

COP 13

Conservation TRIBUNE

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It's time for CITES to take a Principled Stand

Opening statements at this 13th COP of CITES were inspiring and full of passion for the principle of adherence to the Convention in all matters involving trade in and conservation of, wildlife species. Key speakers noted the importance of the principles of adhering to the rules for Appendices listings, the importance of scientific justification for decision-making, and the necessity that biological criteria shall be an integral part of listing decisions.

With these principles freshly reaffirmed as important in the CITES process, we now expect that the Japanese proposal to downlist three stocks of minke whale from Appendix I to Appendix II, shall be granted. According to the Convention, there are no reasons why this should not happen.

The minke whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*) occurs in demonstrated growing abundance in the three areas where these stocks are located: The Okhotsk Sea-West Pacific stock, the Northeast Atlantic stock, and the North Atlantic Central stock, are all recognized by IUCN, Traffic, and the CITES Secretariat as healthy and growing, and they are definitely not endangered. Therefore, the current Appendix I listing is inappropriate and should be corrected immediately.

Scientific documentation is now perfected to ensure the identification of individual whales, as well as broader identification of stocks and species. This system is now accomplished by a cetacean DNA registry in both Japan and Norway. Product from each animal legally caught can now be identified, and any product from illegal catches can be immediately disclosed as such, and then traced to the source. This system exceeds the requirements of CITES that a "diagnostic register" shall be used to ensure that trade is legal. Any whale product imported to Japan will be required to pass the DNA registry test before it is accepted for import.

There is no history of illegal trade in whale products imported to Japan. The current normal import regulations and customs enforcement are extremely stringent, and have been measurably enhanced by the implementation of this DNA registry. The International Whaling Commission's own Scientific Committee has commented that the technical specifications of the Norwegian DNA system, which Japan's system is modeled after, are of the highest quality.

In the past, CITES decisions to downlist minke whales have been delayed out of deference to the IWC, that body being recognized as the appropriate authority to make management decisions on

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cetaceans. At this time, however, it is widely recognized that the IWC process has broken down to the extent that cetacean management through implementation of an oversight and regulatory scheme has not been agreed upon, and may not be accomplished in the near future. Any CITES decision to downlist any species must be based on the best available scientific evidence that downlisting is proven to be biologically appropriate. These stocks of minke whale meet those criteria.

IWMC urges that CITES COP 13 shall approve Doc. 12.2, "Resolution on CITES Listing of Whale stocks and the IWC. This Resolution

urges the IWC to complete and implement its Revised Management Scheme. IWMC also urges that the Parties to COP 13 shall recognize that it is now appropriate to take a principled stand in this case, and set an example of responsible decision making in the international community. CITES should therefore proceed to accept Proposal 4, to transfer from Appendix I to Appendix II these three stocks of minke whale.

The integrity of CITES itself is at stake in this matter, and CITES can demonstrate to the world that its Parties understand and adhere to their own rules of procedure in the matter of the conservation of living natural resources. □

IWMC Mission

To promote Sustainable Use of wild resources - terrestrial and aquatic - as a conservation mechanism.

To re-establish the fundamental link between all components of nature, including man.

To develop better understanding, respect and tolerance towards cultures and values of all nations and social groups in their relation with nature.

To protect the Sovereign Rights of Independent States in their conservation efforts

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