



Lao People's Democratic Republic
Peace Independence Democracy Unity Prosperity

**Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for CITES Implementation
in Lao PDR: Coordination Among the Management Authority, Scientific
Authority, and Law Enforcement Authority**

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1. Introduction

The Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) is committed to the effective implementation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) to ensure that any trade in wildlife is legal, sustainable, and traceable. This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) establishes a coordinated framework for the CITES Management Authority, CITES Scientific Authority, and Law Enforcement Authority to fulfill their respective CITES mandates while safeguarding biodiversity.

1.1. Objectives

The purpose of this Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is to establish a mandatory framework outlining the roles, responsibilities, and procedures essential for effective coordination and collaboration among the designated CITES Management Authority (MA) and Scientific Authority (SA)

in Lao PDR. This SOP aims to ensure compliance with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the relevant national implementing legislation.

1.2. Definitions and Acronyms

This section defines key terms and acronyms used in this SOP, to ensure consistent interpretation among all stakeholders.

- CITES refers to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora which was adopted in Washington D.C. on 3 March 1973 and to which Lao PDR became a party on 1 March 2004;
- CITES-listed species are those protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species to prevent their over-exploitation by international trade. These species are categorized into one of three appendices (I, II, or III) based on the level of threat they face from such trade, with Appendix I representing the most severely endangered species for which commercial trade is prohibited, and Appendices II and III encompassing species that require strict regulation to ensure their survival and sustainable trade.
- CITES Secretariat refers to the secretariat which performs the function of the focal point in gathering and summarizing the information and reports, facilitates the organization of meetings and other activities of the Parties, and communicating all relevant activities of the Parties through the website (<https://cites.org/eng/disc/sec/index.php>). The CITES Secretariat has the Head Quarter in Geneva, Switzerland;
- CITES MA (CITES Management Authority) refers to the unit under the Department of Forestry, Ministry of Agriculture and Environment appointed by the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry to implement the CITES;
- CITES SA (CITES Scientific Authority) refers to the unit under the Faculty of Forestry Science, National University of Laos, Ministry of Education and Sports appointed by the Minister of Education and Sports to undertake the scientific research and certification;

- Legal Acquisition Finding (LAF) refers to inspecting by CITES MA whether the CITES-listed aquatic animals, wild animals and wild plants including carcasses, parts and products are legally acquired in accordance with laws;
- Non-Detriment Finding (NDF) refers to scientific study by the CITES SA to ensure that the trade in the CITES-listed aquatic animals, wild animals and wild plants, including carcasses, parts and products is not detrimental to the survival of the aquatic animals, wild animals and wild plants.
- "Specimen" means:
 - (i) any animal or plant, whether alive or dead;
 - (ii) in the case of an animal: for species included in Appendices I and II, any readily recognizable part or derivative thereof; and for species included in Appendix III, any readily recognizable part or derivative thereof specified in Appendix III in relation to the species; and
 - (iii) in the case of a plant: for species included in Appendix I, any readily recognizable part or derivative thereof; and for species included in Appendices II and III, any readily recognizable part or derivative thereof specified in Appendices II and III in relation to the species;
- Confiscated specimen – Any CITES-listed specimen seized by authorities due to illegal possession, transport or trade (refer to Conf. 9.10 (Rev. CoP15)*)

1.3. Scope

This document serves as a comprehensive guide for the implementation of wildlife trade regulations in alignment with both national and international laws, with a particular focus on the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). It delineates the framework, responsibilities, and procedures essential for the effective regulation and oversight of wildlife trade.

The guide encompasses critical processes, including the issuance of permits, assessments of non-detriment and legal acquisition, trade monitoring, management of confiscated specimens, data collection and reporting, and awareness campaigns aimed at educating stakeholders and the public about the regulations. Collectively, these initiatives strive to promote sustainable and legal wildlife trade, safeguard biodiversity, and bolster global conservation efforts.

2. Designated Authorities

In Lao PDR, the implementation of CITES and broader wildlife protection mandates relies on a coordinated framework of designated authorities, each with distinct responsibilities:

2.1 Management Authority (MA)

The Department of Forestry (DoF), under the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment (MAE), serves as the officially designated **CITES Management Authority (MA)** for the



Lao PDR. The DoF is mandated to regulate, administer, and coordinate the management of CITES-listed species and related activities.

