

Report of the Virtual consultative workshop on CITES electronic permit information eXchange (EPIX) for Parties from the UNECE and ESCAP region

8–9 April 2020, Online

1. The workshop, which brought together 33 participants, was opened by Mr. Loertscher and Mr. Pikart. They provided background information about the workshop and gave a brief introduction. Remarks were made by Mr. Yann Duval, Chief, Trade Policy and Facilitation Section, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Ms. Maria Ceccarelli, Chief of Section, Trade Facilitation, Economic Cooperation and Trade Division, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and Ms. Haruko Okusu, Head, Knowledge Management and Outreach Services, CITES Secretariat. Mr. Loertscher chaired the meeting with the support of Mr. Pikart.
2. In his intervention “Introduction into the automation of CITES permits: concepts, standards and experiences (UNECE)”, Mr. Pikart presented the background of the CITES permit and highlighted gaps in the control system, evidenced by the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation.¹ He focused on the gaps associated with the manual procedures and showcased how eCITES could improve permit processes and the implementation of the convention. He highlighted the urgent need to provide funding and assistance to Managing Authorities (MAs) for implementation of eCITES systems and to support global electronic exchange of permits to prevent illegal trade and to reduce risks for citizens and economies.
3. Ms. Sripotar, CITES MA for Flora of Thailand / Group of Research on CITES Plants, Office of Plant Varieties Protection, Department of Agriculture, presented the electronics permit system in Thailand for Flora. She explained the electronic procedures of application, inspection, issuance and exchange with Customs. The next steps include further improvement of data exchange with Customs, moving to entirely paperless permits (currently partial), and the possibility of using blockchain for information exchange.
4. The workshop continued with the intervention “Introduction into electronic permit information exchange”, by Mr. Pikart in which he presented EPIX, i.e., electronic exchange of CITES permits, certificates (or snippets) between MAs of different countries. Mr. Pikart also outlined the EPIX architecture and message exchange systems. He stated that currently Parties are focusing on implementing direct (Point2Point (P2P)) permit exchanges between countries but Parties may choose to implement further architectures such as Hub solutions or Blockchain in the future. In this regard, he made several suggestions. First, requirements and need for compatibility with the hub solutions should be monitored. Second, Parties interested in blockchain for EPIX should follow up on the current research and pilot projects in UN/CEFACT. Third, ESCAP countries are encouraged to participate in the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless trade in Asia and the Pacific, for

¹ <https://untfsurvey.org>

collaborative efforts towards the exchange and mutual recognition of trade-related data and documents in electronic form in general, and specifically for electronic exchange of CITES permits. Mr. Pikart then introduced the CITES ePermit Toolkit and also touched upon different models to deal with the electronic equivalent of physical signatures and seals.

5. Mr. Marasinghe, Deputy Director Planning, ICT and Law Enforcement, Department of Wildlife Conservation, Sri Lankan Management Authority, shared the functionalities and architectures of eCITES BaseSolution of Sri Lanka, which is based on the ASYCUDA system. He highlighted the benefits of the online system, including provision of tighter and faster internal control with 24/7 accessibility, alert system, absence of physical presence, and automatic verification of information. Mr. Marasinghe also pointed out that the next steps could be providing permit data electronically and establishing EPIX by developing an interface between standards.
6. In his presentation “Current EPIX Pilots and experiences (Switzerland)”, Mr. Loertscher from the Swiss Management Authority and Chair of the CITES Working Group on electronic Systems and Information Technologies highlighted the importance of ensuring political support, reaching agreements between all relevant agencies within the Government, as well as agreements between Governments, and certain critical technical aspects deriving from the experiences of the EPIX pilots. He also spelled out three phases for any Party wishing to join the EPIX system, i.e. preparation, takeoff and operation phases, as described in the EPIX onboarding process, [SC70 Inf. 8](#). With the suggestions from participants, the CITES Secretariat indicated their intention to update the ePermit toolkit, in consultation with the Chair (Switzerland) and experts.
7. Ms. Yap, CITES MA of Singapore, National Parks Board (NParks), presented the electronic permit system of Singapore, called GoBusiness Licensing Portal for the issuance of CITES permits. She outlined CITES import and export/re-export application processes, and functionalities and interface of the Portal, as well as the backend portal called LicenceOne. She indicated that Singapore is keen to explore the e-permit data exchange with MAs that are ready, e.g., Switzerland and France. Ms. Yap also shared their plan to integrate the CITES permit system with Singapore Customs’ National Single Window to allow for paperless trade and seamless application.
8. In his presentation “EPIX Web Service Calls (Switzerland)”, Mr. Loertscher explained CITES processing in Switzerland, with e-CITES processing the majority (more than 98 per cent) of the permits. This results in positive impacts on standard delivery time, financial savings as well as level of satisfaction and elimination of administrative hurdles. Mr. Loertscher then described the EPIX feasibility study for central hub architecture, for Parties including France, Switzerland and United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) conducted in 2015–2016. Based on the study, it was decided to first develop P2P standards and then look into the alternatives including a hub. He also described the technical standards developed from the France and Switzerland pilot in 2017–2018, with CITES ePermitting Toolkit (based on the eCERT standard) as the data format, along with details on the

