

CITES Eases Export Restrictions on Agarwood from India: Impact and Benefits

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What's in today's article?

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- What is Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)?
- What is Aquilaria malaccensis (Agarwood)?
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Why in News?

India has successfully prevented inclusion of ***Aquilaria malaccensis* (agarwood)** in the Review of Significant Trade (RST) of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

The CITES also notified a new export quota of highly valuable and aromatic resinous wood and oil of agarwood from India from April 2024.

What is Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)?

- **About**

- **CITES** is an international agreement aimed at ensuring that international trade in wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival.
- It seeks to regulate and monitor the trade of endangered species of plants and animals to prevent their exploitation and ensure their long-term survival in the wild.
- It was signed in 1973 by 184 parties. It entered into force in 1975.
- Although CITES is legally binding on the Parties, it does not take the place of national laws.
 - Basically, CITES provides a legal framework to promote cooperation among its members, ensure sustainability, and regulate international trade.

- **Structure**

- The CITES Secretariat is administered by UNEP (The United Nations Environment Programme). It is located at Geneva, Switzerland.
- The Conference of the Parties to CITES, is the supreme decision-making body of the Convention.

- **Three categories or appendices**

- CITES works by placing species into three categories or appendices, each offering a different level of protection:
 - **Appendix I:** Includes species threatened with extinction. Trade in these species is permitted only in exceptional circumstances.
 - **Appendix II:** Includes species not necessarily threatened with extinction but for which trade must be controlled to avoid utilization incompatible with their survival.
 - **Appendix III:** Includes species that are protected in at least one country, which has asked other CITES Parties for assistance in controlling the trade.
- Species can be added to or removed from Appendices I and II, or moved between them, only by the Conference of the Parties.
- However, species can be added to or removed from Appendix III at any time by any Party unilaterally.

- **Review of Significant Trade (RST) of the CITES**

- RST is a process, under the CITES, designed to ensure that trade in certain species is sustainable and does not threaten their survival.
 - Species are identified for review based on trade data, reports from member countries, or concerns raised by CITES scientific committees.
 - The status of these species is assessed to determine whether trade levels are sustainable and if they comply with CITES requirements.
 - If issues are identified, recommendations are made to the countries involved to improve management and conservation efforts.
 - These can include actions such as setting export quotas, improving legislation, or enhancing enforcement measures.

What is *Aquilaria malaccensis* (Agarwood)?

- **About**

- *Aquilaria malaccensis*, commonly known as agarwood, is a species of tree belonging to the **Thymelaeaceae family**.

- It is well-known for producing a fragrant resinous wood, which is highly valued for its distinct aroma.
- This resin forms in response to infection by a particular type of mold, and the resulting aromatic wood is known as agarwood, oud, or aloeswood.

- **Uses**

- Agarwood has been used for centuries in various cultures for religious, medicinal, and perfumery purposes. Some of its key uses include:
 - **Perfumes and Incense:** Agarwood is highly prized in the perfume industry for its unique and long-lasting fragrance.
 - **Traditional Medicine:** Agarwood is believed to have medicinal properties and is used in traditional medicine systems like Ayurveda and Traditional Chinese Medicine for its potential to treat various ailments.
 - The essential oil extracted from agarwood has anti-inflammatory, anti-rheumatic, analgesic and anti-oxidant properties.
 - **Spiritual Practices:** In many cultures, agarwood is used in spiritual rituals and meditation due to its calming and soothing properties.

- **Conservation Status**

- It was listed in Appendix II of CITES for the first time in 1995 based on India's proposal at CoP9 in 1994.
 - I.e., While it is not immediately threatened with extinction, trade must be controlled to avoid exploitation that could threaten its survival.

CITES eases export of agarwood from India

- Inclusion of agarwood in the RST of CITES prevented
 - India has successfully prevented inclusion of agarwood in the RST of the CITES.
 - This development is going to benefit lakhs of farmers in certain districts of Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, and Tripura.
- **Decision based on study by BSI**
 - India's removal from the RST for *Aquilaria malaccensis* was achieved through a study conducted by the Botanical Survey of India (BSI) under the MoEFCC.
 - This study, known as a non-detriment finding (NDF), concluded that the species could be sustainably harvested under certain conditions.
 - Key points from the NDF include:
 - **Restrictions:** Harvesting plants, collecting seeds, seedlings, saplings, and other propagules should not be allowed from existing wild populations, protected areas, and reserve forests.
 - **Permitted Harvesting:** Harvesting should be allowed from home and community gardens, plantations on leased or patta lands, private or community plantations, and other small-scale or large-scale plantations.
 - **Export Quotas:** The NDF recommended an export quota for 2024-2027, allowing for 151,080 kg per year of agarwood chips and powder/sawdust and 7,050 kg per year of agarwood oil.
- **Various restrictions affected trade in agarwood from India**

- The absence of an export quota for a long period and other trade-related restrictions in India caused an increase in informal trade/export of agar chips, oil, powder etc. to the Middle East and other foreign countries.
 - It also caused an increase in costs of agarwood chips and oil in the global market as India is a major agarwood trading nation.
 - Though India had an export quota since November 2021, the growers and farmers were unable to trade agarwood legally due to imposing several legal restrictions that led them towards informal traders.
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Q.1. What is United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)?

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is an international organization established in 1972 to coordinate and promote environmental efforts globally. It focuses on assessing environmental conditions, developing international environmental agreements, supporting sustainable development, and providing guidance to nations on environmental policies and practices to protect and preserve the environment.

Q.2. What is Botanical Survey of India (BSI)?

The Botanical Survey of India (BSI) is an organization under India's Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, established in 1890. It is responsible for surveying, documenting, and researching the country's plant resources to promote conservation and sustainable utilization.

Source: [CITES eases export of agarwood from India, move to benefit lakhs of farmers](#) | [CITES](#) | [Vikaspedia](#)

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