

Tiger Progress? The Response to CITES

Resolution Conf. 9.13

A TRAFFIC Network Report

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Executive summary

Tigers in the wild continue to near extinction. Habitat loss and degradation and poaching for trade in Tiger parts are the two greatest threats to survival of wild Tigers today. Already in this century, three of the eight subspecies – the Caspian *Panthera tigris virgata*, Javan *P. t. sondaica* and Bali *P. t. balica* Tigers – have been lost. Of the remaining subspecies, the Indian Tiger *P. t. tigris*, also known as the Bengal Tiger, is the most numerous while the South China Tiger *P. t. amoyensis* is in greatest danger of extinction

Tiger parts are used in most Asian traditional medicine disciplines. In traditional Chinese medicine, Tiger bone is the most precious part of the Tiger and is used to treat conditions such as rheumatism and arthritis.

At its inception, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) recognised that Tigers were endangered. All Tiger subspecies except for the Siberian Tiger were listed on Appendix I of CITES on 3 July 1975 and the Siberian Tiger *P. t. altaica* was transferred to Appendix I in 1987. In March 1993, the CITES Standing Committee first addressed the issue of trade in Tiger specimens and asked Parties to take any steps required to halt the illegal trade in Tigers and Tiger parts and to provide full reports to the Standing Committee on these measures (CITES Notification No. 738). Following a review of measures taken by States to halt the population decline of Tigers the CITES Standing Committee issued CITES Notification No. 774, which outlined minimum criteria for the adequate implementation of protection measures.

These measures were not enough to reduce the trade-related threat to this species and in response to this dilemma, the Parties to CITES, at the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES, held in Florida in 1994, worked together to form a resolution to urge countries around the world to do everything possible to help conserve the Tiger (Resolution Conf. 9.13 – Appendix I). Among other measures, the Resolution urges Parties to adopt adequate penalties to deter illegal trade and to consider national legislation to control domestic trade in Tiger parts; treat any product claiming to

contain Tiger as a readily recognisable derivative and therefore subject to CITES provisions; support Tiger conservation efforts, including establishment of bilateral and multilateral conservation programmes; provide technical and financial assistance to Tiger range states; work with traditional medicine communities; and to engage in education and public awareness programmes.

During late 1996 and early 1997, TRAFFIC undertook a survey of legislation enforcement and conservation activities in 14 Tiger range States and 15 consumer States to assess the response to CITES Resolution Conf. 9.13 and to provide a basis for future recommendations to the Parties to CITES. This report presents the findings of this review in preparation for the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES, which will be held in Harare, Zimbabwe, 9–20 June 1997.

Generally speaking, the response to Resolution Conf. 9.13 has been poor.

Of the States surveyed, only six have adopted new legislation or amendments to existing legislation since the last meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES, and only one, the Netherlands, now has provisions to fully implement CITES and the terms of Resolution Conf 9.13. Many of the Parties (50%) do not have national laws which specifically implement CITES. Only 30 per cent of States reviewed have voluntarily prohibited internal trade and most of those States had the prohibition in place prior to Resolution Conf. 9.13. Possession of Tiger products is banned in only five of the States surveyed. Only 30 per cent of Parties surveyed treat items labelled as containing Tiger as a readily recognisable derivative and subject to Appendix I provisions and, in all cases, this policy was adopted prior to agreement of Resolution Conf. 9.13.

From the information available, it appears that illegal trade in Tiger parts and derivatives is occurring throughout the range and consumer States surveyed with a few exceptions. Financial penalties in many range States are low compared to the potential financial gain. In many States where steep penalties exist, they are not used due to legislation that is difficult to enforce because of limitations in forensic techniques, lack of resources or political will, or backlogged legal systems which require years to bring cases to court.

Current conservation activities relating to wild Tiger populations are concentrating on field research and habitat management/protection. Projects working directly with people in Tiger habitat and helping them live with Tigers are in the minority. Only three consumer States are assisting range States with funding and expertise to carry out Tiger conservation projects while five consumer States are providing

assistance with conservation management and enforcement technology. In addition, only thirty per cent of States surveyed had educational programmes in operation regarding the ecological importance of the Tiger, its prey and its habitat.

Only thirty-eight per cent of States surveyed (including 60% of consumer States) were working with traditional medicine groups and other consumers to discuss alternatives to use of Tiger products and 27 per cent of States surveyed (including 54 per cent of consumer States) were involved in public awareness campaigns to eliminate use of these products.

CITES is merely a framework for co-operation among nations to control trade. The Convention cannot do this by itself. Parties must take responsibility for their own State's actions and not depend on the Convention to control trade without their active participation. Ultimately it is only the Parties who can stop the illegal trade in Tigers and their parts and ultimately help conserve the world's remaining Tigers.