

**Inclusion of Big-headed Turtle *Platysternon megacephalum* in Appendix II. Proponent: China and United States of America.**

**Summary:** The Big-headed Turtle *Platysternon megacephalum* is a medium sized freshwater turtle (up to 18 cm carapace), inhabiting streams in steep hills and mountain areas, with a head so large it cannot be withdrawn into its shell. Like other turtles, this species probably takes a long time to reach maturity, has high juvenile mortality and long adult survivorship. Probably only one clutch of between one and four eggs is produced per female per year. Known range States are China, Hong Kong SAR, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam. IUCN classifies the species as Endangered on the basis of depletion as a result of actual or potential levels of exploitation. At a national level, it is considered 'vulnerable' or 'endangered' throughout its range except in Myanmar where it is 'data deficient'. Collection for the food and pet trade for both domestic and international markets appears to be a major threat to this species across its range. The Big-headed Turtle has been recorded in the food and pet trade in China, Hong Kong SAR, Lao PDR and Viet Nam and as live imports into the USA. There is no legal international trade from Thailand or Myanmar and the magnitude of illegal trade is unknown. The proponents seek inclusion of the Big-headed Turtle in Appendix II in accordance with Resolution Conf. 9.24, Annex 2a criteria A and Bi) on the grounds that if international trade is not strictly regulated the species will meet the criteria for inclusion in Appendix I in the near future and that harvesting of specimens from the wild will exceed, over an extended period, the level that can be continued in perpetuity.

**Analysis** Following Resolution Conf. 9.24, the available information suggests that the species meets the criteria for inclusion in Appendix II (Bi) on the basis that international trade is known, inferred or projected to be unsustainable. Populations are reportedly in decline and international trade has been identified as the main cause of this decline. Much of the international trade in Asia in non-CITES-listed turtle species is not recorded to genus or species level, so it is likely that recorded trade in this species does not reflect the actual levels.

Supporting Statement (SS)	Additional information
<b><u>Taxonomy</u></b>	
<i>Platysternum megacephalum</i> is a widely used but incorrect synonym.	
<b><u>Range</u></b>	
China, Hong Kong SAR, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam.	
<b><u>IUCN Global Category</u></b>	
EN A1d +2d	

**Biological and trade criteria for inclusion in Appendix II**

**A) Trade regulation needed to prevent future inclusion in Appendix I**

Considered endangered in Lao PDR and Viet Nam, endangered or vulnerable in China, vulnerable in Thailand and data deficient in Myanmar. Populations appear to be fairly stable in Hong Kong SAR. The main threat identified is collection for domestic and international markets. Where data are available, it would appear that collection is unsustainable. If such levels of collection continue, the viability of surviving populations will be compromised.

*This species is very rare in the wild in China (Zhenyi, 2002, cited in TRAFFIC East Asia, 2002). Populations are presumed stable in Thailand where they are no longer exploited, with an encouraging proportion of juveniles in the population (van Dijk and Palasuwan, 2000).*

**B) Harvesting for international trade has, or may have, detrimental impact on population**

**(i) exceeds sustainable yield; (ii) reduces population to potentially threatened level**

Although data on population trends for this species are lacking, all information available suggests that many populations are reduced and that collection is unsustainable.

*Stuart and Timmins (2000) state that the unregulated export from Lao PDR to Viet Nam and China is the greatest threat to the turtle species of Lao PDR. Hendrie (2000) comments that all turtle species in Viet Nam require immediate and substantial intervention both inside and outside the country if they are to survive in*

China has suspended exports of *P. megacephalum* but

Supporting Statement (SS)	Additional information
<p>remains a major importer of live turtles, both legal and illegal. Hong Kong SAR is also a major importer and re-exporter of live turtles for the food and pet trade. <i>P. megacephalum</i> has been relatively common in seizures of illegal wildlife along ground transport routes in Viet Nam.</p> <p>The potential impact of trade is thought to be great in all range States.</p>	<p><i>the wild and that natural populations are unlikely to sustain present levels of collection.</i></p> <p><i>P. megacephalum is available in the USA on the internet retailing at USD 75 for 4 inch (10 cm) specimens (TRAFFIC East Asia, 2002). Imports of 1 907 live specimens into the USA were reported from 1998 to August, 2001 (TRAFFIC East Asia, 2002). A US reptile dealer has reported that this species is always available in the spring in any quantity desired. According to a US reptile dealer the wholesale price of USD 15/specimen has remained the same for the last ten years (TRAFFIC East Asia, 2002). This species is available in the pet trade in Japan (Kameoka, in prep).</i></p> <p><i>Platt et al. (2000) comment that available evidence suggests declines have occurred in turtle populations of Myanmar as a result of over-harvesting for both local consumption and to meet the demands of export markets.</i></p>

## Other information

### Threats

Collection for the food and pet trade for both domestic and international markets appears to be a major threat to this species across its range. Other threats include deforestation in China, development projects in Hong Kong SAR and habitat loss in Viet Nam.

