

# The listing of three new holothurian species in CITES Appendix II

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## Introduction

The first listing of sea cucumbers in the CITES appendices dates back to 2003 with the addition of *Isostichopus fuscus* to Appendix III. This was followed in 2019 by the listing in Appendix II of three, easily identifiable, species: *Holothuria fuscogiva*, *H. nobilis* and *H. whitmaei* (Di Simone et al. 2021); and again, in November 2022, at the CITES Conference of the Parties (CoP 19 CITES) in Panama, with three new species added to Appendix II: *Thekenota ananas*, *T. anax* and *T. rubralineata*.

## Sea cucumbers and CITES

The examination of sea cucumbers at CITES began in the early 2000s without being the subject of a proposal for listing in the Appendices during a CoP meeting. Ecuador included the Holothurians in the CITES Appendices in 2003 by requesting the inclusion of its national populations of *Isostichopus fuscus* in Appendix III. It was finally in Geneva, at the 18th CITES CoP, in 2019, that sea cucumbers were included in Appendix II, with three species of the genus *Holothuria* (*H. nobilis*, *H. whitmaei* and *H. fuscogilva*, the “teatfish”) on an original proposal from France, supported by the European Union, and co-supported by the United States, Kenya, Senegal and the Seychelles (Di Simone et al. 2022). The CITES dynamics of sea cucumbers then changes dimension.

## Listing proposal of *Thekenota* in Appendix II

At the 19th session of the CoP in Panama, the European Union co-sponsored by the United States and the Seychelles, again on an original proposal from France (Fig. 1), submitted a listing proposal in Appendix II of three additional species of sea cucumbers: the entire genus *Thekenota*. Exploitation rates of these species have increased rapidly over the last 25 to 50 years, and their life history characteristics, combined with their limited mobility and large size, made them particularly vulnerable to overexploitation. These three species are easily differentiated from other species due to their large papillae (Fig. 2). Many Parties expressed their support: Australia, Burkina Faso, Comoros, Fiji, Gabon, Ghana, India, Jordan, Liberia, Mauritania, Niger, Panama, United of Tanzania, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Vanuatu, and Tonga. Maldives, Samoa, Sierra Leone, Vanuatu and the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme request technical and financial assistance from the Secretariat for the implementation of any listing, drawing particular attention to the need to support the making of non-detriment findings.

China, Indonesia, Japan, Papua New Guinea, and Solomon Islands oppose the proposal, pointing to the lack of stock assessments and scientific data, and believing that listing on the Appendix II would have negative consequences on the livelihoods of coastal communities.



**Figure 1.** Speech by France (Arnaud Horellou – French CITES Scientific Authority) under European delegation, at Committee I of COP19, in Panama.

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**Figure 2.** An adult specimen of *Thelenota ananas*, one of the most valuable and prized sea cucumber species (Purcell 2014).



**Figure 3.** Results of the vote for the adoption of proposal 42: Listing of the genus *Thelenota* in Appendix II of CITES, at Committee I of COP19, in Panama.

At the request of Japan, the proposal was put to the vote. With 97 Parties in favour, 16 against, and 16 abstentions (Fig. 3), the proposal was accepted with an entry into force of the listing in Appendix II delayed by 18 months. As well as the 12-month delayed entry into force of teatfish, this delay will allow range states of these species and importers to prepare for and effectively implement the listing, including the implementation adequate management, identification, monitoring and permitting procedures (Di Simone et al. 2019).

The international trade in these species is now regulated and controlled in accordance with the provisions of Appendix II: CITES permits and certificates will be required for international movements, attesting to the legality and sustainability of shipments. In the absence of these documents, the shipments must be seized as they are expected to be illegal trade (CITES Secretariat 2020). Appendix II controls and regulates trade to ensure that it is based on the management (methods and volumes) of sustainable takes. Transactions will also be tracked and compiled in the Parties' annual trade reports and recorded in the CITES trade database (CITES Secretariat 2020; Di Simone et al. 2021).

## Perspectives

This new CITES listing of three additional sea cucumber species encourages potential new species listings in the future. According to Purcell et al. (2012), 58 species of sea cucumbers are traded worldwide. This number is increasing: species with high commercial value being rare or even depleted, fishing targets other species not yet or with low commercial value that were not listed before (Purcell et al. 2012; Di Simone et al. 2022). The new edition of the FAO book (Purcell et al. 2023) specifies this increase by identifying the new species concerned. Also, the identification guide for commercial sea cucumbers published at the end of 2022 (Di Simone et al. 2022) represents an important tool for implementing the listing of sea cucumbers since it facilitates controls and reporting.

## References

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Figure 4. Invitation to the event “Thelenota” at COP19, 21 November 2022.