

**14th ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES
TO THE CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT
OF POLLOCK RESOURCES IN THE CENTRAL BERING SEA**

**REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL
COMMITTEE**

31 August – 01 September 2009 – Stevenson, Washington, USA

Final: 01 September 2009

1. Opening of the Meeting

Delegations from Japan, Poland, the Republic of Korea (Korea), the Russian Federation (Russia), and the United States (U.S.) opened the meeting of the Scientific and Technical (S&T) Committee of the 14th Annual Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation and Management of Pollock Resources in the Central Bering Sea on 31 August 2009 in Stevenson, Washington, USA.

Patricia Livingston (United States) served as the Chair of the Scientific and Technical Committee Meeting. A list of the participants is provided in Attachment 1.

2. Appointment of Rapporteur

Paul Niemeier (United States) was appointed rapporteur.

3. Adoption of Agenda

3.1. The agenda (Attachment 2) was adopted.

4. Discussion of Science Issues

4.1. Update catch and effort statistics

4.1.1. The United States provided an update of pollock catch statistics for the Bering Sea, by region, in a U.S. handout (Attachment 3: Tables 1, 2, and 4). As in recent years, no pollock fishery was conducted in 2009 in the central Bering Sea Convention Area. The U.S. side explained that the catch in the Eastern Bering Sea in 2008 was close to a million metric tons (mt) and 51,000 mt for the Gulf of Alaska. The United States does not fish on the Bogoslof Island and Aleutian Island stocks but does set a TAC of 50 mt for pollock bycatch in other fisheries. The U.S. 2009 TAC for the Eastern Bering Shelf is 815,000 mt.

4.1.2 Russia provide updated catch pollock through August 25, 2009, for Table 1 in Attachment 3. The catch in the Olyutorskiy-Karagin region was 10,057 mt, and 131,130 mt for the Western Bering Sea.

4.2. Review results of trial fishing

4.2.1. There was no trial fishing reported by the Parties for 2008 or 2009.

4.3. Review results of research cruises

4.3.1 The United States reported on 2009 U.S. pollock surveys. The details of the 7-11 March 2009 Bogoslof Island survey conducted by the R/V *OSCAR DYSON* are included in Attachment 3. The 2009 survey showed an estimated pollock spawning stock biomass of 73 million fish or 110,000 mt in the Specific Area of the Convention--the lowest level on record.

4.3.2 In addition, the United States conducted a pollock stock echo-integration trawl survey in the eastern Bering Sea from 9 June - 7 August 2009. The results of the survey were not available for this meeting. However, the trend in the Eastern Bering Sea is declining pollock stocks. There were 4 years of poor recruitment, from 2002-2005. Only the 2006 year class shows signs of promise. The United States hopes that the 2006 year class will be strong and fuel the future fishery.

4.3.3 Japan asked if any other species have increased in abundance in the area. The United States responded that its surveys did not show an increase in any other species.

4.3.4. Russia provided a detailed report on seven trawl surveys conducted in Russian waters in 2008 and 2009 (Attachment 4). Russia presented the following conclusions from its research cruises:

- 1) The pollock biomass in the Navarin region increased from 875,000 mt to 1,047,500 mt in 2008 (October-December trawl survey data, SRTM *LEBEDEVO*).
- 2) The number and biomass of pollock was 4756,35 mln. individuals and 1466,98 thousand mt from the 176⁰ East longitude up to the maritime boundary (summer-autumn 2008, trawl survey data R/V *TINRO*).
- 3) The 2006 and 2007 year classes of Navarin pollock represented average multi-annual abundance, but the 2005 year class exhibited low abundance.
- 4) All generation recruits (2005, 2006, 2007) of the Karagin subzone pollock were of average multi-annual abundance (trawl survey data).

5) According to preliminary estimates for the years 2001 and 2009, the Commander Island pollock spawning stock biomass became three times greater and may exceed 300,000 mt. The abundance of pollock eggs was 150 times greater than in 1988.

6) The current pollock abundance in the Russian waters of the Bering Sea is not likely to support pollock expansion into the Convention Area.

4.3.5 Japan introduced a paper on pollock bycatch in salmon gillnet surveys in the central Bering Sea from 1981-2009 (Attachment 5). The Parties agreed that this research provides important information on pollock abundance and encouraged Japan to continue to provide such reports to the Annual Conference. In addition, it was recommended that each Party annually report pollock bycatch in any of their scientific surveys in the Bering Sea, if possible.

4.4. Review the status of Aleutian Basin pollock stocks The United States said that based on the Bogoslof Island survey, it appears that stocks have continued to decline. Only the 2006 year class holds the prospect of recruiting into the Aleutian Basin area in the future. The fish are currently age 3 and will not be available until age 5.

4.4.1 Russia agreed with the U.S. assessment of the situation and reiterated that the status of pollock stocks in the Navarin Basin Area and Western Bering Sea is not good. However, the survey data on stocks from the Commander Islands area is positive and may prove to be a source for pollock expansion into the Convention Area in the future.

