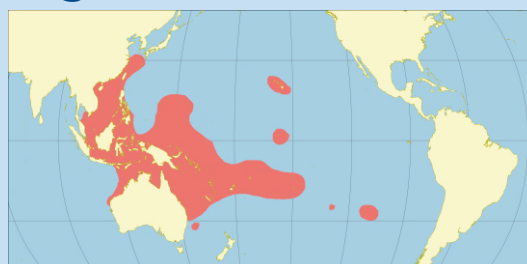


Black teatfish, *Holothuria whitmaei* & *Holothuria nobilis*
White teatfish, *Holothuria fuscogilva*

Meets CITES Listing Criteria

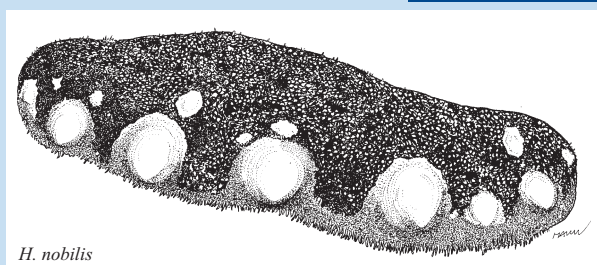


H. whitmaei

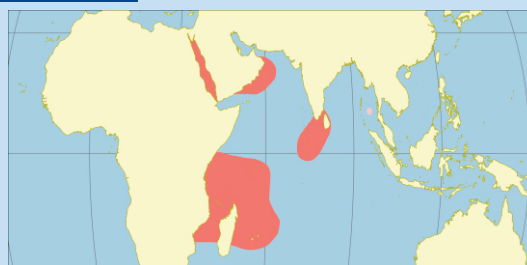


Source: F. Carocci

Insufficient Data



H. nobilis



Source: F. Carocci

Does Not Meet CITES Listing Criteria



H. fuscogilva



Source: F. Carocci

Teatfish are slow-moving, benthic species living on tropical reefs. Despite biological parameters being poorly established, the Expert Panel assessed the species as being of low productivity.

Teatfish stocks have been resilient to species extirpation across their range, although declines in densities have been reported. Some of these were marked declines, which is a concern for the sustainability of the species group, as maintaining sufficient densities is necessary for successful reproduction.

The Expert Panel also noted some examples of recovery in overfished teatfish stocks;

however, rebuilding stocks required multiple years and recovery was variable across locations.

The Expert Panel examined information on the status of stocks sourced from Micronesia (Federated States of), Palau, Cook Islands, Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Australia, Indonesia, Maldives, Egypt, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, Mayotte, Seychelles and the United Republic of Tanzania, Zanzibar – as well as information on shifts in trade volumes.

The Expert Panel considered that data relating to the decline of *H. whitmaei* met CITES listing criteria; on the

other hand, *H. nobilis* was data-deficient and the deeper-water *H. fuscogilva* did not meet CITES criteria.

In considering whether to list these species, the Expert Panel recommends that CITES Parties take note of the widespread difficulties countries are experiencing in managing sea cucumber fisheries, given that the high value of the dried commodity (beche-de-mer, trepang, gamat or balat) drives overfishing.

Traders can differentiate between species, however 'look-alike' provisions may be appropriate for this group, as less trained individuals may find it difficult to tell them apart.

Black teatfish, *Holothuria whitmaei* & *Holothuria nobilis* White teatfish, *Holothuria fuscogilva*

Management

Teatfish species are predominantly exploited in small-scale and artisanal fisheries across most of their range. There has been little international or regional coordination in their management, partially because the fishing of sea cucumbers and export of dried and frozen products both still suffer from poor data collection at the species level, weak management and/or enforcement.

FAO and CITES have a history of examining sea cucumber fisheries for potential complementary

management under the Convention. National and co-management management measures and the enforcement of regulations have generally been unable to stabilize production within countries, with 'boom-and-bust' fishing cycles often characterizing these fisheries.

In the Pacific, the Pacific Community has put forward options for a regional approach to sea cucumber trade, and the Melanesian Spearhead Group has agreed minimum size limits for harvest and trade.

The most common national regulatory measures include: minimum legal size limits, gear restrictions, requirements for exporters to submit logbooks, and temporal closures. Where attempted, total allowable catch quotas have mostly proved difficult to implement successfully. Fishing moratoria have been used in many countries to rest stocks from fishing once depletion had been noted. Species-level recognition is improving thanks to the creation of species identification materials.

Trade

Although centuries old, international trade has expanded in recent decades – in Asian markets teatfish attract prices of over USD 200/kg depending on size and processing quality.

Many countries fishing sea cucumber have challenging development issues, with remote communities reliant on sea cucumbers for cash income.

Trade value chains and fishery-to-market traceability remain largely opaque at a species level, with unlawful activity not uncommon along the chain.

Comments on technical aspects relative to management, trade and implementation

LIKELY EFFECTIVENESS FOR CONSERVATION

Due to the widely distributed and artisanal nature of sea cucumber fishing, and rural communities' reliance on this trade, the implementation of a CITES listing would require significant investment in the capacities of fisheries, conservation and trade agencies in the producing, transit and market states.

The ability for national agencies to perform fishery-independent population assessments is an advantage, and would facilitate the making of management decisions.

A CITES listing for teatfish could have some conservation benefits. Moreover, it

could provide a mechanism for a comprehensive, standardized reporting of quotas and trade. This would be assisted by increasing cooperation among exporting countries.

Control of high-value, low-volume fisheries commodities is difficult. Illegal, unreported and unregulated trade is expected to continue unless there is significant investment in product traceability and surveillance across the market chain.

Identifying species could be a challenge, as sea cucumbers are often considered 'look-alikes'. Teatfish possess teats along their sides

and can be difficult to distinguish from one another by the untrained eye.

If teatfish are listed in CITES Appendix II, future legal trade will be recorded in the CITES trade database. However, as has been the case for listed sharks and seahorses, the Expert Panel expects the listing to prompt some countries to cease legal exports of teatfish, or all sea cucumber species; such a response is likely to be of limited value in increasing governance.

The effects of a CITES listing on the emergence of sea cucumber aquaculture should also be a consideration.