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Your ref.: /

Ms. Elinor Hammar skjöld
Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and
United Nations Legal Counsel
United Nations
New York, NY 10017
United States of America

Geneva, 18 May 2026

Dear Ms.  Hammar skjöld,

I have the pleasure of writing to you in response to your letter dated 19 February 2026, in which you invited the Secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) to submit a contribution to the report of the Secretary-General on oceans and the law of the sea.

The CITES Secretariat has been following global developments on oceans closely and has actively cooperated with the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (DOALOS/OLA) and other relevant UN Entities, in particular through UN-Oceans. Considering the importance and increasing number of marine species included in the Appendices of the Convention, as also reflected in the recent Decisions adopted by the CITES Parties at the 20th meeting of the Conference of Parties (CoP20; Samarkand, November 2025), we envisage a further expansion of such inter-agency cooperation and synergies.

The Convention provides a critical legal framework to ensure that the survival of marine species subject to international trade is not threatened by illegal or unsustainable practices. With 185 Parties, legally bound by the provisions of the Convention, it effectively contributes to the objectives of conservation and sustainable use of the oceans and their resources, as reflected in the United Nations General Assembly Resolutions on Oceans and the law of the sea and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular SDG 14.

We are pleased to provide information on activities implemented since September 2025 under the CITES programme of work. This is based on the Resolutions and Decisions of the CITES Parties and includes updates on the outcomes of the CITES CoP20, as well as the work of the CITES Standing Committee, the CITES Secretariat and the [International Consortium on Combatting Wildlife Crime \(ICWC\)](#).

At CoP20, CITES Parties considered a broad range of issues related to trade in marine species and adopted relevant amendments to the CITES Appendices, as well as new and amended Resolutions and Decisions, including the following:

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- The transfer of eleven species from Appendix II to Appendix I, meaning that international trade is only permitted in exceptional circumstances, in accordance with Article III of the Convention. The eleven species were *Carcharhinus longimanus* (Oceanic whitetip shark), *Rhincodon typus* (whale shark), and nine species listed under *Mobulidae* spp. (mobula rays).
- The inclusion of 45 additional species in Appendix II (16 Centrophoridae species, *Galeorhinus galeus*, and 28 *Mustelus* species), thereby bringing their international trade under CITES regulation.
- The adoption of an amendment of Appendix II with regard to *Glaucostegus* and Rhinidae species, prohibiting commercial international trade in these species taken from the wild.
- The amendment of [Resolution Conf. 16.4 \(Rev. CoP20\)](#) on *Cooperation of CITES with other biodiversity-related conventions* and [Resolution Conf. 18.3 \(Rev. CoP20\)](#) on *CITES Strategic Vision: 2021-2030*, to recognize the adoption of Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the *Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement)*, noting its relevance to global efforts for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity.
- The adoption of a new [Resolution Conf. 20.3](#) on *Trade, conservation and management of anguillid eel species* (*Anguilla* spp.), aimed at supporting legal, sustainable and traceable trade in these species.
- The amendment of [Resolution Conf. 19.5 \(Rev. CoP20\)](#) on *Conservation of and trade in marine turtles*. The amendments addressed compliance and enforcement aspects relevant to marine turtles and, in this regard, further strengthened the Resolution and the response of the Convention to illegal trade in the species.
- The adoption of new [Decisions 20.117 and 20.118](#) on *Introduction from the sea (IFS)*, referring to the transportation of CITES-listed species caught in areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ), including a mandate to the Secretariat to continue assisting Parties and to provide additional guidance on the implementation of IFS provisions.
- The adoption of new or amended Decisions to support the implementation of CITES provisions for international trade in CITES-listed marine species, including:
 - [Decisions 20.198 to 20.202](#) on Eels (*Anguilla* spp.)
 - [Decisions 20.203 to 20.206](#) on Trade, conservation and management of deep-water elasmobranchs (*Centrophoridae* spp.)
 - [Decisions 20.207 to 20.212](#) on Sharks and rays (*Elasmobranchii* spp.)
 - [Decisions 19.229 \(Rev. CoP20\), 19.230 \(Rev. CoP20\) and 20.215 to 20.219](#) on Seahorses (*Hippocampus* spp.)
 - [Decisions 20.220 to 20.225](#) on Sea cucumbers (*Stichopodidae* and *Holothuridae* spp.)
 - [Decisions 19.233 to 19.236](#) on Queen conch (*Strombus gigas*)
 - [Decisions 20.226 and 20.227](#) on Marine ornamental fishes

Additionally, at CoP20, the Parties considered document [CoP20 Doc. 35.3](#) submitted by the CITES Secretariat on totoabas (*Totoaba macdonaldi*) and adopted new [Decisions 20.51 to 20.58](#), aiming to conserve and protect totoaba and vaquita and address poaching and illegal trade affecting these species.

The Decisions adopted at the CoP20 entered into effect on 5 March 2026 and implementation is already underway and will be reviewed by [the Animals Committee at its 34th meeting](#), taking place in July 2026 and by the Standing Committee at its 81st meeting, scheduled for November 2026.