2.2 Scientific Authority (SA)

The **National University of Laos (NUoL)**, through its Faculty of Forestry Science, serves as the designated **CITES Scientific Authority (SA)** of the Lao PDR. The SA provides science-based assessments, technical advice, and research to guide national decision-making on CITES implementation. Its responsibilities include:

2.3 Law Enforcement Authorities (LA)

The Department of Natural Resources and Environment Inspection (DNEI) holds primary enforcement responsibility. It plays a critical role in:

- Investigating wildlife-related violations, including illegal logging and trade.
- Enforcing relevant laws and ensuring field-level compliance with environmental standards.
- Supporting inter-agency coordination and prosecution of wildlife crimes.

3. Legal Basis

The legal framework governing wildlife protection and trade in Lao PDR is founded on a combination of international conventions, national legislation, and implementing instruments. Central to this framework is Lao PDR's ratification of the CITES Convention, which seeks to ensure that international trade in wild animals and plants does not endanger their survival.

This commitment is reinforced through domestic legislation, most notably the Wildlife and Aquatic Law (No. 07/NA, dated 24 December 2015), which provides comprehensive provisions for the conservation, sustainable use, and management of biodiversity. It delineates stakeholder responsibilities and stipulates enforcement measures for violations.

Supplementary decrees and regulations further strengthen national oversight, covering key aspects such as hunting restrictions, protected area governance, and anti-poaching enforcement. These instruments collectively support the effective application of CITES principles.

Implementation is further guided by official CITES references, including the Convention Text, and critical resolutions and decisions (e.g., Conf. 10.3, 11.3, 12.3, 14.3, 14.6–14.7, 16.6–16.7, 17.1–17.9, and 18.6–18.8), which provide operational guidance for sustainable wildlife trade and conservation efforts.

Designation documents for Lao PDR's Management Authority (MA) and Scientific Authority (SA) formally establish their respective mandates under the CITES framework. Additionally, the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) outlines a strategic roadmap for biodiversity conservation in alignment with international obligations and sustainable development goals.



4. Roles and Responsibilities

4.1. Management Authority (MA)

Leading Agency: Department of Forestry, Ministry of Agriculture and Environment

Core Responsibilities:

1) **Permit and Certification Management:**

- Issue, suspend, or cancel permits and certificates for the import, export, and re-export of CITES-listed species, ensuring alignment with CITES provisions and national legislation.
- Review applications, allocate quotas, and maintain accurate records of all CITES-related trade transactions.

2) **Scientific and Enforcement Coordination:**

- Collaborate with the Scientific Authority to obtain Non-Detriment Findings (NDFs), Legal Acquisition Findings, and species-specific technical advice.
- Work with Law Enforcement Agencies to ensure regulatory compliance and provide guidance on permit requirements and species identification.

3) **Reporting and Compliance:**

- Prepare and submit mandatory annual and biennial reports to the CITES Secretariat, including trade data and enforcement measures.
- Ensure national forestry and trade practices adhere to domestic laws and international obligations.

4) **Stakeholder Engagement and Capacity Building:**

- Develop and deliver awareness programs, training sessions, and public outreach initiatives on CITES implementation.
- Serve as the official national contact point for CITES communications and interagency coordination.

5) **Confiscated Specimen Management:**

- Oversight the disposition of confiscated live specimens in consultation with the SA and LAs, ensuring biologically sound and legally compliant outcomes such as repatriation, placement, or release.

6) **Policy Development and Implementation:**

- Formulate and enforce national CITES policies, regulations, and action plans.
- Propose amendments to CITES Appendices for Lao endemic species based on conservation needs.

7) **Registration and Monitoring:**

- Register and monitor facilities holding CITES-listed species, including breeding operations, nurseries, and rehabilitation centers.
- Designate and regulate official ports of entry and exit for CITES-listed specimens.

8) **International and National Representation:**

- Represent Lao PDR in CITES meetings and negotiations; engage with regional and global partners to enhance cooperation and information exchange.
- Facilitate the implementation of international commitments through national frameworks.

9) **Media and Public Communication:**

- Act as the sole authorized entity for all official media communications related to CITES activities, ensuring message consistency and accuracy.



10) Performance Management:

- Establish key performance indicators (KPIs), monitor progress, and implement corrective measures to enhance CITES implementation effectiveness.

11) Other Duties

- Fulfill any other responsibilities as assigned by national laws and regulations.

4.2. Scientific Authority (SA)

Leading Agency: Faculty of Forest Science, National University of Laos, Ministry of Education and Sport

Core Responsibilities:

1) Scientific Assessments and Findings

- Conduct Non-Detriment Findings (NDFs) and Legal Acquisition Findings (LAFs) to evaluate the sustainability and legality of trade for CITES-listed species.
- Develop and review sustainable export quotas and issue corresponding NDF certifications.
- Perform genetic and forensic analysis (e.g., DNA testing) to verify the origin and identity of specimens.

