

MoEFCC & EPCH's emphatic representation to get *Dalbergia sissoo* delisted from CITES threatened list wins hearts

CoP 18 meet, Geneva; 17th - 28th August, 2019

17-28 August 2019 : *Dalbergia* genus (all species - around 200 including sheesham and rosewood) has been enlisted in the Appendix-II of the CITES in 2016 resulting in the issuance of Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) permit by Wild Life Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) or comparable document in lieu of CITES permit i.e. Vriksh Shipment Certificate by EPCH for exports of wooden

CoP18. The panelists included Mr. Siddhanta Das, Director General of Forests, MoEFCC; Mr. Manmohan Singh Negi, Additional Director General (Wild Life), MoEFCC; Mr. Rakesh Kumar, Director General, EPCH; Mr. Anil K Singh, ex-PCCF, CEO-GIPL India; and Mr. Florian Fackler, Director, Holz Leute, Germany. Over 50 participants from various countries attended the meeting with representatives from CITES, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) as well as



The Indian delegation (L-R) Mr. Manmohan Singh Negi, Addl. Director General (Wild Life), MoEFCC; Mr. Anil K Singh, Ex-PCCF; Mr. Sachin Raj Jain, MD, GIPL India; Mr. Florian Fackler, Director, Holz-Leute, Germany; Mr. Siddhanta Das, Director General of Forests, MoEFCC; Mr. Rakesh Kumar, Director General, EPCH; Mr. Arun Yadav, Director, O/o DC(H); Mr. Bashir Ahmed, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of India, Geneva; and Mr. Rajesh Rawat, Jt. Director, EPCH

handicrafts items made from *Dalbergia sissoo* & *Dalbergia latifolia*. The issuance of certificates include establishing of the chain of custody and legality of the procured wood by the exporters.

The 18th meeting of Conference of Parties (CoP) of CITES was held in Geneva from 17-28 August 2019 and delisting of *Dalbergia sissoo* from Appendix II of the CITES (CoP 18 Prop. 51) submitted by India with Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal as co-proponents was one of the agenda items of CoP 18.

In order to create awareness amongst opinion makers, foresters, diplomats, attendees, press and other stakeholders, a Panel discussion was organised on "*Dalbergia sissoo* - Trees for Life and livelihood" on 18th August 2019 on the sidelines of



Delegation meeting with HE Ambassador, Permanent Mission of India, Geneva, Mr. Rajiv K Chander (2nd from left)

CITES signatory countries such as Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Nigeria, Bolivia, Italy, UK and USA. Mr. Arun Kumar Yadav, Director, O/o Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Ministry of Textiles and Mr. Bashir Ahmed, First Secretary,



Representative of Nepal (joint party for movement of proposal), addressing the gathering in support of the cause



Mr. Arun Kumar Yadav, Director, O/o Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Ministry of Textiles; and Mr. Rakesh Kumar, Director General, EPCH, at the side event



L-R: Mr. Siddhanta Das, Director General of Forests, MoEFCC; Mr. Rakesh Kumar Director General, EPCH; and Mr. Manmohan Singh Negi, Additional Director General (Wild Life), MoEFCC



Participants appreciating the display of Dalbergia sissoo wooden handicrafts

Permanent Mission of India (Geneva), also attended the meeting. A presentation was made by Mr. Rajesh Rawat, Joint Director, EPCH, on the subject.

The panelists spoke about the findings of Non Detrimental Finding (NDF) study and the significance of Dalbergia sissoo for Indian handicrafts and livelihood of the farmers. Existing certification system i.e. VRIKSH was also discussed. Representatives from various countries and association raised various queries during the panel discussion.

The Indian delegation had a series of meeting with various parties in the matter to gather support for India's proposal to

delist one of the species under Dalbergia genus i.e. Dalbergia sissoo (Sheesham) in the interest of the artisans and farmers of the sub-continent along with Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. The delegation met the representatives of European Union, Africa, Latin America and also met and briefed H E Mr. Rajiv K. Chander, Ambassador, PMI, Geneva and sought his advice and guidance in the matter.

While placing the proposal, Mr. Manmohan Singh Negi, Addl. Director General (WL) & Indian CITES Management Authority, Govt. of India, spoke about the fact that the entire genus of Dalbergia in appendix II of CITES was based on the report that Dalbergia species of Central and South America met the criteria of enlisting the species in appendix II. Whole Dalbergia genus has been enlisted in appendix II owing to its similarity between different species of Dalbergia genus or a lookalike criteria. India has fulfilled its commitment by conducting a Non-Detrimental Finding (NDF) study by a designated scientific authority, Botanical Survey of India (BSI) which came out positive indicating that the



trade in the species is not going to adversely impact the existence of the species in India.

Mr. Siddhanta Das, Director General of Forests, Govt. of India, spoke about the farmers in India growing Dalbergia sissoo as an investment for future urgent needs such as children's education, daughter's wedding, medical emergency, etc. as the tree is harvested say in 20 years' time and is an important source of revenue for the farmer when harvested. Thousands of artisans are engaged in production of wooden handicrafts made from Dalbergia sissoo and their livelihood is dependent on this species. He further spoke about Indian Timber Legality Assessment and Verification Scheme i.e. VRIKSH which is a robust scheme establishing legality and chain of custody of wood used in production of handicrafts and also helps in identifying the species of wood which is being used for production of items, thus, providing a solution to look alike identification issue raised by various parties. All the exporters exporting

Mr. John C Veremis, National CITES Coordinator, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) raising a query during the session

handicrafts and furniture made up of Dalbergia sissoo are mandatorily covered under the VRIKSH program.

Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal, as co-proponents, and Belize, Indonesia, Japan, Myanmar, Qatar, South Africa, and the Document Centre for Species Protection, supported the proposal. South Africa suggested the use of certification schemes and the creation of identification materials to assist with enforcement following the deletion of the species from Appendix II. Chad, Egypt, the European Union, Nigeria, Switzerland, Thailand and the United States of America, as well as the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN); World Resources Institute; and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) opposed the proposal. With no consensus, the Chair called for a vote. Proposal CoP18 Prop. 51 to delete Dalbergia sissoo from Appendix II was therefore rejected. The next proposal Prop. 52 to amend annotation #15, which applies to the Appendix-II listing of Dalbergia spp. and three Guibourtia species, was introduced by Canada. The proposal reflected the consensus of an intersessional working group of the Standing Committee.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guatemala, Indonesia, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, Senegal, and the United States of America supported the proposal. Following a question from the Republic of Korea, the Secretariat explained that extension of the validity of the interim definitions as communicated in Notification No. 2017/078 would need to be decided by the Parties.

Following the rejection of proposal CoP18 Prop. 51, India suggested the addition of a further part to annotation #15 regarding finished products and items of Dalbergia sissoo originating from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal.

While speaking on the proposal, Director General (Forests) stressed on the need to protect the livelihood of artisans and farmers who are engaged in production of wooden handicrafts and harvesting of Dalbergia sissoo respectively. The Chair heard the argument placed before him and established a working group to resolve the issues discussed and refine the annotation and definitions. The sub-committee met twice in a day to deliberate upon the Annotation #15 wherein India sought relief for Indian artisans/farmers by seeking amendment in sub-para C "Finished musical instrument, finished musical instruments parts and finished musical instrument accessories" to include; "Finished articles of Dalbergia sissoo originating from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal!" Any notification in this matter has not yet been issued. ■