4.5. Factors affecting recovery of the stocks Japan asked if there have been any changes in the conservation and management measures taken by the United States and Russia. Both countries responded that the matter of pollock stock conservation is taken very seriously. Russia has decreased TACs in the Western Bering Sea from 619,000 mt in 2007 to 418,000 mt in 2009. The United States said that its management philosophy has not changed—conservation is still of paramount importance. The U.S. delegate stated that the United States has always set fishing quotas commensurate with biomass estimates and has consistently protected female spawning biomass.

4.6. The effects of the moratorium and its continuation

4.6.1 Russia stated that despite the fact that there have been no signs of recovery of the Aleutian Basin pollock stocks, it does not mean that the Parties should stop conservation and management efforts. Recovery will depend on many factors. The data from the Commander Islands survey is encouraging and presents the possibility that pollock stocks may expand into the Convention Area in the future.

4.6.2 The United States said that the moratorium needs to continue. The state of the stocks is fragile and the stocks need protection. The U.S. side reiterated that it is not unusual for stocks to take a long time to recover.

4.6.3 The Parties agreed on the need to continue the moratorium for another year.

4.7. Methodologies to determine Allowable Biological Catch (ABC) and Allowable Harvest Level (AHL)

4.7.1 Russia and the United States said that since there is insufficient science and technical information available to allow the parties to establish the Aleutian Basin pollock biomass pursuant to the Convention Annex Part 1 (a), the biomass should be determined as per Part 1 (b).

4.7.2 Japan and Korea supported their positions at previous meetings of setting ABC in the Convention Area based on methodology used by the United States for setting the Bogoslof region ABC domestically.

4.8 Recommendation on AHL

4.8.1 Using the indirect method described in the Convention Annex Part 1 (b), the extrapolated biomass for the Convention area is 183,333 mt. This not large enough to trigger an AHL as determined by the Convention Annex Part 1 (c).

4.8.2 Japan and Korea reiterated their position that the Parties should set an AHL, even if it is small.

4.8.3 There was no consensus among the Parties on how to set AHL and therefore the process must follow that established in the Annex of the Convention.

4.9 Research Plans

4.9.1 The United States plans to conduct the next Bogoslof Island pollock survey in 2011. It will continue to conduct annual surveys on the Eastern Shelf pollock stocks. The U.S. side invited scientists from the other parties to participate in the survey.

4.9.2 Korea wanted to participate in the U.S. survey plan in 2011 by placing a Korean scientist on board the U.S. survey vessel.

4.9.3 Russia will continue to conduct surveys in the Navarin Basin Area and the Karagin Subzone in 2010.

5. Discussion of Enforcement and Management Issues

5.1 Violations of the Convention

5.1.1 No violations of the Convention were reported, however the U.S. Coast Guard reported that 10 transport vessels were sighted in and around the Convention Area. These vessels are believed to be supporting illegal, unreported, or unregulated fishing activities in the area. Three of the vessels were Cambodian-flagged, two were

Panamanian flagged, one was Sierra Leone-flagged and the remaining four were unidentified.

5.2. Trial fishing terms and conditions for 2010

5.2.1. The United States suggested that the Parties adopt the same terms and conditions used last year and that countries planning on conducting trial fishing give the other Parties as much lead time as possible, preferably more than one month.

6. Other Issues and Recommendations

6.1 Future Meetings of the Scientific and Technical Committee

6.1.1 Russia said that there are two format options for conducting future meetings of the Scientific and Technical Committee: 1) adopt the teleconference meeting format, or 2) adopt face-to face meetings, regardless of the format adopted by the Plenary. Russia observed that the same people participate in both meetings. Therefore, Russia supports option 1, if the same format is adopted for the Plenary Meeting.

6.1.2 The United States suggested that the Parties could exchange scientific information prior to the Scientific and Technical Committee meeting and then decide that if there is enough new information to warrant meeting face-to-face. Whatever the Parties decide, it should be on a trial basis.

6.1.3 Russia stated that it would be good to decide whether the S&T will meet face-to-face one year in advance of the meeting so that adequate meeting preparations can be made.

6.1.4 The Parties discussed how to define "significant new information" and concluded that there are many factors to be considered.

6.1.5 The Parties decided to defer further discussion on this issue until the outcome of the discussion on the Plenary Meeting format is determined.

7. Report to the Annual Conference

7.1. The Chair of the Scientific and Technical Committee presented the Scientific and Technical Meeting Report to the Annual Conference.

8. Closing Remarks

8.1. The Chair thanked all the participants of the S&T for their discussions, and thanked the rapporteur for compiling the written report. With that, the Chair closed the S&T meeting on Tuesday, September 1, 2009.

8.2 The participants thanked the Chair of the Scientific and Technical Committee for leading the meeting

S&T Committee List of Attachments:

1. Delegations
2. Scientific and Technical Committee Agenda
3. Information for Discussions at the Scientific and Technical Committee submitted by the United States Party to the 14th Annual Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation and Management of the Pollock Resources in the Central Bering Sea
4. Results of Russian Research Cruises to the Bering Sea in 2008-2009
5. Walleye pollock bycatch in salmon gillnet surveys in the central Bering Sea, 1981-2009.