2) Monitoring and Research

- Monitor wild populations and assess the impacts of international trade on their conservation status.
- Conduct scientific studies and ecological assessments to inform management plans for endangered species and their traded derivatives.

3) Technical Advisory and Evaluation

Provide expert, science-based advice to the CITES Management Authority (MA) on:

- The establishment of trade quotas.
- The ecological risks of importing exotic species.
- The disposal of confiscated live or dead specimens.
- Proposals to amend the CITES Appendices.
- Evaluate facilities and provide recommendations for the registration of captive-breeding operations and artificial propagation nurseries.
- Develop protocols for the appropriate handling and welfare of confiscated live specimens.

4) Policy, Data, and Reporting

- Collect, analyze, and manage biological and trade data to support decision-making.
- Prepare scientific proposals for the amendment of CITES Appendices and review proposals from other Parties.
- Regularly report on activities to the Ministry of Education and Sports and the CITES MA.

5) Awareness, Education, and Collaboration

- Develop and lead ecological awareness and educational initiatives for government agencies, communities, and commercial entities.
- Disseminate relevant national and international regulations and policies.
- Collaborate with international scientific organizations and participate in CITES-related meetings and technical exchanges.

6) Coordination

- Coordinate with the CITES MA and other national agencies on all technical and scientific matters pertaining to CITES implementation.

7) Other Duties

- Fulfill any other responsibilities as assigned by national laws and regulations.

4.3. Law Enforcement Authority

Leading Agency: Department of Natural Resources and Environment Inspection (DNEI), Ministry of Agriculture and Environment

Core Responsibilities:

1) Inspection, Detection, and Seizure

- Inspect shipments at borders, airports, and markets to verify CITES permits for imports, exports, and re-exports.
- Identify, detain, and seize illegal wildlife shipments and specimens lacking valid permits or containing discrepancies.

2) Investigation and Prosecution

- Conduct thorough investigations into wildlife trafficking, illegal hunting, possession, trade, and transport of CITES-listed species.
- Investigate permit fraud and dismantle illegal trade networks.
- Prepare comprehensive evidence packages and prosecute offenders under national wildlife laws and CITES regulations.

3) Inter-Agency and International Collaboration

- Collaborate with the CITES Management Authority (MA), Scientific Authority (SA), Customs, and other national law enforcement agencies on compliance, intelligence sharing, and joint operations.
- Enhance international cooperation by working with entities such as ASEAN-WEN, INTERPOL, and UNODC, and neighboring countries to combat cross-border illegal wildlife trade.

4) Monitoring, Intelligence, and Reporting

- Monitor and investigate illegal online wildlife trade (IWT) in coordination with relevant cybercrime units.
- Maintain detailed records of inspections, seizures, arrests, and prosecutions.
- Document, report all seizures and enforcement actions, and provide seized permits and specimens to the MA or designated entities.

5) Evidence and Specimen Management

- Ensure all seized specimens, permits, and evidence follow a strict chain of custody procedure to preserve integrity for legal proceedings.
- Transfer confiscated live and dead specimens, and their derivatives, to the MA or designated rescue centers in accordance with CITES guidelines and national protocols.

6) Capacity Building and Field Operations

- Participate in and conduct training programs and joint operations.
- Engage in patrolling and field-based monitoring to prevent and detect wildlife crimes.

7) Other Duties

- Fulfill any other responsibilities as assigned by national laws and regulations.

5. Coordination Mechanism

5.1. Regular Meetings

- Quarterly coordination meetings between MA, SA, and LA.

- Annual review meeting to assess CITES implementation progress.

5.2. Ad-Hoc Meetings

- Any of the authorities can initiate an ad-hoc meeting if required.
- Meetings will be organized e.g. before SCs, CoPs, after major seizures and in other justified instances.

5.3. Information Sharing

- Permit Data Exchange: The Management Authority (MA) shares permit data with the Scientific Authority (SA) to facilitate comprehensive scientific reviews.
- Enforcement Reporting: Law Enforcement Agencies (LA) report all seizures and enforcement actions to the MA to ensure accurate CITES reporting.
- Scientific Recommendations: The SA provides the MA with scientific recommendations that inform permit decision-making processes.

