

**HEART OF THE MATTER: AGARWOOD USE AND TRADE
AND CITES IMPLEMENTATION FOR *AQUILARIA MALACCENSIS***

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THAILAND

Status and distribution

Both *Aquilaria crassna* and *A. malaccensis* are native to Thailand, according to Oldfield *et al.* (1998), and *A. baillonii* may also occur here (Heuveling van Beek and Phillips, 1999). No information was available regarding the population status or distribution of *Aquilaria* spp. in Thailand.

Domestic trade

Agarwood is known as *gridsanah* (Dr C.Y. Shyun, Medicinal Plants Division, FRIM, *in litt.* to TRAFFIC International, 8 May 2000) and very little information is available regarding the domestic trade. Thai traders are known to have obtained agarwood from Vietnam, but harvesting and export restrictions in Vietnam have now led Thai traders to obtain their supplies from Lao PDR and Cambodia. At least one Thai trader is reported to have been killed in agarwood disputes in Lao PDR (Heuveling van Beek and Phillips, 1999).

Reported international trade

Thailand's CITES annual report showed only one export of *Aquilaria malaccensis*; 244 kg of chips to Singapore in 1997, with a corresponding import volume reported by Singapore. Additional trade is recorded in Singapore's annual reports. A total of approximately eight tonnes of agarwood in the form of chips and timber originating in Thailand has been re-exported to a variety of destinations via Singapore, the vast majority of re-exports occurring in 1995. In 1995 and 1996, a small percentage of this total, in the form of chips and timber, was traded as pre-Convention stock. According to Singapore's CITES annual reports, Thailand also imported approximately four tonnes of agarwood chips originating in Indonesia and Malaysia from Singapore in 1997. Taiwan's Customs data show imports of approximately 327 t of agarwood of Thai origin between 1993 and 1998, increasing from less than one tonne in 1993 to approximately 66 t in 1998. Thailand was the third-largest supplier of agarwood to Taiwan from 1993 to 1998, according to these data.

Harvest and trade controls

The government first attempted to control the agarwood trade in 1987 when a 20% export tax was established. This was later raised to 30% and, as a consequence, the majority of trade went underground and false invoicing and under-invoicing became commonplace in order to evade tax payment (Heuveling van Beek and Phillips, 1999).

CITES requirements for *Aquilaria malaccensis* are implemented in Thailand by the *Plants Act, B.E. 2535* of 1992, which prohibits the import, export and trans-shipment of all CITES-listed plants, except with the permission of the Agriculture Director-General. A 'conserved plant', as covered by the *Plants Act*, includes all CITES-listed plants and those announced by the Minister in a Ministerial Notification. Exceptions to the Act are controlled seeds, prohibited plants and reserved plants. The *Plants Act* regulates the artificial propagation of CITES-listed plants through a nursery registration system. Violation of this Act would result in a fine of up to THB3000 (USD81) and/or imprisonment of up to three months. According to the CITES Scientific Authority, the Government of Thailand has not issued any export permits since the end of 1997, because *A. malaccensis* is regarded as threatened in the country (Scientific Authority of Thailand, statement made at the Ninth Meeting of the CITES Plants Committee, June 1999).

Cultivation

There are reportedly some small-scale *Aquilaria malaccensis* research plots in Thailand. Dr Chang YuShyun, of the Medicinal Plants Division, FRIM (*in litt.* to TRAFFIC International, 8 May 2000) reports that a study on *A. crassna* was undertaken during the late 1980s at the Kesatsart University. The first plantation of *A. crassna*, known as the Gridsanah Botanical Gardens of Aloeswood, was established in 1994. The status of this and other plantations is unclear (Heuveling van Beek and Phillips, 1999).