

Environmental Studies FACT SHEET



www.curriculum-press.co.uk

Number 039

CITES

CITES = The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

What is it?

An international agreement between governments of 160+ countries. Joining is voluntary but, once joined, a country has to agree to the rules. The aim is to make sure trade in wild animal and plants doesn't threaten their survival.

Trade in animals and plants and trade in products made from them (foods, leather goods, wooden musical instruments etc.) is worth millions annually. Trade is worldwide so it's no use just one country trying to stop it – it takes international effort. Once a country has signed the Convention (become a Party to the Convention), it has to use its own domestic laws to provide the required protection.

How it works

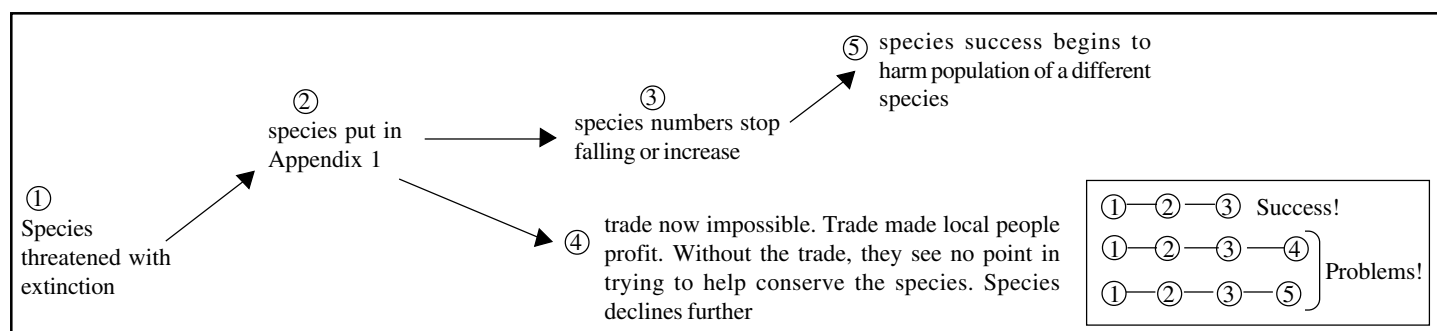
Species (or products from them) that are included in CITES can only be imported or exported if a license has been obtained. Species are put in one of three Appendices: In each Appendix there are entire species, subspecies and sometimes just geographically isolated populations of plants and animals.

Table 1. CITES appendices (Number of species)

	Mammals	Birds	Reptiles	Amphibians	Fish	Invertebrates	Plants	Total
Appendix 1: Species threatened with extinction. Trade allowed only in exceptional circumstances	228	67	67	16	9	63	298	827
Appendix 2: Species which may not be threatened with extinction, but which need strict control of trade. This includes look-a-like species – those which resemble species in Appendix 1 - which might become threatened by trade because the other species is in Appendix 1.	369	1401	508	90	68	2030	28074	32540
Appendix 3: Species that are already protected in a country which wants CITES members to help control trade in that species	57	149	25	—	—	16	45	291

At first sight CITES might look like an idea no-one could criticise. It helps save species doesn't it? In fact, there are many people who believe CITES is harming threatened species! Some critics argue that the whole idea of Appendix 1-3 is flawed (Fig 1)

Fig 1.



Critics of CITES claim that:

- putting species threatened with extinction by trade into App.1 always ends up harming a previously unthreatened species
- there are no species which have been put in App. 2 which have, as a result, increased in numbers so much that they can be removed from that Appendix
- CITES removes the incentive for local people to help in conserving species. Critics quote the example of the black rhinoceros. It has been on App.1 from the beginning of CITES, when its population was then 50,000+. Now it is in danger of extinction.

CITES is to blame, critics argue:

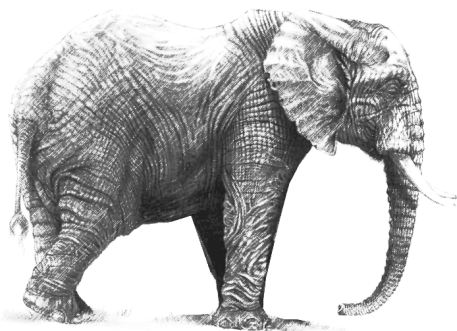
- By banning trade in rhino ivory, its price rocketed, stimulating poaching
- If trade *had* been allowed, there would have been more incentive for sustainable management and poaching would not have increased.
- Demand for rhino horn was underestimated
- The cost of trying to protect the rhino was too high for countries who had also lost income from trade
- Legal substitutes for rhino horn were not developed quickly enough

The general criticisms of CITES then are as follows:

