



‘EASY ACCESS’ LIST OF EU CORAL SUSPENSIONS

The situation regarding the importation of corals into the European Union has always been a somewhat confused one. Individual species have been discussed and added to the number of prohibited or suspended species following meetings of the CITES Scientific Review Group (SRG) over the years, but a simple overview has never been made widely and easily available. A list exists, but you need to know where to look for it...not an easy matter where EU documentation is concerned.

Yet, this list is vitally important, both for all those countries which export to the EU, as well as for EU importing countries. In particular, both exporters and importers need to know what species they can, or cannot, trade in. Indeed, it is likely that this lack of detailed, accessible, knowledge may well be at the root of a fair number of the seizures of consignments which have been made by EU authorities. Between 2007-2008, there were, for instance, four prosecutions in the UK alone related to coral seizures, between 2009-2010, the figure was 21, between 2011 and 2012, it was 4, and for the period 2013-2014 (the most recent one for which we have data), it was 18. The figures are inconsistent, but they don't offer any sign that the situation is improving.

There could be many factors affecting these figures. For a start, it is quite possible that companies may have attempted to export or import certain species without knowing exactly what the status of the said species might be. However, one can also argue, of course, that it is the responsibility of both exporters and importers to find out which species can be legally traded. This is undeniable, but, as long as the possibility for ambiguity exists, we are likely to remain stumbling in a less-than-satisfactory state of affairs that impedes the smooth flow of international trade.

The matter is not helped by the fact that some of the suspensions are straightforward ones (in the sense that they are listed as suspensions), while others are listed as being based on so-called Negative Opinions arrived at by the Scientific Review Group. Then, to add a further element of confusion, suspensions may apply to imports of all types of specimens belonging to some species (wild-caught), while, in other cases, the suspensions apply only to wild-caught specimens, but not to maricultured ones, or to live or maricultured specimens attached to artificial substrates, or just to live specimens, but not (by implication) dead ones, i.e. coral skeletons.

As I mentioned earlier, the information exists...it's just a question of tracking it down. For example, most of the suspensions are based on Suspension Regulation No. 2015/736. However, in those instances where they are the result of SRG recommendations, one needs to consult the reports of the respective meetings of this group, e.g. SRG17 in the case of the genus *Euphyllia*, SRG72 in the case of *S. cristata*, and so on. I have always felt that this situation is less than helpful to any party in the coral supply chain, or to the authorities who have to police it. How, for example, does a border official distinguish between, say, *Blastomussa merleti* and *B. wellsii*?

Therefore, as we await the seizure figures for the period between 2014 and 2016, as well as any new list of suspensions which may be being compiled, here is the full list of corals currently affected in an easy-to-manage, understandable format. I should stress that this is not a list which I have put together myself, but the official one that already exists within the labyrinth of EU legislation and which, as shown above, is so 'elusive'.

PHOTO: JOHN DAWES

Several *Plerogyra* or bubble coral species (this is *P. sinuosa*, which is included as a result of a Negative Opinion of the SRG) feature on the current EU suspensions list.