

New protections sought for polar bear, elephants, manta rays and other species under UN-backed treaty



A forest elephant in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photo: UNESCO

5 October 2012 – Several dozen species – ranging from elephants, polar bears, sharks and manta rays to medicinal plants and rare trees – will receive additional protection under a United Nations-backed treaty for the conservation of endangered species if new proposals are adopted at a world wildlife meeting next March.

More than 50 countries submitted 67 proposals for consideration under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) by the 4 October midnight deadline, and these will now be discussed at a meeting of treaty parties in Bangkok, Thailand, from 3 to 14 March, coinciding with its 40th anniversary.

“CITES is where the rubber ‘hits the road’ and the outcome of our world wildlife conference in 2013 will be of great significance to the future of many species of plants and animals,” [said](#) John E. Scanlon, the Secretary-General of the Convention, the secretariat of which is administered by the UN Environmental Programme ([UNEP](#)) in Geneva.

With 176 Member States, CITES is one of the world’s most powerful tools for biodiversity conservation, regulating international trade in close to 35,000 species of plants and animals, including their products and derivatives, ensuring their survival in the wild with benefits for the livelihoods of local people and the global environment.

The new proposals would grant additional protection to some species, grant initial protection to others and, in some cases, lessen protection for yet others.

For example, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Mali and Togo are calling for an extension of the ban on the trade in elephant ivory, while Tanzania wants elephant hunting to be legalized within its borders for non-commercial purposes saying its elephant population was no longer endangered.

The United States is seeking to have the polar bear transferred from CITES Appendix Two – under which trade in species not necessarily threatened with extinction must be controlled to avoid uses incompatible with their survival – to Appendix One, under which trade is permitted only in exceptional circumstances.

The US is seeking similar action on Burmese star tortoises, big-headed turtles and Roti Island snake-necked turtles, while Vietnam wants a similar transfer for the Indochinese box turtle and Annam leaf turtle. Ecuador wants to include the manta ray and the Machalilla poison dart frog in Appendix Two, and transfer its vicuña from Appendix One to Appendix Two.

Madagascar, Kenya and Mexico, meanwhile, are seeking to include various trees, medicinal and ornamental plants in Appendix Two, while New Zealand wants similar protection for the New Zealand green gecko. Brazil, Comoros, Egypt and the European Union are seeking to include the porbeagle shark in Appendix Two.

On the other hand, New Zealand wants to delete the white-faced owl from Appendix Two, and Australia is seeking to delete the dusky flying-fox from Appendix Two while removing the buff-nosed rat-kangaroo and the pig-footed bandicoot from Appendix One.

At the March meeting, Member States will also consider how CITES can further enhance efforts to combat overall illegal trade in elephant ivory and rhino horn as well Asian big cats and great apes.

They are also expected to discuss the potential impact of CITES measures on the livelihoods of the rural poor who are often on the frontlines of using and managing wildlife.

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