

**REPORT OF THE 20th MEETING OF THE
SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL COMMITTEE OF THE PARTIES TO THE
CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF POLLOCK
RESOURCES IN THE CENTRAL BERING SEA**

14 – 25 September 2015 Virtual Process Meeting

1. Opening of the Meeting

Loh-Lee Low (USA) served as the Chair of the Scientific and Technical Committee Meeting. A list of the participants is provided in Appendix 1.

2. Appointment of Rapporteur

The Chair also served as rapporteur to compile the S&T report. The following individuals served as the contact point and “voice” from each party for email exchange –Japan (Orio Yamamura), the Russian Federation (Alexander I. Glubokov), the United States (Loh-Lee Low), the Republic of Korea (Seok-Gwan Choi), Poland/EU (Barbara Lewkowska and Adam Augustynowicz). The People's Republic of China did not participate.

3. Adoption of the Agenda

3.1. The agenda (Appendix 2) was adopted.

4. Discussion of Science Issues

4.1. Update catch and effort statistics

4.1.1. The United States and the Russian Federation provided updated pollock catch statistics by year and region (Appendix 3). Two figures at the end of the report are provided to show the geographical/statistical areas of the Bering Sea.

4.2. Review results of trial fishing

4.2.1. There was no new trial fishing reported by the Parties.

4.3. Review results of research cruises

4.3.1. The Russian Federation reported that it conducted a pollock survey in the northwestern Bering Sea during September-October 2014 by the R/V *TINRO*. The studies showed that the year classes with above average abundance were in 2006, 2008, and 2012. The average year classes were in 2009, 2011, and 2013. The PowerPoint report also provided projections of pollock biomass for the northern Bering Sea (Navarin area) and the western Bering Sea (Karagin area). The biomass (spawning biomass and age 2+ biomass) is projected to increase in the northern Bering Sea from 2012 to 2018. The biomass in the Western Bering Sea is stable at a low level from 2010.

4.3.2. The U.S. survey strategy for pollock in the Bering Sea are as follows: (1) Eastern Bering Sea (EBS) shelf – An annual survey to assess groundfish and crabs in the summer months (June to August); usually using two chartered fishing vessels; (2) EBS slope -- The NOAA ship *Oscar Dyson* conducts a summer pollock acoustic-trawl survey every 2 years (the latest one

in 2014 and the next to be 2016). It surveys the western and northwestern parts of the U.S. EEZ in the eastern Bering Sea, and the Russian side of the U.S.-Russia Convention Line; going back and forth from the U.S. EEZ to the Russian EEZ. This survey is part of a cooperative study of Bering Sea pollock with Russia's Pacific Fisheries Research Institute (TINRO-Center); (3) Aleutian Islands -- The Aleutian Islands area is surveyed every 3 years using 2 chartered fishing vessels. The latest surveys were conducted during June-August 2014. The next survey will be in 2017; and (4) Bogoslof Island area -- The NOAA ship *Oscar Dyson* also conducts a pollock acoustic-trawl survey in the Bogoslof area every 2 years, the latest one in 2014 (3-14 March) and next to be in 2016. This is the specific area that has been designated in the Convention to provide an indicator of pollock stock condition in the central Bering Sea Convention Area.

The reporting of the cruise results and assessments of the pollock stocks in the U.S. EEZ are timed to the completion of summer surveys and a meeting of the Fishery Management Plan Team each year, generally about mid-September. The Plan Team drafts stock assessments for the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to start the process of fisheries management decision making for the following year. The website for these annual Plan Team reports can be found in <http://www.afsc.noaa.gov/REFM/Stocks/assessments.htm>. Pertinent parts of the U.S. survey and pollock stock assessments are discussed in section 4.4 below.

4.3.3. Japan generally conducts an annual salmon survey in the central Bering Sea during July to August. No pollock was caught (incidental to the salmon catch) in the central Bering Sea area in 2013 and 2014. The survey in 2015 caught some juvenile pollock (age 0) in 2 of the 17 stations sampled in the central Bering Sea. The numbers of pollock caught were 375 in station H08 and 131 in station H20.

