

How CITES works

CITES works by subjecting international trade in specimens of selected species to certain controls. These require that all import, export, re-export and introduction from the sea of species covered by the Convention has to be authorized through a licensing system. ('Re-export' means export of a specimen that was imported.)

The species covered by CITES are listed in three Appendices, according to the degree of protection they need. (For additional information see www.cites.org)

- Appendix I includes species threatened with extinction. Trade in specimens of these species is permitted only in exceptional circumstances.
- Appendix II includes species not necessarily threatened with extinction, but in which trade must be controlled in order to avoid utilization incompatible with their survival.
- Appendix III contains species that are protected in at least one country, which has asked other CITES Parties for assistance in controlling the trade.

Each Party to the Convention must designate one or more Management Authorities in charge of administering the licensing system and one or more Scientific Authorities to advise them on the effects of trade on the status of the species.

A specimen of a CITES-listed species may be imported into or exported (or re-exported) from a State party to the Convention only if the appropriate document has been obtained and presented for clearance at the port of entry or exit. There is some variation of the requirements from one country to another and it is always necessary to check on the national laws, but the main conditions that apply for each Appendix are described below.

Appendix-I specimens

1. An import permit issued by the Management Authority of the State of import is required. This may be issued only if the specimen is not to be used for primarily commercial purposes and if the import will be for purposes that are not detrimental to the survival of the species. In the case of a live animal or plant, the Scientific Authority must be satisfied that the proposed recipient is suitably equipped to house and care for it.
2. An export permit or re-export certificate issued by the Management Authority of the State of export or re-export is also required.

An export permit may be issued only if the specimen was legally obtained; the trade will not be detrimental to the survival of the species; and an import permit has already been issued.

A re-export certificate may be issued only if the specimen was imported in accordance with the provisions of the Convention and, in the case of a live animal or plant, if an import permit has been issued.

In the case of a live animal or plant, it must be prepared and shipped to minimize any risk of injury, damage to health or cruel treatment.

Appendix-II specimens

1. An export permit or re-export certificate issued by the Management Authority of the State of export or re-export is required.

An export permit may be issued only if the specimen was legally obtained and if the export will not be detrimental to the survival of the species.

A re-export certificate may be issued only if the specimen was imported in accordance with the Convention.

2. In the case of a live animal or plant, it must be prepared and shipped to minimize any risk of injury, damage to health or cruel treatment.
3. No import permit is needed unless required by national law.

In the case of specimens introduced from the sea, a certificate has to be issued by the Management Authority of the State into which the specimens are being brought, for species listed in Appendix I or II. For further information, see the text of the Convention, Article III, Paragraph 45, and Article IV, paragraph 6.

Appendix-III specimens

1. In the case of trade from a State that included the species in Appendix III, an export permit issued by the Management Authority of that State is required. This may be issued only if the specimen was legally obtained and, in the case of a live animal or plant, if it will be prepared and shipped to minimize any risk of injury, damage to health or cruel treatment.
2. In the case of export from any other State, a certificate of origin issued by its Management Authority is required.
3. In the case of re-export, a re-export certificate issued by the State of re-export is required

The Convention allows or requires Parties to make certain exceptions to the general principles described above, notably in the following cases:

- for specimens in transit or being transhipped;
- for specimens that were acquired before CITES provisions applied to them (known as pre-Convention specimens);
- for specimens that are personal or household effects;
- for animals that were bred in captivity (this term is carefully defined in Resolution Conf. 10.16 Rev.);
- for plants that were artificially propagated (this term is carefully defined in Resolution Conf. 11.11);
- for specimens that are destined for scientific research;
- for animals or plants forming part of a travelling collection or exhibition, such as a circus.

There are special rules in these cases and a permit or certificate will generally still be required. Anyone planning to import or export/re-export specimens of a CITES species should contact the national CITES Management Authorities of the countries of import and export/re-export for information on the rules that apply.

Some Parties have domestic legislation with trade controls stricter than those required by CITES. In these cases, compliance with CITES regulations may not be sufficient to ensure that trade is legal. When a specimen of a CITES-listed species is transferred between a country that is a Party to CITES and a country that is not, the country that is a Party may accept documentation equivalent to the permits and certificates described above.

Articles I, II and III to the Convention are lists of species afforded different levels or types of protection from over-exploitation (see How CITES works). The Appendices are also available in Word and PDF formats for downloading (www.cites.org).

Appendix I lists species that are the most endangered among CITES-listed animals and plants (see Article II, paragraph 1 of the Convention). These are threatened with extinction and CITES generally prohibits commercial international trade in specimens of these species. However trade may be allowed under exceptional circumstances, e.g. for scientific research. In these cases, trade may be authorized by the granting of both an export permit (or re-export certificate) and an import permit. (See Article III of the Convention)

Appendix II lists species that are not necessarily now threatened with extinction but that may become so unless trade is closely controlled. It also includes so-called "look-alike species", i.e. species of which the specimens in trade look like those of species listed for conservation reasons (see Article II, paragraph 2 of the Convention). International trade in specimens of Appendix-II species may be authorized by the granting an export permit or re-export certificate; no import permit is necessary. Permits or certificates should only be granted if the relevant authorities are satisfied that certain conditions are met, above all that trade will not be detrimental to the survival of the species in the wild. (See Article IV of the Convention)

Appendix III is a list of species included at the request of a Party that already regulates trade in the species and that needs the cooperation of other countries to prevent unsustainable or illegal exploitation (see Article II, paragraph 3, of the Convention link). International trade in specimens of species listed in this Appendix is allowed only on presentation of the appropriate permits or certificates. (See Article V of the Convention)

Species may be added to or removed from Appendix I and II, or moved between them, only by the Conference of the Parties, either at its regular meetings or by postal procedures (see Article XV of the Convention). But species may be added to or removed from Appendix III at any time and by any Party (although the Conference of the Parties has recommended that changes be timed to coincide with amendments to Appendices I and II).

The names of species in the Appendices may be annotated to qualify the listing. For example, separate populations of a species may have different conservation needs and be included in different Appendices (e.g. the wolf populations included in Appendix I are only those of Bhutan, India, Nepal and Pakistan, whereas all others are included in Appendix II). Such specifications can appear next to the species name or in the Interpretation section through a cross-reference (e.g. '#1'). For this reason, the Appendices should always be consulted alongside the interpretation with which they are presented.

Parties may enter reservations with respect to any species listed in the Appendices in accordance with the provisions of Articles XV, XVI or XXIII of the Convention