

CEEweb at CITES CoP 16th

The 16th Conference of the Parties (CoP) of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) took place between 3-14 of March in Bangkok (Thailand). The Conference, as always, attracted a lot of interest from the authorities responsible for implementation of the Convention on the country level, different kinds of institutions and organizations – including many national and international NGOs. The total number of participants exceeded 2000 people from 178 countries. On the list of participants, between the others, there were also three representatives of CEEweb for Biodiversity CITES Working Group. High interest in the CITES CoP shouldn't be surprising to anybody – during such an events important issues are discussed - both in terms of nature conservation, as well as (and perhaps especially) in terms of the economy of many countries. That makes many debates very stormy, and representatives of various countries and organizations are trying by all means to convince the others to their points of views. That was a case also at this time, and there was no shortage of the hot issues.

Probably the most difficult negotiations concerned to the proposals of inclusion of five shark species (oceanic whitetip shark, porbeagle and three species of hammerheads: scalloped hammerhead, great hammerhead and smooth hammerhead) to the Appendix II of CITES. Since many years there is a strong pressure, particularly from the Asian countries under the leadership of China and Japan, that the Washington Convention should not deal with the marine species. This informal coalition has effectively blocked many proposals for the inclusion of marine species to the appendices of CITES for a long time. With no restrictions from the Washington Convention the overexploitation of many endangered marine species was (and still is) going on. During this CoP, however, there has been a breakthrough and all five of the proposed shark species, with loud cheering of the pro-conservation organizations and Parties, were included into the Appendix II of CITES. Beside sharks, Parties agreed to include to the App II whole genus of *Manta*, which includes two species: reef manta ray and giant manta ray. These two species are exploited mainly just for their gill plates, which are used for the medicinal purposes.

Very complicated negotiations before and during the CoP 16th concerned the US proposal for the uplisting of the polar bear from the App. II to the App. I. This was one of the CEEweb main goals. Unfortunately, despite the strong efforts of many nature conservation NGO's, this Conference of the Parties turned out to be less lucky for this species. Attempts to improve the conservation status of polar bear had failed due to the strong opposition from Canada supported by Greenland. It has to be clearly said, that also EU is responsible for the failure of the proposal, as EU member states were not able to establish their common position with regard of the US proposal. Instead of that, EU Commission submitted it's own proposal – so called "compromise proposal", which was supposed to solve the polar bear problem in a way acceptable for US and Canada. This proposal however failed to get the necessary support from the CITES parties and the Commission withdraw it. During the final voting on the US proposal EU abstained and nailed in the polar bear proposal coffin. The forecast for this species seems to be very serious. Scientists predict that as a result of climate change, by 2050 the whole world polar bear population could be reduced by over 65%! Of the five range states of this species, 4 already introduced a ban on the international trade on polar bear – both, in hunting trophies as well as

for commercial purposes. The exception is just Canada, which has the largest population of this species. Canadians claim that the species is managed in an appropriate and safe way, and polar bear hunting is an important part of the culture of the indigenous people of the country. The real situation of the polar bear population seem to be slightly different. In Canada from 13 subpopulations identified by the IUCN, seven show a declining trend, for two there is no enough data to assess their status, while from the other four only one show increasing trend, and three are relatively stable (but there is a high probability that at least one of them in the near future will have to be reclassified to a group with declining trends).

During the CoP 16th, beside the above mentioned issues, there were couple of important proposals, which were adopted by consensus. Such a situations have occurred in the case of proposals for inclusion to the App. II green geckos from New Zealand and China endemic species of snake – Mangshan pit viper. Similarly, most species of turtles proposed for inclusion to CITES appendices (or uplisting from the App II to I) were adopted with no objections.

Many decision taken during this CoP concerned the enforcement issues. Among the most important ones were those that related to elephants and rhinos. These charismatic species currently suffer from extremely intense poaching. Therefore some measures to improve the efficiency of their protection were adopted.

During the CoP, CEEweb distributed leaflets with the latest results from the monitoring of e-commerce in specimens of CITES species (attached) conducted by the members of the WG since couple of years. This is our third publication on this matter. Over the years these documents helped to highlight the problem of wildlife e-commerce and now it is well known phenomenon for the CITES community. The issue is so important, that special e-commerce working group was created. During the CoP Parties endorsed the continuation of the working group's mandate under the UK leadership.

Besides the bitter taste of defeat for uplisting polar bear, conservationists should be pleased from the results of the CITES CoP 16th, as without any doubts that was one of the most positive conferences in terms of nature conservation in the history of CITES. This fact is of particularly importance in light of falling in this year's 40th anniversary of the creation of the Treaty. We keep our fingers crossed that the winning streak for nature will continue for at least the next 40 years.



Despite the efforts of many NGO's including CEEweb, proposal for uplisting polar bear from CITES App. II to App. I had failed during the CoP 16th. Photo © Proframe Images



General Secretary of CITES – John Scanlon during the ceremony of opening of CITES CoP 16th Photo © PTOF "Salamandra"