4.4. Review the status of Aleutian Basin Pollock stocks

4.4.1. The Aleutian Basin also encompasses the central Bering Sea Convention Area (see the 2 figures at the end of this report). Direct surveys have not taken place as the area is rather large. Instead, the Convention established a specific area (defined in Convention Annex Part 1) around Bogoslof Island where the central Bering Sea pollock stock is known to migrate to spawn. It is in this specific area of Bogoslof where the abundance of pollock is estimated during February-March by the NOAA ship *Oscar Dyson* every 2 years, to provide an indirect indicator of the central Bering Sea Pollock stock abundance. The Annex assumes that the "specific area" represents 60% of the pollock stock in the entire Aleutian Basin at the time of the survey. The results of the historical surveys are shown in Figure 1 below:

Bogoslof Survey Results, 1988-2014

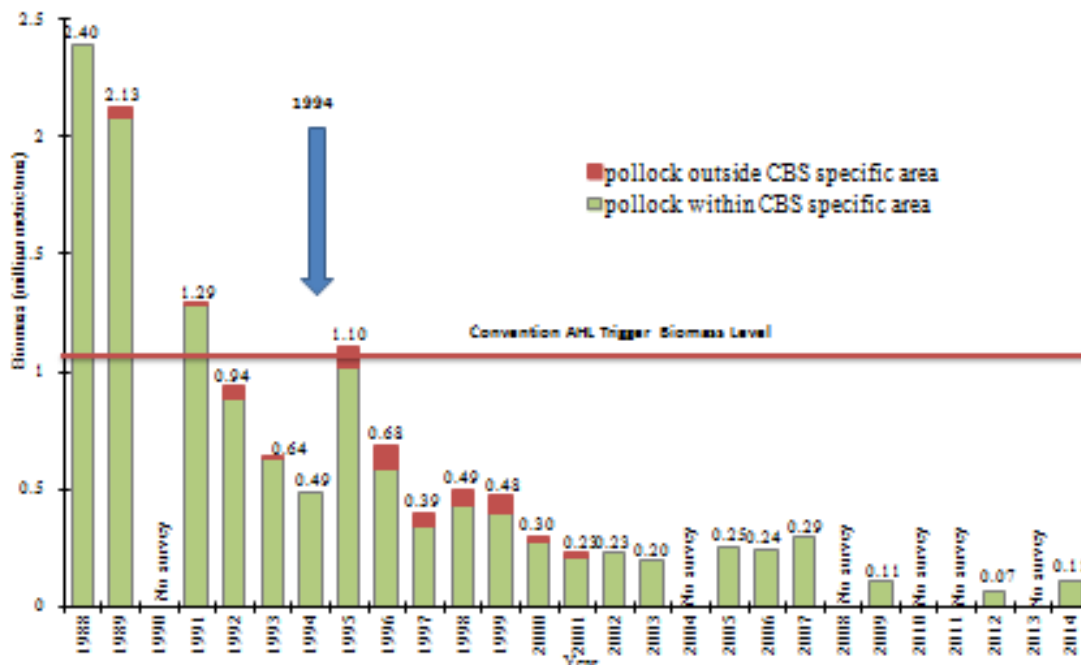


Figure 1. Biomass estimates obtained during acoustic-trawl surveys for walleye pollock in the Bogoslof Island area, 1988-2014. The United States conducted all the surveys; except for the 1999 survey, which was conducted by Japan.

4.4.2. The Russian pollock studies conducted in 2014-2015 showed that the pollock biomass in the Western Bering Sea is stable at a low level since 2010 and the biomass of the Navarin pollock has been projected to increase from 2012 – 2018.

4.4.3. The United States provided the following summary information about pollock stocks status for the Bering Sea by region. The table below is extracted from the U.S. document that summarizes the status and catch specifications of the pollock stocks in the Bering Sea-Aleutian Islands (BSAI) management areas in the U.S. EEZ. All units are in metric tons. *The catches for 2015 are through 18 July.

All units are in metric tons.

Area	Year	Age 3+ Pollock Biomass	Overfishing Level (t)	Acceptable Biological Catch (t)	Total Allowable Catch (t)	Catch (t)
1.E Bering Sea	2010	4,620,000	918,000	813,000	813,000	810,215
	2011	9,620,000	2,450,000	1,270,000	1,253,000	1,199,069
	2012	8,340,000	2,470,000	1,220,000	1,186,000	1,205,197
	2013	8,140,000	2,550,000	1,375,000	1,247,000	1,270,745
	2014	8,082,000	2,726,000	1,369,000	1,267,000	1,298,593
	2015	9,203,000	3,330,000	1,637,000	1,310,000	831,737*
2.Aleutians	2010	242,000	40,000	33,100	19,000	1,285
	2011	261,000	44,500	36,700	19,000	1,208
	2012	251,000	39,600	32,500	19,000	975
	2013	266,000	45,600	37,300	19,000	2,964
	2014	259,525	48,600	40,000	19,000	2,348
	2015	228,102	36,005	29,659	19,000	710*
3.Bogoslof	2010	110,000	22,000	156	50	176
	2011	110,000	22,000	156	150	140
	2012	110,000	22,000	16,500	500	79
	2013	67,100	13,400	10,100	100	54
	2014	67,100	13,413	10,059	75	428
	2015	106,000	21,200	15,900	100	727*

*The catches for 2015 are through 18 July 2015.

