



TRACEABILITY SYSTEMS FOR A SUSTAINABLE INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN SOUTH-EAST ASIAN PYTHON SKINS





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For the purpose of this Study:

- South East Asia refers to the following countries: Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam.
- Marking, marking system or re-marking for the purposes of this Study entails any system that permits the traceability of a skin.
- The word “tagging” is often used as a synonym for “marking” in regards to traceability systems.

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Guillermo Valles
Director
Division on International Trade
in Goods and Services, and Commodities

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Contents

Note	ii
Acknowledgements	ii
Acronyms	v
Executive summary	vi
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background	1
CITES process and UNCTAD's contribution.....	1
Consultation process of this Study	3
Python skins trade in South East Asia	4
II. MARKING AND TRACEABILITY	7
Marking systems	7
Two-tier traceability system	7
Type of marking options	9
Conclusion	14
Supply chain for snake skins and point of tagging	14
Re-tagging	15
Other traceability issues	17
III. COMPLEMENTING CITES PERMITTING SYSTEMS	21
Shipment declarations.....	22
Trade monitoring	22
Sustainable sourcing strategies	24
IV. IMPROVE CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE FRAMEWORKS	27
Non-detriment findings.....	27
Annual quotas.....	27
IUCN/SSC Boa and Python Specialist Group	29
V. ENHANCE COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT	31
VI. ENHANCE CAPACITY BUILDING	33
VII. ENCOURAGE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT	35
Industry stakeholder initiatives	35
VIII. DEDICATED FUNDING.....	37
IX. EQUITABLE COST AND BENEFIT SHARING.....	39
X. ANIMAL WELFARE AND HUMANE KILLING GUIDELINES.....	41
XI. CONCLUSIONS.....	43
XII. KEY FINDINGS AND NEXT STEPS.....	45
Marking and traceability systems.....	45
Other traceability issues	45

Complementing the CITES permitting systems.....	46
Improve conservation and sustainable use frameworks	46
Enhance compliance and enforcement.....	46
Enhance capacity building.....	47
Encourage stakeholder engagement	47
Dedicated funding	47
Recommend equitable cost and benefit sharing	47
Animal welfare and humane killing guidelines.....	47
Next steps.....	47
ANNEXES	49
References	50
Consultations	51
Notes	52

Acronyms

AAC	Alligator Advisory Council
AMS	Adaptive Management Strategies
AVA	Agri-food and Veterinary Authority of Singapore
ASEAN-WEN	South East Asia Nations Wildlife Enforcement Network
BMP	Best Management Practices
BPSG	IUCN/SSC Boa & Python Specialist Group
CDB	Convention on Biological Diversity
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
CoP	Conference of the Parties (to CITES)
CSG	Crocodile Specialist Group
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
FWC	Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
FWF	Florida Wildlife Federation
FWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
GRTS	Global Reptile Trade Study
IACTS	International Alligator Crocodile Trade Study
IGO	Intergovernmental Organization
INV	Inventory designation of stockpile skins
IRATA	Indonesian Reptile and Amphibian Trade Association
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
ITC	International Trade Center
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
IWG-RS	International Working Group- Reptiles
JLIA	Japan Leather Industries Association
LDWF	Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
MA	Management Authority
MSY	Maximum Sustainable Yield
NDF	Non-Detriment Finding
NFC	Near Field Communication
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OIE	World Organization for Animal Health
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
PRF	Python Resource Fund
RESP	Responsible Ecosystem Sourcing Platform
RFID	Radio Frequency Identification
RJC	Responsible Jewellery Council
SA	Scientific Authority
SC-SWG	Standing Committee Working Group on snake trade and conservation management
SSC	Species Survival Commission (IUCN)
SRSTA	Singapore Reptile Skin Traders Association
SVL	Snout-Vent Length
TCM	Traditional Chinese Medicine
TOR	Terms of Reference
TRAFFIC	Trade Record Analysis of Fauna and Flora in Commerce
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNEP	United Nations Environment Program
UNEP-WCMC	UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Center
UNIC	Unione Nazionale Industria Conciaria
VCC	Visual Computing Consultancy
WCMC	World Conservation Monitoring Center
WWF	World Wildlife Fund
YAMP	Yellow Anaconda Management Program

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 15th and 16th meetings of the Conference of the Parties to CITES decided to consider the feasibility of implementing a traceability system for snake skins based on available studies and reports, after guidance and recommendations from its Standing Committee. In response, UNCTAD and the CITES Secretariat jointly commissioned this scoping study on “Traceability Systems for a sustainable international trade in South East Asian Python Skins” (referred to as the Study hereafter) to provide analysis and options regarding existing marking and tracing systems, a traceability system to confirm the legal origin of snake skins, and the economic feasibility of current technologies to implement such a traceability and marking system. Specific recommendations to the CITES Animals Committee and Standing Committee would be elaborated by UNCTAD and the CITES Secretariat on inputs received from stakeholders during the consultations, briefings, meetings, peer reviews and workshops conducted in the course of preparing the Study, and from the discussions on the Study.

