

# Policing international trade in endangered species: the CITES treaty and compliance

by Rosalind Reeve

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‘It is not legislation alone, but rather the implementation process that determines whether a commitment has any practical influence.’ Quoted in the preface of Rosalind Reeve’s book, this not only sums up the basis of her thesis but pinpoints the crux of the matter in natural resource conservation that so many of us are involved in and care about.

Dr Reeve has worked on wildlife trade issues for over 16 years. Based on her master’s thesis in environmental law and her wide range of experience, this book is an extremely comprehensive but very readable examination of how effectively the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) has been implemented worldwide. Dating from 1973, CITES has been a flagship agreement and one of the most innovative of the multilateral environmental agreements. But it has also been one of the most difficult to apply comprehensively, in the face of financially associated challenges and emotive issues. Its implementation has much to teach us and Rosalind Reeve has done an excellent job of analysing and presenting this information.

She covers the structure and mechanism of the convention, the compliance system and non-compliance response, problem issues and mechanisms for dealing with them. Through structured detail and a range of interesting case studies, she examines the

enforcement mechanism and how it has been developed and improved, lessons learned and relationships with other treaties—and then she looks to the future.

Her book is a comprehensive reference work for a widely ranging audience, an analysis of 30 years of rules in practice and a fascinating insight into the realities of implementation. Starting from a legal basis for global decision-making on such an important issue as the trade in endangered species, it seems that much of the present institutional framework was not part of the original treaty text, but has developed subsequently with a wide range of input including non-governmental participation. From chameleons and golden frogs in Madagascar, through ivory and chimpanzees from the Democratic Republic of Congo, the caviar and sturgeon issue, tigers, parrots and a host of threatened plant species, she takes us to the importing countries, both end users and those who profit along the way. At every stage she has real facts and figures and interesting examples.

As she says, ‘enforcement is the Achilles heel of CITES’. A treaty is nothing more than a piece of paper if it is not implemented. This book is a must for all who want to learn from these experiences or who are in any way involved with or affected by CITES—a treaty crucial to natural resource conservation and sustainable use. I thoroughly recommend it.