



MEDIA RELEASE

World Experts Meet to Discuss Valuable Natural Resources

NT wildlife trade expert Dr Greg Leach has been invited to attend the CITES Agarwood Experts group meeting this month in Kuala Lumpur.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) of Wild Flora and Fauna is an international agreement to ensure that trade does not threaten wildlife with extinction.

Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts (NRETA) biodiversity conservation executive director Dr Leach said CITES regulates international trade of CITES-listed species of live animals and plants and any products or derivatives produced from such species.

“This capacity building workshop is aimed at improving enforcement and implementation of the listing of *Aquilaria malaccensis* and other agarwood-producing species,” Dr Leach said.

“Agarwood is a resinous, fragrant and highly valuable heartwood produced by tropical rainforest trees particularly in the genus *Aquilaria*, found in south-east Asia to Papua New Guinea.

“The resin that permeates the heartwood of some *Aquilaria* tree species due to a fungal infection is prized for its fragrance and has been used for religious ceremonies and medicinal products for centuries throughout the world.

“The price of oil distilled from agarwood is generally valued at between five and ten thousand US dollars per kilogram, but can be significantly more for agarwood oil of exceptionally high quality.

“The value of this product is similar to the value of frankincense, myrrh in biblical times that were equivalent to the value of gold.”

Dr Leach said that unfortunately, the demand for agarwood currently far exceeds the available supply, which is naturally restricted with the resin only found in a small percentage of trees.

“External signs of the presence of agarwood are not always obvious, so trees are often cut down indiscriminately in the search for those containing agarwood with the non-impregnated wood being considered too soft to be useful for construction,” he said.

“The depletion of wild trees combined with the high value of agarwood products is also stimulating illegal harvest and trade in several range countries.

“Discussion at the meeting will include; illicit trade of agarwood, sustainable harvesting levels, registration and labelling systems, types of agarwood products in trade and the potential for establishing personal effects exemptions.

“The findings of this meeting will be used to assist with the implementation of the provisions of the Convention for agarwood-producing species.

“We can then report the findings at the Conference of the Parties (CoP) when signatory countries meet every two years to assess changes in procedures and listing of species that come under CITES control.”

Dr Leach was nominated for the Plants committee by the Australian Government and represents the broader region of Oceania signatory countries of Australia, Fiji, New Zealand, Papua News Guinea, Vanuatu, Palau and Samoa.

Dr Leach said the NT has had a long standing interest and active involvement in the Convention due to the NT international trade in crocodile and Cycad products.

“CITES governs the trade of these products and it also plays an important role in providing a framework for sustainable use and the NT Sustainable Utilisation of Wildlife Policy,” Dr Leach said.

The CITES Agarwood Experts Meeting will be held in Kuala Lumpur from 13 to 18 November 2006.

Ends

Media Note – For more information contact Greg Leach on 8999 4582.

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