

TRANSFER SAIGA ANTELOPE TO APPENDIX I

Executive Summary



Saiga antelope meet the biological criteria for listing on Appendix I detailed in Resolution Conf. 9.24 (Rev. CoP17). The species has experienced a marked long-term decline of over 80 percent in its wild population and is affected by trade. Saiga are also incredibly susceptible to disease outbreaks that cause large fluctuations in population size. While populations can begin to rebound from such outbreaks, as recently documented in Kazakhstan, they also face the constant threat of catastrophic collapse from disease. Given their highly segmented and depleted populations, impacts from habitat loss, fragmentation, and degradation, as well as illegal hunting and trade, saiga are far from fully recovered and remain classified as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

Hunting of saiga, including for their horn, resulted in large scale population declines and prompted all saiga range States with existing wild populations to voluntarily ban saiga hunting and international trade in saiga specimens by the mid-2000s. Despite these voluntary bans, trade in saiga horn occurs widely among consumer countries such as China, Singapore, Malaysia, and Japan for use in traditional medicine. The trade is claimed to be primarily from government and private stockpiles largely accumulated before the range state trade bans. There is a dire need for regular assessment and reporting on stockpiles because of the ongoing threat that illegal saiga horn is being laundered as pre-Convention and/or stockpiled horn.

The CITES Secretariat estimated in 2006 that these stockpiles would be depleted between 2016 and 2021 given then-reported saiga horn consumption rates in China. As saiga horn stockpiles dwindle in consumer countries, and with no sign of significant future demand reduction, trade in saiga products, both legal and illegal, will likely increase pressure on wild saiga populations as evidenced by frequent and recent reports of poaching as well as small-scale and large-scale seizures.

The proposal to transfer the species to Appendix I is a response to these threats and uses the most up-to-date nomenclature for the species “*Saiga tatarica*” instead of the outdated nomenclature in Wilson & Reeder currently employed by CITES, which recognizes two species of saiga (*S. tatarica* and *S. borealis*). However, the proposal itself quite clearly pertains to all saiga throughout their range including proponent Mongolia’s populations (*S. borealis*) and the proponents have clarified their intent to uplist all saiga to Appendix I (see CoP18 Doc. 105.2 (Rev. 1)). This uplisting is necessary to ensure that commercial trade in saiga does not contribute to the further decline of the species and so that enforcement and demand reduction efforts are improved.

Inclusion on Appendix I will also provide for oversight of saiga captive breeding efforts, which is crucial given that saiga are notoriously difficult to breed in captivity, thus increasing the risk that trade in parts from purportedly captive-bred saiga could be used to launder illegally-sourced horn. One Chinese pharmaceutical company has already established a breeding facility in Ukraine to harvest saiga horn for its medicinal products.

Saiga are clearly affected by trade and meet the biological criteria for Appendix I detailed in Resolution Conf. 9.24 (Rev. CoP17). A CITES Appendix I listing will complement the listing of saiga on CMS Appendix II, which encourages cooperation between range and consumer States on saiga conservation pursuant to the Memorandum of Understanding concerning Conservation, Restoration and Sustainable Use of the Saiga Antelope. A CITES Appendix I listing will ensure commercial international trade does not further contribute to declines in saiga populations, will simplify enforcement, encourage demand reduction and provide CITES oversight for registration of captive breeding facilities, while still allowing for trade in trophies when such trade is legal and not detrimental. An Appendix I listing may also encourage additional resources for enforcement and conservation efforts, given the conservation priority often afforded to Appendix I species.

As the mortality events of 2015-16 illustrate, saiga remain prone to rapid population depletion and cannot afford additional pressure on their population driven by ongoing demand for their horns. Given the significant historical decline of saiga populations, the ongoing demand for saiga horn, and the omnipresent threat of disease outbreaks, the legally binding obligations of an Appendix I listing are necessary to protect saiga for future generations. We urge all CITES Parties to vote in support of CoP18 Prop. 2 to transfer all saiga from Appendix II to Appendix I.