

Critics urge reform of CITES endangered list

London

NEXT week's meeting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) in Kyoto, Japan, promises to be the most acrimonious in the treaty's 19-year history.

Already on the agenda is a fight between several southern African nations and their neighbours, teamed up with the industrialized world, over proposals to modify a three-year ban on trade in elephant ivory. But informed observers say this battle is part of a larger issue that member nations must address: badly needed reform of CITES itself. The convention is performing poorly, according to leading conservation biologists, largely because it lacks appropriate criteria for

deciding which species should be included under its trade controls.

South Africa and a consortium of five southern African nations (Zimbabwe, Botswana, Malawi, Namibia and Zambia) want to remove their thriving elephant populations from Appendix 1 of CITES, a listing that prohibits international trade in any elephant products. Despite the serious problems with elephant poaching elsewhere in Africa, these countries can claim that their populations are managed effectively. They want to sell ivory from elephants that are culled annually, to raise money for wildlife conservation. Another proposal, by Richard Leakey of the Kenyan Wildlife Service, would allow countries with healthy elephant populations to

resume the less-lucrative trade in elephant skins, while retaining the ivory trade ban. Conservationists hope that this compromise can unite the divided African nations.

South Africa's request has already been endorsed by a panel of CITES-appointed experts (see *Nature* 354, 175; 1991), and expert reports on requests from the other nations will be delivered near the start of the two-week Kyoto meeting. But even if these reports are also positive, delegates from many of the 112 CITES nations are expected to block the requests. UK environment secretary Michael Heseltine, for example, has already said Britain will oppose the move.

Anticipating a tough battle, the five black southern African nations, led by Zimbabwe, are launching a full-scale offensive to rewrite the convention itself. Zimbabwe and its allies want CITES to recognize that a carefully managed trade in animal products can benefit conservation efforts. They also argue that it is now almost impossible to cancel a species' CITES listing, even if populations are no longer endangered. CITES needs 'symmetrical' criteria for including and removing species from its appendices, the southern African countries argue.

These nations also want to abolish the 'Berne criteria', by which species are given their CITES listings. Under these rules, species qualify for inclusion in Appendix 1 of CITES if they are "currently threatened with extinction". The southern African countries argue that this definition is hopelessly vague, and leading conservation biologists agree. "They're not even criteria at all," says Georgina Mace, from the Institute of Zoology in London.

Last month, at a workshop in Cambridge organized by the World Conservation Union, conservation biologists agreed that many species have been given inappropriate CITES listings. At one point, Rowan Martin, director of research at the Zimbabwean National Parks Department, challenged biologists to name a single species that has benefited from a CITES listing. There were several moments of embarrassed silence before a handful of species were put forward.

The southern African nations want to replace the Berne criteria with new definitions developed for the Union by Mace and Russell Lande, from the University of Oregon. The new definition would cover those species that have a 20 per cent chance of becoming extinct within 20 years, or ten generations (*Conservation Biology* 5, 148; 1991).

Mace believes that her criteria are not yet ready for general use; she says there have so far been no studies to test their usefulness. But she is hopeful that the

BRAZILIAN UNIVERSITIES

Soviet immigrants trigger debate

São Paulo

A TRICKLE of scientists from the former Soviet Union who are headed towards Brazil has touched off a heated debate about the wisdom of hiring them at a time when native scientists are struggling to find jobs.

The current recession has meant few opportunities for faculty of any stripe. The notable exception is the University of São Paulo, the biggest and richest university in the country which, not coincidentally, can also boast of having the most talented faculty. The university, supported by the state of São Paulo, is putting the finishing touches to contracts with 10 scientists from abroad, including eight from the former Soviet Union. One has already arrived for a two-year stay, and his colleagues — mostly engineers, physicists and mathematicians — are due this spring.

However, their hiring has been criticized by the president of the Brazilian Society for the Progress of Science, an umbrella group of scientists from various disciplines. Physicist Ennio Candotti, head of the society, believes that it is wrong for the university to hire foreigners at a time when the federal government is failing to provide necessary support for both working and would-be scientists.

Candotti pointed out that, since last May, the government has withheld funds for projects approved by an advisory body to the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development. Students who are studying abroad face similar delays. The problem came to a head earlier this month when several graduate students camped in front of foreign consulates and overseas agencies of the Bank of Brazil in cities where they are going to school to complain that they had not received their scholarship money. Their pro-

tests convinced the government to release the funds.

"The idea of bringing scientists from abroad is a very good one", says Candotti. "But we must be careful not to lose our international credibility". Candotti is also worried that foreign scientists could face the same hardships as native researchers if the Brazilian government fails to sustain its support. "Our wages are not competitive internationally," he says. Although São Paulo plans to pay the immigrant scientists some \$3,000 to \$3,500 a month, foreign scientists expected this fall at the University of Brazilia will be earning only \$1,200 to \$1,400 a month.

São Paulo's pro-rector for research, Emey Plessman de Camargo, says that his university's recruitment of foreigners goes back more than 50 years, and that "we must keep the tradition of bringing competence [to the university] from abroad". He says that the university's \$400 million annual budget can easily absorb the cost of the new faculty.

The first contingent of Russian scientists has already arrived, and is making a difference. The University of Ijuí, a small institution in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul, has hired a small group of chemists, applied mathematicians and physicists from the Kazan Aviation Institute, a research facility that until recently has been closed to foreigners. They are currently teaching in a small town far from the country's main academic research centres.

The group are part of a continuing effort by the university to bring in foreign faculty for two-year periods. "We're very pleased with their work," says Telmo Frantz, the university's rector. "We hope that they stay."

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