

Can Trade Policy be Used to Slow Species Extinction?

A Case Study of CITES and Sawfish (*Pristis* Spp.)

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Abstract- Most discussions among economists conclude that inefficiencies in public management of fisheries imposes social costs that are substantial, and could surpass the additional management costs necessary to achieve sustainable management. However, the absence of efficient public management of fisheries, especially in the developing world, is only part of the reason we see over-exploitation and extinction of species. It also has to do with macro policy, often aimed at improving economic development, that places further pressure on all species and especially the most vulnerable to extinction, mainly through accidental capture. The durability of animal parts that are collected and traded as trophies also has an impact on species sustainability, especially when animals are slow-growing, have low fecundity, or are particularly vulnerable to capture. CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora), a voluntary convention, came into force in 1975. It has aimed principally at controlling the international trade in wild fauna and flora through various means. However, specialists in international trade now better understand the limitations of trade policy to correct social cost issues. Many of these limitations have to do with the unintended economic consequences of animals being placed on endangered species lists, which triggers trade restrictions. We illustrate these problems by focusing on the genus group *Pristis* (Sawfish), which is a species group in danger of extinction. We found some evidence to suggest that rather than slow down the drivers towards extinction for this group, they may have speeded up by putting upward pressure on prices, as well as driving markets underground. The CITES convention is not presently organized to effectively monitor all market activity, making the encouragement of trade restrictions even more problematic. Based upon results from an admittedly small sample of only one species group, we make some policy suggestions for improving efforts to slow extinction that is based more upon helping countries identify and address the social costs of common pool resource use and their impacts on vulnerable species. A brief discussion of the possible links between other macro policies for development and endangered species management concludes the paper.

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