

REPORT OF THE THIRTY-FOURTH MEETING OF THE CITES ANIMALS COMMITTEE

13-17 July 2026



ASSOCIATION *of*
FISH & WILDLIFE
AGENCIES

2026



INTRODUCTION

From 13 to 17 July 2026, state and provincial fish and wildlife interests were represented at the 34th Animals Committee (AC34) of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in Geneva, Switzerland. The delegation included Buddy Baker (SEAFWA), Gordon Batcheller (NEAFWA), Carolyn Caldwell (MAFWA), Stewart Liley (WAFWA), and Deb Hahn (AFWA). As the first in-person Animals Committee meeting since the 20th Conference of the Parties (CoP20), the forum drew nearly 500 representatives from 78 Member Countries and 79 observer organizations, underscoring the interest in global wildlife trade regulations.

OVERVIEW

At AC34, representatives of the AFWA Technical Work Group (Team) supported state agency authority and prevented native North American species from entering burdensome international trade review processes, showcasing the high return on investment of coordinated state representation at CITES. AC34 was chaired by Dr. Amir Hamidy (Indonesia), who efficiently navigated several sensitive agenda items. The meeting resulted in the formation of three in-session working groups and 9 intersessional working groups. The Team engaged in plenary sessions and working groups to protect agency jurisdiction on critical topics. Primary areas of focus included the following. More details can be found in the Discussion Items/Outcomes section.

- The Review of Significant Trade (RST) process (the primary mechanism used by CITES to suspend or restrict trade in species).
- The role of CITES in reducing zoonotic disease risks associated with international wildlife trade (ensuring measures do not go outside of CITES mandate).
- State-managed species of interest, including freshwater eels, polar bears, seahorses, corals, queen conch, and amphibians.
- Efforts to include socio-economic factors and risk assessments into CITES pre-listing decisions.



STRATEGIC OUTCOMES FOR DIRECTORS:

1

Safeguarded Native Species from Trade Restrictions (No RST Listing): Other than Queen Conch, there were no U.S. or Canadian native species included in the RST process. Queen Conch was included for Nicaragua due to sharp trade increases, but reassuringly, no decisions made here will adversely impact management in Puerto Rico or the U.S. Virgin Islands, where take remains prohibited. The proactive, state-led work on turtle conservation, specifically the U.S. Turtle Trade Assessment and Addendum was also helpful. The Team recommends this successful turtle framework as a model to launch a similar assessment for native reptiles to preempt future CITES actions.

2

Secured Seat on Working Groups: The Team joined a key in-session working group on RST tasked with reviewing species-country combinations. This ensures we can intervene early if native species are considered in the RST process. Additionally, the Team joined intersessional working groups on eels and non-detriment findings guidance.

3

Strengthened Bilateral Alignments: The Team held productive, side-margin alignment discussions with federal partners (the U.S., Canadian, and Japanese delegations), as well as the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC), and sustainable-use organizations.

DISCUSSION ITEMS/OUTCOMES

AC34 Doc 29, Conservation of Amphibians (*Amphibia spp.*)

The Team is monitoring the work under this agenda item for its potential impacts on future species listings. The current work focuses on the development of identification materials to assist law enforcement in correctly identifying species in trade.

AC34 Docs 13 – 13.3, Review of Significant Trade in Appendix II species

CITES utilizes a process called the RST that allows action in the form of trade suspensions for countries that may not be making reliable Non-Detriment Findings (NDF) for species with high reported export data. Species in the RST are selected by the Animals Committee at its first meeting following a CoP. During the current cycle no North American species were included in the RST. Of interest was the selection of the queen conch (*Strombus gigas*) for Nicaragua due to sharp increases in trade of this highly threatened species. Nicaragua is the largest exporter. The U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico are within the range of the species.

AC34 Doc 35, Eels (*Anguilla spp.*)

AC34 created an inter-sessional working group. The Team joined the working group.

AC34 Doc 17/PC28 Doc 15, Non-detriment findings

AC34 created an inter-sessional working group. The Team joined the working group.

AC34 Doc 39, Seahorses (*Hippocampus spp.*)

Discussions continue about the conservation and management of seahorses. We continue to monitor the current attention to worldwide seahorse trade due to the limited and sustainable trade in Florida of both wild and cultured specimens.

AC34 Doc 41, Queen Conch (*Strombus gigas*)

CITES is engaged in supporting the management and capacity building for implementation of queen conch decisions. The U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico prohibit take and are heavily engaged in management and restoration. Other range countries, however, do continue to harvest and questions arise about the sustainability of the trade, hence the inclusion of Nicaragua in the RST process. No decisions were made at AC 34 that will adversely impact management or capacity within Puerto Rico or the U.S. Virgin Islands.

AC34 Doc 44, Inclusion of Socio-economic Factors and Risk Assessments in CITES Listing Decisions

The proposed amendments to Resolution Conf. 9.24 (Rev. CoP17) seek to incorporate assessments of potential risks, market economic structures, and socio-economic or livelihood implications into future CITES listing decisions. Co-authors Switzerland and South Africa invited Parties to collaborate on developing a formal proposal for CoP21. During floor interventions, several countries highlighted that socio-economics is a structured science capable of strengthening and improving the Appendices listing process. The Animals Committee noted the document, supported the proposed next steps outlined by Switzerland, and invited countries to share further input. The ongoing debate around integrating socio-economic factors into Resolution Conf. 9.24 remains a key policy issue to track leading up to CoP21. [This video](#) provides additional context on the discussions and proceedings from AC34 discussions.

ADDITIONAL MEETINGS, DISCUSSIONS, AND SIDE EVENTS OF NOTE

Eel Sustainability

The IUCN hosted a side event on eel sustainability. Presenters included Matt Gullock (IUCN), Jules McApine (UK Senior CITES Policy Advisor), and Jason Ladell (Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO)). The presenters focused on the UK NDF for eels and Canada's recent country-wide stock assessment. A key takeaway was the need to work across the range of eel species, with several participants making connections to share information and cooperate. We believe the side event successfully demonstrates that the eel Resolution path was a more appropriate and flexible way forward to enhance cross-border cooperation and communication than a CITES *Aguilla* spp. listing. Maine and Atlantic State Marine Fisheries Commission, with the assistance of the Team, are considering a side event next year at AC35 as another step towards implementation of the eel Resolution.



Reptile Trade Toolbox:

This side event focused on captive breeding of CITES listed reptiles and the feasibility of captive breeding for listed species. The side event included a presentation on the reference guidance for assessing captive-breeding claims put together by the German Herpetological Society. The guidance document can be found [here](#) and includes reference to many North American species.



A More Effective CITES:

Switzerland and South Africa hosted a side event to introduce the concepts informing the development of AC34 Doc 44, referenced above. The basic principle is that CITES listing decisions should include consideration of social, cultural, and economic effects on both people and the species in question. That is, a CITES listing may not necessarily advance population security of wild species, or benefit local communities. While Doc 44 was not ultimately adopted during AC34, the discussions surrounding the issues attracted broad interest amongst the Parties and Observer Organizations. We can expect the proponents to revise the proposed amendments to Resolution Conf. 9.24 (Rev. CoP17) in response to concerns voiced at AC34, and to present a revised document at CoP21 in 2028 for consideration by the Parties. Members of the Team spoke to representatives of South Africa and Switzerland, along with a specialist at the University of Oxford, to discuss the merits of their proposal and to offer suggestions for its presentation at CoP21 (e.g., case studies to illustrate how the proposed revisions would work in practice).

CITES Technical Work Group:

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