EBS Stock area— The biomass trends of the stock tends to reflect recruitment patterns. The 2008 biomass reached a recent low that resulted from poor recruitment of successive 2002-2005 year classes. Recruitment levels improved after that and so did the biomass. According to criteria used by the U.S. fishery management council process, the pollock stock in the EBS is not being subjected to overfishing, is not overfished, and is not approaching an overfished condition.

Aleutian Islands area— There was a very strong 1978 year class that built up the biomass of Aleutians pollock from 1980-1985. Since that strong year class, recruitment (thus biomass) levels have declined drastically and remained at low levels; though there has been a general slow increase of biomass from 1999. These increases have resulted more from dramatic decreases in harvest levels rather than from good recruitment. The pollock stock in the Aleutian Islands is not being subjected to overfishing, is not overfished, and is not approaching an overfished condition.

Bogoslof area: As no new survey information is available since the 2014 U.S. survey, this section of the report is extracted from the 2014 meeting report: “The trend in estimated biomass in the Bogoslof Island area has been steadily down. The low biomass was detected in 2012 (67,100 t). The latest survey by NOAA ship *Oscar Dyson* estimated the 2014 pollock biomass to be 112,000 t. This is an increase from 2012. The pollock stock in the Bogoslof Island area, while low in biomass, is not subjected to overfishing as directed fishing has not been allowed. However it is not possible to determine whether this stock is overfished or whether it is

approaching an overfished condition since there is insufficient information about the population dynamics of the stock.”

Poland/EU asked the United States for an explanation of the increased pollock catch in the Bogoslof area in 2014 and 2015. The United States explained that the increase in pollock in Area 518 (Bogoslof) was primarily driven by increases in the arrowtooth/Kamchatka flounder fishery in that area in recent years. While the catch has exceeded total allowable catches in 2014-15, it is still substantially below acceptable biological levels (see table above). This flounder fishery is primarily prosecuted by non-pelagic trawl catcher processors in the months of May through July.

Poland/EU further asked if biological data on fisheries in the area were taken. The United States indicated that observers are normally on board the vessels to sample the catches, including pollock bycatch. No special notes were reported on the catches; but the Chair asked that the United States provide further details on the bycatch in future S&T sessions.

4.5. Factors affecting recovery of the stocks

4.5.1. No new information was provided.

4.6. The effects of the moratorium and its continuation

4.6.1. No new information was provided.

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

4.7.1. Japan had previously proposed to discuss establishing a new rule for setting an AHL below the recovery level specified in Annex Part I of the Convention; but no action has been taken by any study group. Thus, no new information was provided.

4.8. Recommendation on AHL

4.8.1. No new information was provided. In the past, the Parties have used Annex Part 1 of the Convention to establish AHL. The AHL level has been set at zero; because the minimum biomass level needed to trigger a non-zero AHL according to the Convention Annex has not been reached. Figure 1 (above) shows the estimated biomass in relation to the biomass level needed to trigger establishing an AHL.

4.9. Research Plans

The United States plans to conduct its next survey on pollock in the Bogoslof area in 2016 (during a 2 week period in February-March). Other survey plans by the Parties (United States and Russia) in their EEZ waters are expected to continue as in previous years. Japan normally conducts its salmon survey (that may catch pollock incidentally) in the central Bering Sea annually.

5. Discussion of Enforcement and Management Issues

5.1. Violations of the Convention.

5.1.1. No new information was provided; but no IUU fishing in the Convention area was known to have been reported in 2015.

5.2. Terms and conditions for trial fishing for the following year

5.2.1. The Committee recommended that the terms and conditions for trial fishing remain the same as in the previous years. Trial Fishing is addressed in Article X, paragraph 4 of the Convention. In general, any trial fishing intention needs an application and trial fishing plan to

be approved by the Scientific and Technical Committee. No Party has applied for trial fishing in 2016 to the Scientific and Technical Committee.