- There is little evidence that species have been saved by CITES
- CITES assumes that any trade is harmful and ignores the fact that local people need financial incentives if they are going to help conserve species
- CITES uses population figures to decide if a species goes on App.1. But absolute numbers aren't the important element of sustainability; the proportion of the total population of a species that is being traded is the key point

Trade is unstoppable. Rather than waste millions of dollars annually trying to achieve the impossible, it would be better for CITES to recognise that controlled trade provides an incentive for species preservation and make wildlife conservation a sustainable business

Some **supporters of CITES** disagree completely. They believe that any trade is a bad idea. If you agree to supply ivory to certain markets, for example, that market will grow, demand will increase, therefore so will price and the killing will accelerate. Others regard some trade as a necessary evil; they don't like it, but put up with it for species in App..2 because they want the protection offered to other species in App.1. They believe controlled trade can work and point to the example of the **Nile Crocodile**. Some populations of the crocodile are in App. 1 and cannot be traded and some are in App.2. and can be. This allows demand for crocodile products to be met, but conserves the species as a whole.

Case Study: The African Elephant

Some African countries want to be able to kill and trade elephant products. They believe that the ban on trade began in 1989 stimulates poaching. At the CITES meeting in Santiago, Chile in 2002, three African countries – Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe – again asked for elephant populations to be downlisted from App. 1 to App.2 so that ivory trade could resume.

These 3 countries contain 175,000 of the 580,000 elephants in the whole of the continent. They wanted to trade only with Japan which, they argued, would make it easy to police the trade and they only wanted to sell ivory that had already been collected from animals that had died naturally or that had been recovered from poachers.

A consortium of 30 Non – Governmental Organisations (NGOs) opposed them. They included two from the UK – the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Controversially, the delegates voted to allow the three countries to sell off up to 30 tonnes of their ivory stockpiles. This is expected to raise £13m. Many conservationists said the decision would send a message to poachers that full ivory trading had resumed. This, they said, could mark a return to the level of slaughter that saw African elephant numbers halve from 1.2 million to 600,000 in just over a decade before all trade was stopped in 1989

“You could now have an uncontrollable situation. This could trigger a fashion for ivory goods in China which could be devastating to African elephants,”

Iain Douglas Hamilton of Save the Elephant.

“This is not a decision to open the trade but it could lead to it in a few years’ time. We are not sure exactly what the immediate effect of selling the stocks will be but there are real risks.”

Susan Lieberman, of WWF International

However, non-governmental groups in several African countries welcomed the decision.

“The Cites vote is a step in the right direction. Kenyans are currently barred from using their natural resource,”

“African people should be allowed to escape their poverty by making use of their resources - even elephants - without the interference of elitist eco-imperialism by NGOs who are only interested in protecting animals, and not human beings,” he said, predicting that trade would increase elephant conservation.

James Shikwati of the Sustainable Development Network in Nairobi,

However, the EIA is concerned that levels of consumer demand for ivory in countries such as Japan, China and Thailand far outstrips supply. Most of this demand is met by supplies of illegal poached ivory.

Since the ban in 1989, elephant numbers have steadily risen. Indeed, wildlife managers are beginning to complain that elephant numbers have increased in some areas to the point that the carrying capacity has been exceeded and that damage to tree branches and roots is destroying the environment for other species. At Kruger National Park in the Republic of South Africa, biologists are testing the efficacy of a contraceptive vaccine in a group of elephant cows. This, however, is not a popular approach with local people. “People believe wildlife should be culled periodically to help people” through the sale of meat, hides and ivory. “If wildlife doesn't benefit the people, they will want to use the land for other purposes.” . The South African government has now asked CITES to downgrade its listing of African elephants in South Africa from Appendix I, which prohibits trade, to Appendix II.

Is CITES out of touch with the needs of developing countries?

In some regions 70-90% of people's income comes from hunting for sport. The income is used for clinics, schools, bore holes and grinding mills. A CITES ban on sport hunting would cause resentment, and may slow the country's development and damage health. Although they are hunted, elephant populations are increasing

Sources of information

www.iucn.org International Union for the conservation of nature

www.cites.org Lists all the species on the Appendices

www.ifaw.org Campaigning NGO

www.eia-international.org Research and campaign organisation

Search engines: Try Scirus for scientific papers on elephants

Acknowledgments: This Factsheet was researched and written by Kevin Byrne Curriculum Press, Bank House, 105 King Street, Wellington, Shropshire, TF1 1NU Environmental Science Factsheets may be copied free of charge by teaching staff or students, provided that their school is a registered subscriber. No part of these Factsheets may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any other form or by any other means, without the prior permission of the publisher. ISSN 1351-5136