5.4. Formal Communication Channels:

- LA submits reports in real time in the information system to the MA detailing seizures, ongoing cases, and emerging trends.
- The SA delivers reports, including Non-Detriment Findings (NDFs) and monitoring summaries, to the MA when ready, based on previous requirement.
- The MA circulates summaries of permits, CITES notifications, and relevant intelligence to both the SA and LA and grants access to the password protected files on servers and data warehouses.
- Centralized Database: The MA maintains a secure national CITES database that includes issued permits, seizure records (submitted by LA), SA recommendations, and species data. Access to this database is controlled and granted to the SA and LA based on their specific needs.
- Rapid Communication Protocols: Dedicated phone and email lists will be established for urgent communications, such as live specimen seizures, significant smuggling attempts, and verification of suspect permits. The MA will serve as the primary communication hub for these urgent matters. Hotlines 24/7 will be established in all respective bodies: LA, MA, SA.

6. Joint Operations

- Collaborative Inspections: MA, SA and LA conduct coordinated inspections at critical trade points to ensure compliance with regulations. A secret concrete plan of events will be available in general and announced to the conducting parties at least one month in advance.
- Training and Capacity Building: Ongoing training programs are implemented for officials to enhance their understanding of CITES procedures and improve enforcement capabilities.
- Joint Inspections and Raids: Periodic joint inspections and raids are carried out at strategic entry and exit points, markets, breeding facilities, and suspected trafficking hubs. These operations involve the MA, SA (for species identification and advisory support), and relevant LA.



- Joint Training Initiatives: Regular workshops and seminars are organized to provide comprehensive training on CITES procedures, species identification (utilizing identification guides), permit verification, investigative techniques, legal updates, and database utilization (including the CITES Trade Database and national databases). The MA will coordinate these efforts, while the SA and LA contribute their specialized expertise.
- Case-Specific Task Forces: Task forces are established for major or complex investigations, comprising investigators, prosecutors, the MA, and the SA to ensure a thorough and effective approach to enforcement.
- Cross-Border Collaboration: Authorities will actively engage in cross-border collaboration with ASEAN-WEN, INTERPOL, and neighboring CITES Management and Law Enforcement Authorities for intelligence exchange, information-sharing, and joint operations targeting transnational trafficking.

7. Permit and Compliance Process

7.1. Application for CITES Permit

1. The exporter or importer submits a comprehensive application to the Management Authority (MA), accompanied by all necessary supporting documents.
2. The MA performs an initial administrative review to confirm the application is complete and the applicant meets eligibility criteria.
3. The MA formally requests advice from the SA, including an NDF for Appendix II exports, LA advice for Appendix I, and any other necessary scientific input.
4. The SA conducts a detailed assessment and provides written NDF or LAF advice and recommendations to the MA within an agreed timeframe of 15 working days, in justified complex and exceptional cases it can be extended to 30 days, subject to approval by the head of MA.
5. The MA verifies the legal origin and source of the specimens, which may involve coordination with LA for specimens sourced domestically and involves communication with foreign authorities and subjects in case of import.
6. The MA makes a final decision on the permit application, taking into account the SA's advice, legal compliance, and other CITES requirements.
7. The MA issues the permit or informs the applicant of the refusal, providing LA reasons for the decision.
8. The MA records the permit details in the national database to ensure effective tracking and compliance monitoring.


7.2. Seizure and Enforcement Process

1. Detection of Violations: Law enforcement agencies in Laos, such as Customs, Police, and Forest Inspection, identify potential violations, which may include missing or invalid permits, misdeclarations, or illegal possession and transport of specimens.
2. Detention of Shipments and Suspects: Upon detection, the LA detains the shipment or specimens and any suspects involved, if applicable. They must immediately notify MA verbally, followed by a written report in real time, maximum within 24 hours.



3. Evidence Collection: The LA secures all relevant evidence, including permits, specimens, documents, and photographs to support the case.
4. Chain of Custody Protocol: All specimens, documents, and evidence must follow a standardized chain of custody protocol. Each transfer must be logged with date, time, responsible officer, and signatures to ensure admissibility in court.
5. Verification and Advisory Role of MA: The MA provides urgent verification of the authenticity and validity of permits upon request. They also offer guidance on CITES requirements and coordinate with SA for specimen identification and advice, particularly regarding the initial care of live specimens.
6. Role of the SA: The SA confirms species identification and provides advice on the care and handling of live seized specimens when requested by the LA or MA.
7. Investigation Process: The LA conducts a thorough investigation, collaborating with other LA, the MA, and the SA as necessary to gather comprehensive information.
8. Submission to Prosecutor: The LA compiles and submits a detailed case file to the Prosecutor for potential charges under national wildlife laws, including any violations of CITES.
9. Post-Seizure Coordination: After a seizure, the MA coordinates the disposition of confiscated specimens, considering options such as repatriation, placement in rescue centers, or euthanasia, in accordance with CITES Resolution Conf. 17.8 and national guidelines. The MA ensures that all final dispositions are accurately recorded.