6. Other Issues and Recommendations

6.1. Future Meetings of the Scientific and Technical Committee.

6.1.1. The next meeting of the Committee will be held via email exchanges as they have from 2010. The Party that will host this meeting (expected to be Japan) shall be determined at the Annual Conference.

7. Report to the Annual Conference

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

8. Closing Remarks

8.1. Thank you, all participants

Appendix 1
List of Participants

China

No name was provided by China.

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Appendix 2

20th Annual Meeting of the Scientific and Technical Committee of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation and Management of Pollock Resources in the Central Bering Sea

Virtual Meeting hosted by the United States
14-25 September 2015

Agenda

1. Opening
2. Appointment of the Rapporteur (United States)
3. Adoption of the Agenda
4. Discussion of Science Issues
 - 4.1 Update catch and effort statistics.
 - 4.2 Review results of trial fishing.
 - 4.3 Review results of research cruises.
 - 4.4 Review the status of the Aleutian Basin pollock stocks.
 - 4.5 Factors affecting recovery of the stocks.
 - 4.6 The effects of the moratorium and its continuation.
 - 4.7 Methodologies to determine Allowable Biological Catch (ABC) and Allowable Harvest Level (AHL).
 - 4.8 Recommendation on AHL.
 - 4.9 Research plans.
5. Discussion of Enforcement and Management Issues
 - 5.1 Violations of the Convention.
 - 5.2 Terms and Conditions for Trial Fishing for next year.
6. Other Issues and Recommendations
7. Report to the Annual Conference
8. Closing Remarks

Appendix 3: Table of Pollock catches in the Bering Sea.

Table 1. All-nation historical catch of pollock from the Bering Sea, in metric tons, 1977-2015

