</sup>.

The European Parliament's [resolution](#) on COP19 calls on the European Commission to prepare an ambitious, new EU Action Plan without delay. The new Action Plan should include evidence-based demand reduction initiatives in key consumer countries, including those within the EU. The EP's resolution, moreover, calls on the European Commission and Member States to allocate sufficient human and financial resources for the new Action Plan and to build more capacity and better train enforcement and judicial authorities. It also calls on the European Commission and the Member States to tackle online trade, ensuring that wildlife cybercrime is given the same level of priority as other forms of cybercrime. Adequate funding for non-EU countries and an effective monitoring and evaluation mechanism are also needed.

## Strengthening species protection: the EU position

In [Council Decision \(EU\) 2022/982](#), the EU has proposed a series of amendments for COP19, to strengthen protection for 12 groups of species (see Table 1).

Table 1: Overview of the EU proposals

Taxonomic group	Taxon (and common name)	Proposal
Reptiles	Physignathus cocincinus (Chinese water dragon)	Include in App. II
	Cuora galbinifrons (Indochinese box turtle)	Transfer from App. II to App. I
Amphibians	Laotriton laoensis (Laos warty newt)	Include in App. II
	Agalychnis lemur (Lemur leaf frog)	
Fish	All species of Sphyrnidae spp. (Hammerhead sharks) not yet included in Appendix II	
Invertebrates	Thelenota ananas, T. anax, T. rubralineata (Sea cucumbers)	
Trees	Khaya spp. (African mahogany), Populations of Africa	
	Azelia spp. (Pod mahogany), Populations of Africa	
	Handroanthus spp. (Trumpet tree); Tabebuia spp. and Roseodendron spp.	
	Pterocarpus spp. (Padauk), Populations of Africa	
Other plants	Rhodiola spp.	
Cartilaginous fishes	Carcharhinidae spp. (Requiem sharks)	

## Key groups of species needing protection

COP19 will discuss the protection of a range of animal and plant species, including those proposed by the EU. The following pages discuss four key groups of species: sharks, big cats, African elephants and tropical trees.

### a. Sharks

Since 1970, global shark populations have dropped by an estimated 71 %; currently, 37 % of shark species are threatened with extinction. The main pressure is overfishing<sup>25</sup>, and the EU is among the exporters of shark meat, including fins, taken by its global fishing fleets<sup>26</sup>.

At COP19, four proposals have been made to list shark (and ray) species in Appendix II: [one](#) to list over 50 requiem shark species, supported by the EU (see Table 1) and other Parties to the Convention; [another proposal](#), also supported by the EU, to list hammerhead sharks; a [proposal](#) to include the family Rhinobatidae (guitarfishes); and a [proposal](#) by Brazil to include endemic freshwater stingrays. The first three proposals may be controversial as they list numerous species: for requiem sharks, the Secretariat found that only seven species proposed directly meet the criteria for Appendix II, while the others are “look-alike” species that, if not protected, might be used to conceal the trade of more endangered ones. (Brazil’s proposal covers freshwater stingrays in the Brazilian Amazon and is not expected to be controversial.)<sup>27</sup>

### b. Big cats

Tigers have already disappeared from about 90 % of their original habitat<sup>28</sup>. Similarly, African lion populations dropped by 40 %<sup>29</sup> in just 20 years. Poaching for trading purposes has been a major pressure: tiger parts are used for traditional medicine, for example, and for jewellery. All species of big cats, except for lions, are listed in the CITES Appendix I; the European Parliament’s resolution of October 2022 on COP19 calls for this species to be included. A 2021 TRAFFIC study in Mozambique and Tanzania found that domestic trade and conflicts with growing human populations were key threats to this species; however, international trafficking of lion parts was also a pressure<sup>30</sup>.

A key issue is the protection of tigers. UNODC’s 2020 *World Wildlife Crime Report* cites 1 032 seizures worldwide related to tigers from 2007 to 2018, four-fifths in Thailand and India, with medicinal products reportedly containing tiger parts representing 40 % of the seizures. Although CITES COP14 agreed that tigers should not be bred for commercial trade, facilities in countries including Thailand and China reportedly have thousands of captive tigers, and concerns remain that breeding facilities continue to use them for illegal trade<sup>31</sup>. A further concern is that other big cat parts are used as a substitute for tigers: following the implementation of a ban on the tiger trade in China, the country stated that leopard bones could be used as a substitute for tiger bones<sup>32</sup>. TRAFFIC has underlined the need for better data on legal and illegal trade related to big cats<sup>33</sup>.