7.3. Management of Confiscated Live Specimens

1. WELFARE: All confiscated specimens will be handled in accordance with principles of ethics, animal rights, and welfare. Their life requirements, comfort, and well-being must be prioritized at all times. Under no circumstances should they be neglected, mistreated, or left to starve. Every effort must be made to ensure humane treatment and appropriate care.
 2. Primary Coordination by MA: The MA serves as the primary coordinator and is informed immediately upon the seizure of live specimens by the LA.
 3. Urgent Consultation with SA: The MA consults the SA urgently for species identification and immediate care recommendations for the seized specimens.
 4. Identification of Temporary Holding Facilities: In collaboration with the SA and LA, the MA identifies appropriate temporary holding facilities, such as government or private rescue centers, accredited zoos, or sanctuaries, taking into account the specific needs of the species, distance of transport and costs.
 5. Transport Arrangements: The MA arranges for the transport of the specimens, utilizing LA assistance if security is required during transit.
 6. Long-Term Disposition Planning: The MA, with guidance from the SA, formulates a plan for the long-term disposition of the specimens. Options may include repatriation, placement, or release, ensuring that all actions are biologically sound and legally compliant. The MA oversees the execution of these plans.
 7. Documentation of Decisions: The MA meticulously records all decisions and dispositions in a centralized database to ensure transparency and accountability.
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8. Reporting and Documentation

- Annual Report Preparation: MA compiles the annual report for the CITES Secretariat, incorporating contributions from the SA and LA.
- Seizure Records: The LA maintains detailed seizure records, which are recorded in the information system in real time, each record has to be in place within maximum 24 hours from the event. Shared with the MA for comprehensive documentation.
- Scientific Reports: The SA produces scientific reports detailing the conservation status of various species.
- Monthly Seizure Reports: LA are responsible for providing standardized monthly reports to the MA. These reports include information on species, quantities, locations, modus operandi, and the status of each case.
- Annual Scientific Summary: The SA delivers an annual summary to the MA, highlighting Non-Detriment Findings (NDFs), Legal Acquisition Findings (LAFs), and key monitoring insights.
- National and Biennial Reports: The MA compiles both national annual and biennial reports for submission to the CITES Secretariat. These reports integrate data from LA and SA, and relevant enforcement and monitoring summaries are shared with other concerned agencies.

9. Monitoring, Review and Evaluation

- Conduct an annual performance review of CITES implementation to assess progress and identify areas for improvement.
- Perform compliance audits on permit issuance and enforcement to ensure adherence to regulations and best practices.
- Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to be monitored include:
 - o Permit processing times
 - o Non-Detriment Findings (NDF) and Legal Acquisition Findings (LAF) turnaround times
 - o Number of inspections, seizures, and prosecutions
 - o Timeliness of reporting
 - o Participation rates in meetings and training sessions
 - o The KPIs are quantified by MA
 - o The KPIs must not deviate from the set parameter by more than 20%, otherwise corrective actions will be planned and executed.
 - o The KPI monitoring system must be accessible online.
- The SOP will undergo a formal review and update every two years. They can be reviewed upon request of any involved party, in response to changes in CITES requirements, national legislation, or operational experiences.

10. Resources

To effectively fulfil their mandates under CITES, it is crucial for authorities to receive substantial support from both governmental and international bodies. This support should include a wide array of technical resources, tools, equipment, and financial assistance necessary for the MA, SA, and LA to function optimally. Essential resources encompass access to comprehensive databases, field equipment for monitoring and enforcement, species identification guides, and dedicated training budgets to enhance personnel skills. By actively advocating for these resources, authorities can significantly bolster their

capacity to protect endangered species and ensure compliance with CITES regulations, thereby contributing to global conservation efforts.

11. Approval and Review

- This SOP requires a thorough review every two years to evaluate its relevance and effectiveness. In the event of significant regulatory changes or updates locally or internationally, or based on operational experience during this timeframe, an immediate review will be conducted to implement necessary adjustments.
- CITES authorities will be consulted in necessary and informed in due course.
- This proactive strategy ensures that the SOP remains a dependable and authoritative resource, aligned with the latest practices and legal requirements.
- By following this review schedule, the organization reaffirms its commitment to upholding high standards of operational excellence and regulatory compliance.

05 SEP 2025



Approved by:

For Minister of
Kykeo SINGNAVONG
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