

Virtual consultative workshop on CITES electronic Permit Information eXchange (EPIX) for Parties from the UNECE and ESCAP region

Organised by the UNECE, ESCAP and CITES with the support of the United Nations Network of Experts for Paperless Trade and Transport in Asia and the Pacific (UNNExT) Task Force on electronic cross border exchange of CITES permits

Dates and Time: 8 - 9 April 2020, 09:00 – 12:00 (Geneva time)

Background

The *Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)* establishes a legally binding regulatory regime to ensure the survival of endangered, CITES-listed species. Currently, 182 countries and the European Union are Party to this Convention and bound to its rules. CITES regulates trade in over 36,000 species of wild animals and plants, both aquatic and terrestrial and includes emblematic species such as tigers, elephants, rhinos, manta rays and all great apes.

However, wildlife is becoming increasingly threatened by organized illegal trade. In October 2019¹ the World Bank estimated that illegal logging, fishing and wildlife trade have an estimated value of \$1 trillion or more per year. Governments in source countries forego an estimated \$7-12 billion each year in potential fiscal revenues that aren't collected due to illegal logging, fishing, and, in some instances, wildlife trade. Illegal trade in wildlife and is now considered the fourth largest international crime.

In September 2019 the UN General Assembly, concerned about the increasing scale of poaching and illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products and its adverse economic, social and environmental impacts adopted the GA resolution titled *Tackling illicit trafficking in wildlife* (document A/73/L.120) with a call to urgently increase efforts to prevent illegal trade in wildlife. In particular, the General Assembly called on Member States *..to take measures making permit systems more resilient to corruption and to take advantage of modern information and communications technologies for improved control of international trade in protected species of wild fauna and flora in order to prevent the use of fraudulent documents in the international trade in protected species.*

Since a permit can transform millions of dollars of suspected contraband into millions of dollars of legitimate merchandise, much of the illegal trade in wildlife proceeds through the front door, with paperwork provided through fraud, forgery and corruption.² For CITES it is of utmost importance to apply international best practice and latest standards, technologies and approaches for the issuance and control of the CITES permit process.

¹ Legal logging, fishing, and wildlife trade: The Costs and how to combat it, World Bank, 2019.

² World Wildlife Crime Report, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2016, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/wildlife.html>

CITES parties are now stepping up efforts for electronic CITES permit processing and cross border electronic exchange of CITES permits to increase transparency, fight corruption and prevent forgery of CITES permits through use of information technologies. These activities are summarized in the eCITES agenda which aims to establish an efficient end-to-end control of CITES listed trade by using modern UN/CEFACT eBusiness standards and technologies.

It is important to note that the implementation of Electronic Permit Information eXchange (EPIX) through which Management Authorities of different countries can directly exchange CITES permits in electronic format. EPIX prevents fraudulent use of CITES permits, facilitates legal trade and improves the annual reporting of CITES trade which is important for sustainability assessment.

Objective of the workshop and target audience

The overall objective is to provide information on the latest state of electronic cross border exchange of CITES permits (EPIX) and its implementation, and to kick-off electronic CITES permit exchange pilots between interested CITES Parties of the UNECE and ESCAP region with the support of the UNNExT.

The purpose of the workshop is to

- Share experiences and lessons learned of Parties which implement EPIX
- Explain the workflow in an electronic permit information exchange between two Parties
- Learn about EPIX message exchange standards
- Discuss the use of electronic equivalent of physical signatures and seals in CITES permits
- Discuss managerial tasks in setting up EPIX exchanges with another Party
- Learn about the readiness of other Parties from the Europe and the Asia-Pacific region to start new EPIX pilots
- Network with other management authorities with a view to launching an EPIX pilot under the umbrella of UNNExT

The workshop is addressed to decision makers from Management Authorities and their service providers which have already implemented electronic permit systems, and which evaluate the possibility to exchange electronic CITES permits with other Parties.

Relation with the CITES CoP 18 decisions³:

- Decision 18.125 c), d), e), f) and g) directed to Parties
- Decision 18.126 b) and e) directed to the Standing Committee
- Decision 18.127 c) directed to the Secretariat

³ <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/dec/valid18/E18-Dec-.pdf>

- Decision 18.128 directed Parties

Draft agenda:

Time	Programme
8 April (Wednesday)	
09:00 – 09:30	Welcome and opening
09:30 – 10:30	eCITES Primer
10:30 – 10:45	<i>Break</i>
10:45 – 11:00	Thailand
11:00 – 12:00	EPIX Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPIX Primer
9 April (Thursday)	
09:00 – 10:30	EPIX Introduction (Cont'd) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sri Lanka • Current EPIX Pilots and experiences • Singapore
10:30 – 11:20	EPIX Introduction (Cont'd) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPIX WebEx Service Calls • EU Traces
11:20 – 12:00	Way Forward <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing pilots between pilots between Switzerland and Parties in Southeast Asia • Readiness of Parties to move forward and establishing a UNNExT Task Force
12:00	Closing

About UNECE: The Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) is a UN regional commission with 56 Member States in North America, Europe, Central Asia, the Balkan and the Caucasus Region. Within the United Nations System UNECE serves as the focal point for the development of standards and best practice for trade facilitation and electronic business which are developed in its Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT). UNECE has developed the standards for eCITES, in inter alia the eCERT standard for electronic SPS and CITES permits (CITES toolkit) and UNECE Recommendation 14 which is used for electronic signatures in CITES permits.

About ESCAP: The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) serves as the United Nations' regional hub promoting cooperation among countries to achieve inclusive and sustainable development. The largest regional intergovernmental platform with 53 Member States and 9 associate members, ESCAP has emerged as a strong regional think-tank offering countries sound analytical products that shed insight into the evolving economic, social and environmental dynamics of the region. ESCAP is the secretariat for the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific, a UN treaty aimed at accelerating the implementation of digital trade facilitation measures for trade and development

The United Nations Network of Experts for Paperless Trade and Transport in Asia and the Pacific (UNNExT) is a community of knowledge and practice for experts from developing countries and transition economies from UNECE and ESCAP countries in the Caucasus, Central-Middle- and South-east Asia and the Pacific involved in the implementation of electronic trade systems and trade facilitation. Established by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) in 2009, it aims to support national, sub-regional and transcontinental Single Window and paperless trade initiatives through adoption of open, global standards provided inter alia by UN/CEFACT.