While CITES COP18 in 2019 approved a decision establishing a Big Cats Task Force, this group has yet to meet, due in part to the COVID-19 pandemic. At COP19, a document and proposed decision (addressed in Agenda Document No. [67](#)) to put in place the Task Force will be discussed: the Task Force would review enforcement priorities, exchange intelligence on illegal trade and support work on demand reduction. COP19 will also discuss a document on Asian big cats (Agenda Document No. [68](#)), proposing actions including a mission by the CITES Secretariat to Asian breeding facilities.

### c. Elephants

The African Elephant Status Report published by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) estimates that the population of this species declined by 10 000 individuals a year from 2006 to 2015. Poaching for ivory is a key factor in this decline<sup>34</sup>. More recently, CITES programmes and actions by range and destination states have helped to reduce illegal killing of elephants and illegal trade of elephant ivory, according to data from more than 100 sites. Trends in elephant poaching are tracked by the CITES program “[Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants](#)” (MIKE) (see Agenda Document No. [22](#)). On the demand side, key



Parties including China and the US have pledged to close their domestic ivory markets. Ivory prices are decreasing, hopefully meaning that demand has also decreased<sup>35</sup>.

At COP19, Parties have made two proposals to be discussed in the Scientific Committee. A [proposal](#) by west African Parties would put all African elephant populations in Appendix I. In southern Africa, however, elephant populations are not in decline, and this proposal – which is reflected in the European Parliament's October 2022 resolution – is likely to be controversial. A key concern is that if the proposal were approved, one or more southern African countries would make a Party Reservation, which would largely exempt them from the restrictions. Another proposal, by Zimbabwe, would loosen restrictions on the ivory trade. In addition, the Regulatory Committee will consider working documents regarding trade in live elephants; this topic is also likely to be difficult as Parties are divided<sup>36</sup>.

#### d. Tree species

Illegal logging and trade of tree species, in particular in tropical countries, contributes to deforestation and climate change, while reducing source country incomes<sup>37</sup>. COP19 will discuss seven proposals on tree species, including the two by the EU on African species (see Table 1 above). The seven proposals cover over 150 species, and could have a major influence on protecting forests, if fully implemented (addressed in Agenda Document No. [19](#)).

The EU has provided EUR 7 million for the 'CITES tree species programme' (addressed in Agenda Document No. [20](#)), a type of trust fund managed by the CITES Secretariat with the International Tropical Timber Organization; however, this funding will end soon, and further support for source countries will be needed to accelerate implementation of current and future restrictions.

## CITES and the One Health approach

An estimated 80 % of emerging diseases in humans are zoonoses, infectious diseases spread from animals to humans, and 70 % of these zoonoses derive from wild animals<sup>38</sup>. International trade in wild animals is a key driver of these emerging diseases<sup>39</sup>, though domestic trade in wild animals and their meat as well as migratory animals (such as birds spreading bird flu) are considered at least as or more important; diseases from livestock are also a key driver<sup>40</sup>.

### The One Health Approach

*"an integrated, unifying approach that aims to sustainably balance and optimize the health of people, animals and ecosystems. It recognizes the health of humans, domestic and wild animals, plants, and the wider environment (including ecosystems) are closely linked and inter-dependent."*

Source: [One Health High-Level Expert Panel](#)

One Health (see the box) provides an approach to better manage the many links between the environment and human health. A range of factors shape the risks of zoonotic diseases from wild animals, including: the species being traded; the form (live animals, meat, other products); the locations where the animal is hunted or raised, collection points, transport hubs, and markets; and the preventive measures being taken. The [threat of zoonotic disease](#) exists for both legal and illegal trade.

Four international bodies are leading global action on One Health and zoonotic disease risk. In October 2022, this 'Quadripartite' – bringing together the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) – launched an international [One Health Joint Plan of Action](#) that addresses a range of issues including the illegal trade in wildlife. An [international alliance of NGOs, research organisations and government bodies](#) is raising awareness and promoting measures to address health risks in wildlife trade.

