

Thailand suspends seahorse trade amid conservation concerns

September 29 2016, by Christopher Torchia



In this March 16, 2007 file photo, a Thai customs official shows confiscated seahorses during a press conference in Bangkok. It was announced Thursday Sept. 29, 2016, at a meeting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora that Thailand, the biggest exporter of seahorses, is suspending trade in the animal because of concern about threats to its wild population (AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit, File)

Seahorses, traded by the millions annually as an ingredient in traditional medicine in parts of Asia, are getting a reprieve from Thailand, the

world's biggest exporter of the animal.

A marine biologist who works closely with Thailand on seahorse conservation welcomed the government's decision to suspend seahorse trade because of concern about threats to its wild population.

"It's a way station to getting serious management in place," Amanda Vincent of The University of British Columbia said Thursday. Vincent is director of Project Seahorse, a marine conservation group whose partner is the Zoological Society of London.

The Thailand decision was announced at a meeting in South Africa of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, or CITES. The U.N. meeting, which regulates trade in more than 35,000 species of animals and plants, ends Oct. 5.

Seahorses are mainly used in dried form for traditional medicine in mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. They are also popular as curios, and there is a trade in live seahorses for display in home aquariums, including in Europe and North America.

CITES requires some controls on trade in the dozens of types of seahorse, designed to ensure the survival of the species.

But Thailand, responsible for three-quarters of the world's documented exports of seahorses, could not meet its obligations and stopped issuing export permits at the beginning of the year, according to Vincent.

Thailand's goal, she said, is to make seahorse exports "sustainable."

CITES has suspended the seahorse trade with three other big exporters—Vietnam, Senegal and Guinea—after they failed to meet requirements for the trade in the animal, Vincent said.

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