steps of electronic data exchange between these countries. Mr. Loertscher also pointed out non-technical standards and guides developed by the CITES Secretariat.

9. In his presentation “EU DG ENV on plans for an EU Hub for exchange of CITES permits”, Mr. Nagy introduced the EU CITES automation feasibility study. The analysis of business and technical requirements allowed to select the “Open Design”, which is based on a hub communication system, with compliance to EPIX. He also explained that all interactions were initiated by the users of the system who could push/pull(poll) through Web Service calls to the hub. Mr. Nagy described with a selected business scenario the flow between the hub (which includes CERTEX, EU Customs Single Window and Trade NT, EU CITES), CITES MAs of countries and other Parties.
10. During the final session, participants discussed the way forward. Mr. Loertscher and Mr. Pikart proposed that 1) participants were to consult the workshop materials and go through internal consultation on their participation in an electronic CITES permit exchange pilot in the next two weeks and 2) another virtual meeting with the four Parties (EU, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand) would be organized in two weeks (23 April 2020) at 9:00 CEST to discuss practical next steps towards pilots. They also informed the participants that 1) Sri Lanka and Switzerland would have a meeting in one week to discuss an early testing and 2) another workshop on the UNCTAD eCITES BaseSolution would be organized.
11. Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand, and the European Commission expressed tentative interest and willingness to participate in EPIX, subject to internal consultation and approval. They would come back to ESCAP/UNECE after internal consultation. The other countries were also encouraged to contact ESCAP/UNECE to discuss future plans and possibilities of getting involved.
12. Mr. Lim highlighted the value of creating a dedicated small task group for ensuring effective coordination of different domestic requirements, arranging capacity-building support and sharing lessons learnt from implementation. This Task Force will be set up supported jointly by UNECE and ESCAP taking advantage of expertise of UNNExT and the UN/CEFACT Expert group of agriculture trade to provide capacity-building and implementation support for UNECE and ESCAP member States. It was agreed that, after countries confirm their commitment to the pilot project, establishing a dedicated group in UNNExT, supported by UN/CEFACT Agriculture Domain, would be discussed in detail, including its operational modalities and expected activities. Mr. Lim also stressed the importance of the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific to furthering electronic CITES permit exchange, especially for countries in the Asia-Pacific region, and showed an introductory video² on it.
13. The meeting was closed with concluding remarks from Mr. Loertscher, thanking ESCAP and UNECE for the organization and expressing his wish to initiate pilot projects soon.

² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aw184IelHdU&feature=emb_logo

Annexes:

- 1. Agenda**
- 2. List of participants**

ANNEX 1. AGENDA

Time	Agenda
7 April (Tuesday)	
09:00 – 10:00 ³	Testing session
8 April (Wednesday)	
09:00 – 09:30	Welcome and opening <i>UNECE/ESCAP/CITES</i>
09:30 – 10:30	Introduction into the automation of CITES permits: concepts, standards and experiences (UNECE)
10:30 – 10:45	<i>Break</i>
10:45 – 11:00	Country presentation: eCITES Thailand
11:00 – 12:00	Introduction into electronic permit information exchange (UNECE)
9 April (Thursday)	
09:00 – 9:15	Country presentation: Sri Lanka eCITES BaseSolution
09:15 – 9:45	Current EPIX Pilots and experiences (Switzerland)
09:45 – 10:00	Country presentation: Singapore electronic permit system
10:00 – 10:30	EPIX Web Service Calls (Switzerland)
10:30 – 10:45	Presentation of EU DG ENV on plans for an EU Hub for exchange of CITES permits
10:45 – 12:00	Way forward <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Managing pilots between Switzerland and Parties in Southeast Asia• Readiness of Parties to move forward and establishing a UNNExT Task Force
12:00	Closing

³ Central European Summer Time (CEST).

ANNEX 2. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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