



## **MEDIA ADVISORY**

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### **CAVIAR EMPTOR URGES CITES TO MAINTAIN BAN ON CAVIAR EXPORTS**

September 27, 2006 -- Caviar Emptor, a coalition of scientists and environmentalists working to save Caspian Sea sturgeons, today urged international trade officials to maintain the global ban on trade of wild caviar imposed in January.

Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Iran have said they would call for the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) to lift the current caviar trade ban at the 54th meeting of the CITES Standing Committee taking place from October 2nd to October 6th in Geneva.

Officials with Caviar Emptor will testify at the meeting in support of the ban and its continuation until sturgeon populations recover.

The ban on the 2006 caviar trade was imposed after Caspian countries failed to provide CITES with evidence that they have reduced fishing to sustainable levels. The caviar export quotas, the CITES Secretariat said in January, "must also make full allowance for the amount of fish caught illegally," which in the past CITES has estimated to be three to five times that of the legal catch.

Next week's annual policy meeting of CITES' member nations comes at a time when scientists are increasingly concerned about the continuing decline of Caspian sturgeons, source of most of the world's wild caviar. In September 2005, *Science* magazine reported that the most recent survey of the Caspian sturgeon population shows "sturgeon stocks are down 20% to 30% from last year," according to Mohammad Pourkazemi, director of the International Sturgeon Research Institute in Iran.

Of particular worry is the beluga sturgeon, a slow-to-reproduce species that has declined by 90 percent in the past two decades due to overfishing, pollution, habitat loss and poaching. Sturgeon scientists Drs. Ellen Pikitch and Phaedra Doukakis of the University of Miami's Pew Institute for Ocean Science and Caviar Emptor, wrote recently in *Fish and Fisheries* journal about the status of Caspian beluga sturgeon, saying there were "dangerously small populations of beluga and harvest quotas equivalent to the removal of nearly all mature individuals." They have called for a fishing moratorium on beluga sturgeon. Last year, after a petition by Caviar Emptor, the United States, once the world's largest consumer of beluga caviar, banned imports following its decision to list beluga under the US Endangered Species Act and the failure of Caspian nations to submit adequate evidence that Caspian beluga populations were healthy and well managed.

The campaigns Caviar Emptor and L'Autre Caviar are urging CITES to refuse Caspian nations' request and keep global trade closed. Caspian nations have had eight years to meet the requirements for trade of endangered

sturgeon under CITES, yet have made little progress in establishing comprehensive population surveys and a basin-wide recovery plan and in combating illegal fishing and trade.

Dawn Martin, executive director of SeaWeb, which is also part of the Caviar Emptor coalition, said, “the tough stance that CITES took earlier this year must continue if Caspian sturgeons are to be saved. Consumers can help save wild sturgeon by choosing environmentally friendly farmed caviars rather than eating the eggs of an endangered species.”

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*For more information, see [www.seaweb.org](http://www.seaweb.org), [www.seaweb.fr](http://www.seaweb.fr) or [www.pewoceanscience.org](http://www.pewoceanscience.org) or contact Julia Roberson at +33 6 76 51 48 08 or [jroberson@seaweb.org](mailto:jroberson@seaweb.org) to arrange interviews with spokespeople attending the CITES meeting.*

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