As wildlife trade is a factor in zoonotic disease, CITES also has a key role to play. While there have been suggestions to amend CITES to restrict international and domestic trade in species with a high risk of

zoonotic disease transmission, this might increase illegal trade. The CITES Secretariat has carried out work related to disease transmission, including cooperation with the International Air Transport Association (IATA) on the safe transport of live animals (addressed in Agenda Document No. [52](#)) and with WOAHA on better coordination between veterinarians and national CITES management authorities.

The European Parliament's October 2022 resolution on COP19 emphasises the role that CITES should play in preventing future pandemics and underlines the importance of the One Health approach; it calls on CITES to strengthen cooperation with other international organisations. TRAFFIC has urged better cooperation among agencies at national and international levels and better monitoring and transparency of supply chains<sup>41</sup>. At COP19, a draft resolution submitted by seven west African Parties calls for the creation and funding of a CITES One Health Expert Panel and the development of a One Health CITES Action Plan (see Agenda Document No. [23.2](#)). The resolution also calls on Parties to raise awareness of and take action against zoonotic disease risks.

The COVID-19 pandemic has in turn hindered international action against wildlife trafficking (see Agenda Document No. [24](#)): it appears that the decreased number of seizures recorded during the pandemic are related to less enforcement rather than a decrease in illegal trafficking<sup>42</sup>. The pandemic also interrupted CITES work at international level.

## Conclusions

While CITES has established a strong and well-established global framework to ensure that legal trade in animals and plants does not threaten their survival in the wild, and to combat illegal wildlife trade, many challenges need to be addressed for its effective implementation. Notably, greater resources and capacity-building are required to ensure that legal wildlife trade is sustainable and the illegal trade is fought effectively. National legal systems around the world need to provide effective sanctions for wildlife trafficking. Stronger action is required to address new forms of wildlife trafficking, notably via the Internet.

The upcoming COP19 in Panama offers the opportunity to discuss key issues, consider amendments to the CITES Appendices and strengthen international cooperation in the effort to tackle illegal wildlife trade. COP19 will consider actions to strengthen protection for key species, including sharks, big cats, elephants and trees. The Conference can also advance the role of CITES in supporting the One Health approach to preventing zoonotic disease.

Greater international cooperation, stronger national actions and better coordination among and within Parties are needed to move further towards the CITES 2030 Vision, that all wildlife trade is legal and sustainable. The EU can play a key role in promoting global cooperation at COP19 and in supporting European and global actions to implement the decisions taken in Panama.

- <sup>1</sup> UNEP and INTERPOL, The Rise of Environmental Crime: A Growing Threat To Natural Resources, Peace, Development And Security, 2016, <https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/7662>.
- <sup>2</sup> Duffy, R., EU trade policy and the wildlife trade (study for the European Parliament, Policy Department, Directorate-General for External Policies), 2016, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/578025/EXPO\\_STU\(2016\)578025\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/578025/EXPO_STU(2016)578025_EN.pdf).
- <sup>3</sup> Mitsilegas, V., Fasoli, E., Giuffreda, F., Fitzmaurice, M., Environmental Crime at the International Level: Recent Trends, in The Legal Regulation of Environmental Crime: The International and European Dimension, Queen Mary Studies in International Law, Volume 47, 2022, <https://brill.com/view/serial/QMIL>.
- <sup>4</sup> Interview with CITES Secretariat, 14.10.2022.
- <sup>5</sup> Sarah Heinrich, Talia A. Wittman, Joshua V. Ross, Chris R. Shepherd, Daniel W.S. Challender, & Phillip Cassey, [The Global Trafficking of Pangolins: A Comprehensive Summary of Seizures and Trafficking Routes from 2010–2015](https://www.traffic.org/site/assets/files/1606/global-pangolin-assessment.pdf), at 16, 24, TRAFFIC (2017), <https://www.traffic.org/site/assets/files/1606/global-pangolin-assessment.pdf>.
- <sup>6</sup> Lemaître S. & Hervé-Fournereau N., 2020, [Fighting Wildlife Trafficking: An Overview of the EU's Implementation of Its Action Plan Against Wildlife Trafficking](https://doi.org/10.1080/13880292.2020.1775949), Journal of International Wildlife Law & Policy, 23:1, 62-81, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13880292.2020.1775949>.
- <sup>7</sup> Interview with CITES Secretariat, 14.10.2022.
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