

## **US Proposals (for CITES) To Control Turtle Trade Seen By Thai Critics As Trade Barrier**

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Thailand will join other ASEAN countries in opposing US proposals to control international trade in Southeast Asian freshwater turtles and tortoises during an international meeting on wildlife trade to be held in Bangkok early next month, the Fisheries Department announced yesterday.

"We are well aware that these proposals are more about trade barriers than conservation. We have to deal with the issues carefully because developed countries always use environmental issues as trade barriers," said Budit Kullavanijaya, a biologist at the Fisheries Department's Bureau of Fisheries Administration and Management.

So far, the Fisheries Department is the only agency that has come up with a clear position on proposals to be submitted to the two-week 13th conference of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (Cites).

The departments of Agriculture, Marine and Coastal Resources, and National Park, Wildlife and Plant Conservation have not yet made public their positions on some 50 proposals for improving the conservation and international trade in rare species, to be submitted to the Cites meeting to be attended by delegates from 166 member countries.

The United States has proposed that all species under four genera of freshwater turtles and tortoises, including the Malayan snail-eating turtle, the Malayan flat-shell turtle, the Southeast Asian soft-shell turtle, and the pig-nosed turtle, be included in Appendix II of Cites.

Appendix II lists species that are not now threatened with extinction but that may become so unless trade is strictly controlled.

"Ten ASEAN member countries, including Thailand, have agreed recently that the inclusion of turtles and tortoises should be considered on the species-by-species basis. The inclusion of all species is unacceptable because it may cause social and economic impacts," said Mr Budit.

He questioned whether Washington wanted to control international trade in these turtle and tortoise species despite the fact the US has none of these species. The creatures are found only in Southeast Asia, including Thailand, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and Brunei.

Thailand would also vote to reject Namibia's and Zambia's proposals to ease international trade in Nile crocodiles for fear that the move would harm Thailand's crocodile breeding and export industry worth over two billion baht a year.

However, the department has yet to decide whether to support Japan's proposal to transfer the Minke whale from Appendix I to Appendix II to facilitate its whaling industry.

"Thailand might support Tokyo's proposal in exchange for their support for our proposal to upgrade the Irrawaddy dolphin to Appendix I, which strictly prohibits international trade in the listed plants and animal species," said Mr Budit.

Wildlife Conservation Office director Schwann Tunhikorn, who is also acting director of the Cites office in Thailand, however, said his agency already had a rough negotiation plan, but declined to reveal it.

"Disclosing our position may hamper our negotiation," said Mr Schwann.

The Thai negotiation team comprises 15 officials from the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry and from the Agriculture and Cooperatives Ministry.

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