



THE ONLINE AGARWOOD TRADE AND SEIZURE ANALYSIS IN THE PHILIPPINES

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ABSTRACT – Agarwood is the resinous heartwood that forms in some *Aquilaria* and *Gyrinops* species and is valued for its fragrance. The trade of agarwood for cultural and medicinal purposes has been documented for over 1,500 years. The persistent demand for agarwood threatened the survival of many agarwood-producing species, resulting in the inclusion of all *Aquilaria* and *Gyrinops* in CITES Appendix II, which went into effect in 2005. Despite the historical and longstanding use, it appears to have started only recently in the Philippines. This study provides baseline information on the trade of agarwood and related products, importation of *Aquilaria* species, and trafficking based on the online survey and seizure records in the Philippines. Results of a nine-month online survey from June 2021–February 2022 of agarwood trade groups showed that seedlings (n=690), agarwood (n=351), and fruits/seeds (n=265) were the most frequently advertised products. Prices ranged from PHP 25–350 (USD 0.49–6.84) for each seedling, PHP 1,000–4,000 (USD 19.50–78.20) for fruits/seeds per kilogram, and PHP 40,000–300,000 (USD 782–5,865) for agarwood per kilogram. Seizure records from authorities from 2012 to 2021 documented 37 agarwood seizure incidents from 2018 to 2021. No seizures were recorded from 2012–2017. Most seizures occurred on Leyte, Mindanao, and Luzon islands. Based on CITES Trade Database records, agarwood chips were imported from six countries but did not have corresponding DENR import permits, rendering the transactions illegal under Republic Act No. 9147. The ongoing destructive and illicit collection of agarwood in the Philippines is likely endangering the survival of *Aquilaria* species in the wild. However, available information on the scale of the problem is limited. The Philippines has adequate laws to protect natural resources but enforcing them remains challenging. Prevention of illegal cutting of wild *Aquilaria* trees is essential to ensure the species' survival in the wild. The potential of silviculture for agarwood production to support livelihood programs rather than being an extractive, get-rich-quick scheme in the Philippines that appears to be mushrooming in the country also warrants more in-depth studies.

Keywords: *Aquilaria*, CITES, illegal wildlife trade, Lapnisan, R.A. No. 9147



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