### Conservation, management and legislation

China has recently taken several legal/regulatory measures to control imports and exports of freshwater turtles. In Hong Kong SAR, the collection, removal, destruction and possession of any wild turtle is illegal. In Lao PDR the species is currently unprotected although wildlife legislation is currently under review. Commercial trade of tortoises and freshwater turtles in Myanmar is illegal, although collection for subsistence use is permitted. The species is specifically protected from exploitation in Thailand. Viet Nam prohibits the export of all native turtle species and recently adopted CITES-implementing legislation, which should help control international trade.

The species is likely to occur in protected areas.

*All commercial imports of turtles into China from Indonesia, Cambodia and Thailand were suspended from June, 2001 and commercial imports of turtle species listed in Appendix II of CITES are only accepted from those Parties that have set an annual export quota. Trade with countries that prohibit exports of tortoises and freshwater turtles is not allowed (CITES Management Authority of China, 2001). As of 1 July 2002, the CITES Management Authority of China ended processing of applications for import of all turtles and tortoises with a carapace measuring less than 10 cm in diameter, noting the threat posed to China's native populations from the introduction of pathogens from imported species and mindful of human health concerns (CITES Management Authority of China, 2002).*

*Imports of turtles into the provinces of Guangdong and Hainan and into Shenzhen Special Economic Zone (China) are temporarily limited to Guangzhou Baiyun Airport, Haikou Meilan Airport and Shenzhen Huangtian Airport, respectively. All other imports of turtles into China need to be accompanied by export permits or certificates from the exporting country, noting the point of entry into China. Wildlife authorities are instructed to cooperate with customs authorities under the notification on 'Strengthening the Trade Management on Turtles and Tortoises', issued in June 2001 (CITES Management Authority of China, 2001).*

*Although not specified in Notification 2001 / 45, 'Strengthening the Trade Management on Turtles and Tortoises' it is likely that import restrictions into China refer to imports by air only and not to imports by other means, such as by road from Hong Kong SAR (TRAFFIC East Asia, 2002).*

Supporting Statement (SS)	Additional information
	<p><i>The species is confirmed to occur in several protected areas in Hong Kong SAR and Thailand.</i></p> <p><i>Legislation to protect chelonians in Myanmar is not effectively enforced (CITES Management Authority of Myanmar, 2002).</i></p>

**Captive Breeding**

Captive breeding occurs on an extremely limited scale in Thailand and reportedly occurs for commercial sale on Chinese turtle farms.

*Some collectors are thought to breed this species but not on a commercial scale (TRAFFIC East Asia, 2002).*

**Other comments**

The consensus recommendation from the CITES-sponsored Technical Workshop on Trade in Freshwater Turtles and Tortoises in Asia, held in Kunming, China from March 25-28, 2002, is that the genus *Platysternon* spp. is among the 11 highest-priority taxa for inclusion in Appendix II CITES at CoP 12.

All range countries were consulted by mail regarding this proposal.

**Reviewers:** N. T. Kalyar, P. Praschag, TRAFFIC East Asia, TRAFFIC East Asia - Japan, TRAFFIC North America, TRAFFIC Southeast Asia, TRAFFIC Southeast Asia - Indochina, Win Ko Ko

**References:**

- CITES Management Authority of China, 2001. Notification 2001/45: Strengthening the trade management on turtles and tortoises.
- CITES Management Authority of China, 2002. Notification 2002/45: Stopping the processing of applications for import of some turtles and tortoises.
- CITES Management Authority of Myanmar, 2002. (Kalyar Nyunt Thein). *in litt.* to TRAFFIC Southeast Asia, Hanoi, Viet Nam.
- Hendrie, D.B., 2000. Status and conservation of tortoises and freshwater turtles in Vietnam. In: van Dijk, P.P., Stuart, B.L. and Rhodin, A.G.J. (Eds.), *Asian Turtle Trade: Proceedings of a Workshop on Conservation and Trade of Freshwater Turtles and Tortoises in Asia. Chelonian Research Monographs 2*: 63-73.
- Kameoka, S., in prep. Market Survey of Turtles and Tortoises in Japan. TRAFFIC East Asia – Japan. *in litt* to TRAFFIC East Asia. *in litt* to TRAFFIC International, Cambridge, UK.