

News Release

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Marine Species Take Center Stage at Global Wildlife Trade Meeting

(Johannesburg, South Africa) - Conservation actions for chambered nautilus, devil rays and sharks were agreed today among member nations or “parties” to the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in Johannesburg, South Africa. These species, all of which are slow-growing and produce few young, are at risk of overexploitation due to commercial trade for their shells, fins, gill rakers, or meat.

“The United States is dedicated to conservation of the marine environment across the globe and as a range country for many of these species, deeply appreciates the partnerships formed in development and adoption of these proposals,” said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe, head of the U.S. delegation to the treaty’s 17th Conference of the Parties (CoP17). “We applaud the leadership of Fiji, India, Palau, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives and respect their strong actions to promote marine conservation.”

The United States trades in several of these species and is perhaps the largest consumer of products made from chambered nautilus - deep sea mollusks prized by collectors for their beautifully intricate shells, which are sold as souvenirs to tourists and shell collectors and as jewelry and home decoration items.

“Nearly 1 million nautilus have been imported into the United States in the last decade. We have a significant role in this trade and a responsibility to ensure it does not drive these beautiful creatures to extinction,” said Ashe. “Existing protections for nautilus are poorly enforced and implemented, which has led to overharvest and population declines. CITES protections will strengthen range States’ ability to address illegal trade in these species.”

Similar to manta rays, which are currently included in CITES, devil rays are vulnerable species that are increasingly found in international trade due to the growing demand for their gill rakers (the appendages that are

used for breathing) in Asian markets. Relatively few countries have enacted regulations to protect devil rays, and there is a lack of regional and international measures to ensure that harvest is sustainable.

“NOAA applauds CITES parties and the global community for taking steps at CoP17 towards ensuring that the international trade in key marine species is legal and sustainable,” said Eileen Sobeck, NOAA Assistant Administrator for Fisheries. “We are particularly pleased to see that the trade in chambered nautilus and devil rays – species that are extremely vulnerable, largely unregulated, and at risk of population decline due to international demand – will now be regulated.”

The U.S. has been a strong supporter of shark conservation and supports the requests by the Maldives and Sri Lanka to include the silky and thresher shark in Appendix II. These listings will go into effect in one year to give countries the necessary time to ensure effective implementation.

The United States is a global leader in marine conservation. The decisions taken today further the Obama Administration’s legacy of taking bold actions to protect our ocean and marine ecosystems, including creating the world’s largest marine protected area, establishing the first-ever National Ocean Policy, and combating illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing.

Although today’s votes await finalization later this week, Ashe expressed confidence that the listings will be upheld.

CoP17 is taking place from Sept. 24 through Oct. 5, 2016. CITES is an international agreement initiated in 1973 and since ratified by 182 countries and the European Union to protect certain wild animals and plants against over-exploitation as a result of international trade. More than 35,000 species of animals and plants benefit from CITES protection. Every two to three years, parties meet to review, discuss and decide on changes in the implementation of CITES, including changes in protections for certain species.

Species protected by CITES fall under one of three appendices. Appendix I includes species threatened with extinction and provides the greatest level of protection, including restrictions on commercial trade. Appendix II includes species that, although currently not threatened with extinction, may become so without trade controls. Changes to Appendices I and II must be proposed at a CoP and agreed to by a two-thirds majority of the parties present and voting. In contrast, listings to Appendix III can be requested by individual parties at any time. Appendix III includes species protected by at least one country that needs assistance from other parties to control trade.

To learn more about the Service’s involvement in CITES CoP17, visit:

<http://www.fws.gov/international/cites/cop17>.

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