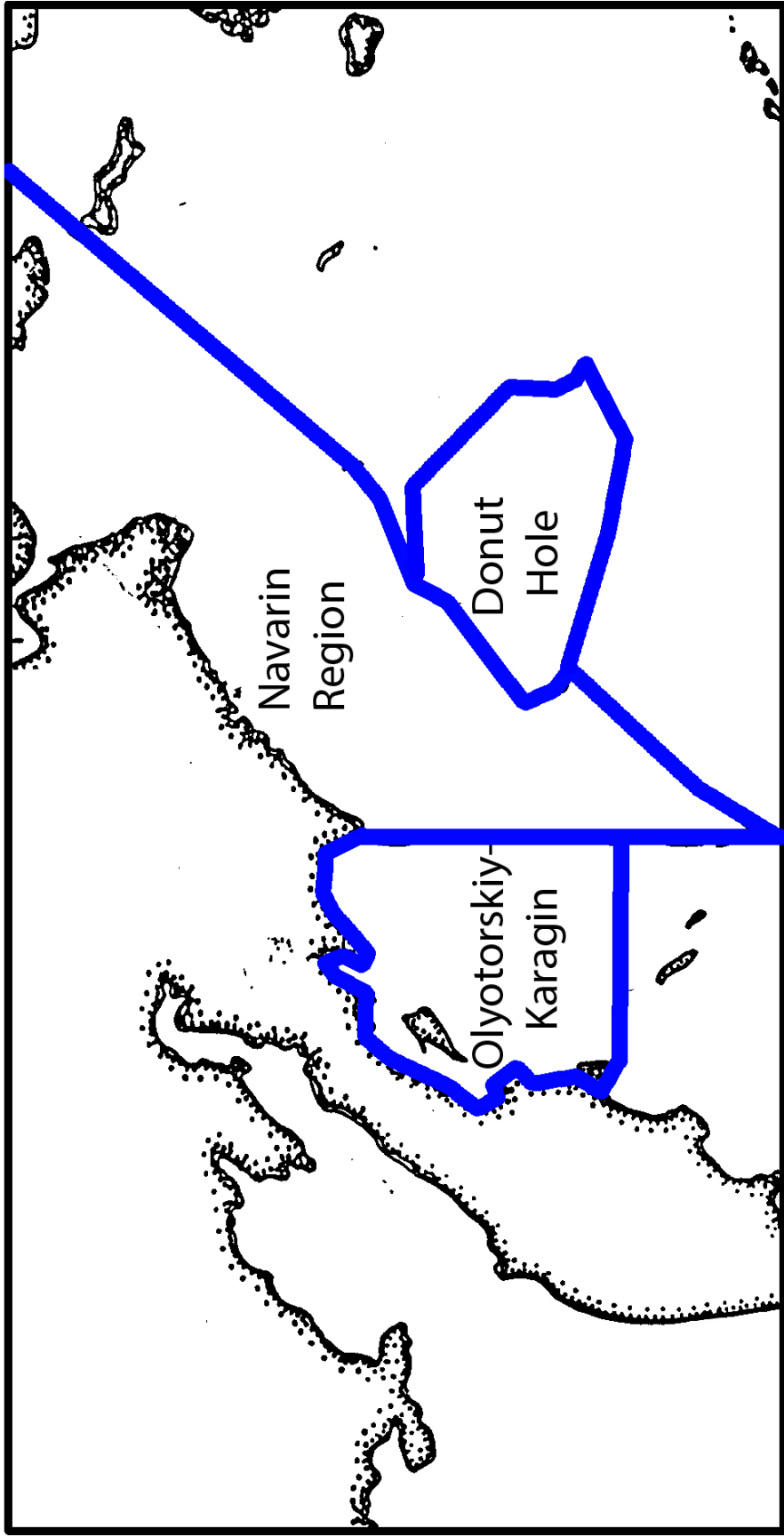
Year	Olyotorskiy-Karagin (W of 170W)	Navarin Region (E of 170W)	Donut Hole	Bogoslof	Aleutian Region	Eastern Bering Sea	Total
							Bering Sea
1977	265,000				7,625	978,370	1,250,995
1978	417,000				6,282	979,431	1,402,713
1979	546,000				9,504	935,714	1,491,218
1980	825,000				58,156	958,280	1,841,436
1981	1,133,000				55,516	973,502	2,162,018
1982	976,000				57,978	955,964	1,989,942
1983	1,006,000				59,026	981,450	2,046,476
1984	252,000	503,000	181,200		81,834	1,092,055	2,110,089
1985	134,000	488,000	363,400		58,730	1,139,676	2,183,806
1986	297,000	570,000	1,039,800		46,641	1,141,993	3,095,434
1987	349,000	463,000	1,326,300	377,436	28,720	859,416	3,403,872
1988	475,000	852,000	1,395,900	87,813	30,000	1,228,721	4,069,434
1989	345,000	684,000	1,447,600	36,073	15,531	1,229,600	3,757,804
1990	582,000	232,000	917,400	151,672	79,025	1,455,193	3,417,290
1991	326,000	178,000	293,400	264,760	78,649	1,217,301	2,358,110
1992	282,000	315,000	10,000	160	48,745	1,164,440	1,820,345
1993	288,000	389,000	1,957	885	54,074	1,198,790	1,932,706
1994	204,000	288,900	NA	556	53,224	1,197,224	1,743,904
1995	79,000	427,300	Trace	264	60,184	1,169,614	1,736,362
1996	34,000	753,000	Trace	389	26,597	1,102,579	1,916,565
1997	30,000	735,000	Trace	163	24,721	1,036,789	1,826,673
1998	25,000	719,000	Trace	8	22,053	1,058,288	1,824,349
1999	46,000	639,000	Trace	1	965	889,561	1,575,527
2000	15,000	507,000	Trace	29	1,174	1,019,067	1,542,270
2001	25,000	526,000	0	61	788	1,247,305	1,799,154
2002	8,000	370,000	0	22	1,134	1,331,416	1,710,572
2003	14,600	411,200	0	24	1,653	1,491,356	1,918,833
2004	6,200	424,500	0	0	1,150	1,493,394	1,925,244
2005	4,400	446,800	0	0	1,622	1,483,398	1,936,220
2006	3,900	462,500	0	0	1,736	1,486,414	1,954,550
2007	62,600	587,900	0	0	2,519	1,354,091	2,007,110
2008	50,632	507,127	0	9	1,277	990,314	1,549,359
2009	26,052	328,517	0	46	1,729	810,821	1,167,165
2010	43,352	319,543	0	176	1,285	810,195	1,174,551
2011	37,189	336,690	0	173	1,208	1,199,066	1,574,326
2012	26,300	390,040	0	79	975	1,205,371	1,622,765
2013	29,800	358,900	0	57	2,964	1,270,732	1,662,453
2014	15,100	330,600	0	427	2,375	1,297,409	1,645,911
2015*	4,700	161,000	0	727	698	831,737	998,862

Sources of Data

Reported by the Parties to the Convention

*US data through 18 July 2015, Russian data through 21 July 2015

Statistic areas in the Bering Sea



Bogoslof (518) area