The CITES Secretariat has continued to provide support to various Parties in their implementation of the Convention with regards to Introduction from the Sea (IFS) and species taken in ABNJ, including newly listed species, such as sharks and rays. This included **technical support** on the legal interpretation of Introduction from the Sea and CITES certificates to be issued in such cases; Non-Detriment Findings (NDFs) and Legal Acquisition Findings (LAFs) for marine species; awareness-raising; and questions related to transit and transshipment. The CITES Secretariat is planning to organize, in cooperation with the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC), a Regional Technical Workshop on Introduction from the Sea for Southeast Asian and East Asian countries to be held in Bangkok, Thailand, from 4 to 7 August 2026.

The CITES Secretariat has been following closely the developments regarding the ratification and entry into force of the **BBNJ Agreement**. In the period since September 2025, the Secretariat participated and presented potential synergies between the BBNJ Agreement and CITES in two Regional Workshops on the BBNJ Agreement organized by DOALOS for African States on the coasts of the Indian Ocean, Gulf of Aden and Red Sea, and landlocked States in these regions, as well as States of the Benguela Current Convention, and for Latin American and Caribbean States. The Secretariat also organized, in cooperation with DOALOS, a side event at CITES CoP20, focusing on synergies between CITES and the BBNJ Agreement. Finally, the CITES Secretariat participated in the second and third sessions of the Preparatory Commission for the Entry into Force of the BBNJ Agreement and the Convening of the First Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Agreement and delivered statements on relevant agenda items.

Regarding **queen conch** (*Strombus gigas*), in March 2026, the Secretariat, in collaboration with the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI), held a two-day online training workshop on the application of the simplified NDF guidance developed for queen conch, for all range States. The workshop was attended by 32 range States and overseas territories. CITES Scientific Authorities from queen conch range States have been invited to test the guidance in the field, with three range States receiving targeted support. Participants in the testing will be invited to provide feedback on the usefulness of the guidance, any challenges faced and to suggest possible improvements.

With regards to **efforts to combat wildlife crime related to marine species**, several activities have taken place, notably on the totoaba (*Totoaba macdonaldi*) and vaquita (*Phocoena sinus*). The CITES Secretariat continues to monitor Mexico's implementation of its compliance action plan on totoaba and reported progress to the 79th meeting of the CITES Standing Committee (SC79; Samarkand, 2025). The Standing Committee welcomed the continued progress made and agreed further recommendations addressed to Mexico. The recommendations were complemented by a set of Decisions adopted at CoP20 setting the roadmap for Parties to follow during the intersessional period and progress will be reviewed by the Standing Committee at its 81st meeting (SC81) in November 2026.

In addition, a report on global illegal trade in **seahorses** is currently being finalized. The report includes an analysis of data from the CITES Illegal Trade Database, illegal trade routes, *modus operandi* and other relevant matters. This report will be considered by SC81 in November 2026.

The CITES Secretariat continues work with its partners in the ICCWC to strengthen criminal justice systems and provide coordinated support at national, regional and international levels to combat wildlife and forest crime, including crimes affecting marine species. Activities conducted in this regard directly contribute to implementation of relevant provisions outlined in Resolution A/RES/80/110 on Oceans and the law of the sea, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 9 December 2025.

The CITES Secretariat has also maintained its longstanding effective cooperation with **FAO** for a better implementation of CITES in the fisheries sector, regarding commercially exploited aquatic species listed in CITES Appendices. This cooperation includes the ongoing maintenance and update of **CITES-LEX**, serving as a repository of legal and policy instruments relevant to CITES implementation, as well as joint actions in support of common objectives. The CITES Secretariat has worked with FAO to update the [Database of measures on conservation and management of sharks](#) to ensure that relevant information on CITES-listed sharks and rays are easily accessible to the CITES Parties.

The CITES Secretariat will continue supporting Parties in accordance with their priorities, including through scientific and legal advice and capacity building activities, to fulfil their obligations, especially related to newly listed species. In this regard, the CITES webpage dedicated to Introduction from the Sea ([IFS webpage](#)) is kept up to date. This webpage includes practical guidance on implementation of IFS provisions, as well as a living document on the most [frequently asked questions on IFS](#).

In the present context, enhanced cooperation and coordination across the United Nations system and with relevant international partners remains essential to ensure coherence, leverage comparative advantages and maximize synergies in advancing the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity. The CITES Secretariat recognizes that important coordinating role of UN-Oceans and has maintained its active engagement within this mechanism, including through its contribution to, and participation in, the UN-Oceans side event organized at the third United National Ocean Conference (UNOC-3; Nice, June 2025).

The CITES Secretariat appreciates the opportunity to provide inputs to the report of the Secretary-General on oceans and the law of the sea on behalf of the CITES Parties and agrees to the posting of the present letter on the website of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea.

Any enquiries regarding the above can be directed to stavros.antoniadis@un.org, with a copy to info@cites.org. The CITES Secretariat remains at your disposal as may be needed.

Yours sincerely,



Ivonne Higuero
CITES Secretary-General