This Study has been prepared on the basis of inputs received from stakeholders during extensive and intensive consultations, briefings, meetings, peer reviews and workshops. Three key conclusions emerged from this work as follows: (1) there is an urgent need to mark all python skins traded, (2) there should be an inventory and tagging of all python skin stockpiles in South East Asia, and (3) there was recognition of the need for dedicated funding sources to annually support monitoring programs including research, management, enforcement, compliance, trade monitoring and conservation education. Related and additional findings from the Study are summarized below.

Marking of python skins

There is an urgent need to mark python skins traded to ensure that such trade is legal, sustainable and verifiable (traceable and independently monitored), with benefits to commerce (economic gains), conservation (habitats and wetlands), and communities (local people and cultures). Improved traceability would contribute to confirming origin and legal sourcing, and together with export permits would strengthen the credibility of the CITES certification system. At the same time, it is noted that improved traceability and tagging systems can help prevent but cannot totally overcome false declarations of origin, laundering of wild skins or direct smuggling. It is thus important for Parties to CITES and relevant stakeholders to accord high priority to traceability and sustainability issues, with timely and strict penalties for non-compliance.

Among the different traceability systems considered, a two-tier system emerged as a preferred option. It would comprise a mandatory first tier from dried snakes’ skins to finished leather (tannery bottleneck). A low-cost, barcoded ‘button style’ tag was preferred as the feasible marking choice for the first-tier. A second tier from manufacturing to retail product was also supported, however no clear consensus emerged on whether it should be optional or mandatory. The implication of a mandatory marking of finished products requires thorough review. RFID technology is considered an option for the marking under the second tier. The preference for a two-tiered traceability system was also based on the emergence of local manufacturing capacity as a value added strategy, with increased incomes for local communities including apprentices and craftsmen.

The re-tagging of python skins after the tanning process was considered. Justification does exist to remove python skin tags during tanning operations, particularly finishing, because of its specific and unique requirements and the machinery used for the pressing, plating and millennium finishes of python skins. However, further discussions are needed with concerned industries to examine workable solutions, including on potential loopholes associated with retagging.

As part of the improved traceability system, Adaptive Management Strategies and Non-Detriment Findings can be enhanced by the collection of data on snake skin size and gender.

Inventory of python skin stockpiles in South East Asia

An inventory of python skin stockpiles in South East Asia ideally under the supervision of the local CITES Management Authority and with the data gathered remaining strictly confidential. Protocols for standardized

inventory guidelines should be developed to address tagging, pre-Convention stock (if any remains), and a budget to administer the inventory.

Snake skin skinning instructions to deter stockpiling have been successfully used in Argentina for the model Yellow Anaconda Management Program (YAMP), which also requires tagging, licensing, reporting and enhanced accountability systems. Skinning instructions may be less useful once stockpiles and annual range State quotas are tagged and account-based reporting systems and databases are operational.

Compliance, capacity building and dedicated funding sources

Range State compliance issues related less to regulatory frameworks, which were generally comprehensive, and more to compliance monitoring and the interdiction of illegal trade. The ASEAN-WEN (Wildlife Enforcement Networks) could greatly assist ASEAN range State enforcement efforts.

Compliance monitoring could be further improved with the use of transport documents that included tag number manifests, shipping declarations, electronic reporting, designated port inspections and enhanced enforcement techniques.

Capacity building and best management practices are essential building blocks to enhance research, management, enforcement, compliance, trade monitoring and conservation education. Engaging local range State biologists and scientists is an important step in developing local champions who could work to promote strategies for sustainability in local communities.

Economic incentives for legal trade, value-added tanning and manufacturing options, more development of by-product markets as well as recognition of “skin and leather values” are important ways to enhance equitable cost and benefit sharing. The importance of python trade values to local livelihoods should be highlighted in initiatives that could include linking with the media and private sector stakeholders.

A more comprehensive commercial case for the levels of captive-bred python skins reported in trade needs to be made, particularly in Lao PDR and Viet Nam.

Dedicated funding options are essential to better finance sustainability and traceability options. The Louisiana Alligator and Papua New Guinea crocodile program approaches for duties and monitoring revenue are examples to be considered in a range of 3-5% of a skin's export value. Industry should also consider establishing a python resource fund to support range States' efforts for enhanced traceability and sustainability. Industry should also consider funding levels and organizational structures to expedite regional testing workshops, first tier tagging, range States databases (including scanners, computers, technical expertise) and sustainable sourcing initiatives linked to UNEP-WCMC.

Trade data

The “World Trade in Skins of Large CITES-Listed Snake Species” Report completed as part of this Study, should

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