

**8th 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**

15-17 September 2003 – Portland, Oregon, USA

Final: 17 September 2003

Delegations from Japan, the Republic of Korea (Korea), the Russian Federation (Russia), and the United States (U.S.) participated in a meeting of the Scientific and Technical (S&T) Committee in conjunction with the 8th Annual Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation and Management of Pollock Resources in the Central Bering Sea in Portland, Oregon.

1. Opening remarks

Dr. Richard Marasco (U.S.), Chair of the Scientific and Technical Committee, opened the meeting at 11:00, 15 September 2003. A list of the participants is provided in Attachment 1.

2. Appointment of Rapporteur

Paul Niemeier (U.S.) was appointed as rapporteur.

3. Adoption of Agenda

The agenda for the meeting was adopted (Attachment 2).

4. Report of the May 2003 Pollock Workshop in Busan

Dr. Loh-Lee Low (U.S.) summarized the results of the Workshop for the Committee. A report of the Workshop was provided to participants (Attachment 3).

5. Discussion of Science Issues

5.1. Update Catch and Effort Statistics

5.1.1. As custodian of the historical database on catch and effort statistics for pollock in the Bering Sea for the Parties, the United States noted that catch data for the Western Bering Sea is still needed from Russia to complete a table of the historical catch of pollock in the Bering Sea (Section I, Table 2 of Attachment 4). Russia responded that it would provide the necessary data to amend the table at the meeting.

5.1.2. The United States pointed out that detailed pollock catch and effort statistics for the

Central Bering Sea for Japan Korea, China, and Poland are available on the website developed by the United States.

5.1.3. The United States noted that U.S. pollock catches in the Bogoslof and Aleutian Island areas in Section I, Table 1 of Attachment 4 were incidental catches, as its fishery regulations prohibit targeting on pollock.

5.2. Review Results of Trial Fishing

5.2.1. Korea reported on 2003 trial fishing operations in the Convention Area (Attachment 5). Two commercial vessels were sent to the Area, one from 12-23 March and the other from 12-26 March. Only two pollock were caught in a combined total of 13 mid-water trawl hauls.

5.2.2. The United States asked if Korea could supply the exact time that the Korean vessels were at each set and hauling position. Korea said it would.

5.2.3. No other Parties present at the S&T Committee Meeting conducted trial fishing since the last S&T Committee meeting.

5.3. Review Results of Research Cruises

5.3.1. The United States reported on the 9-13 March 2003 echo-integration-trawl survey of pollock in the southeastern Aleutian Basin near Bogoslof Island by the R/V *MILLER FREEMAN* (Section II of Attachment 4). The cruise was able to complete acoustic data collection, but only 5 of 12 planned trawl hauls due to bad weather. The pollock biomass estimate for the Bogoslof Island area was 198,000 mt. Biomass estimates for this area have averaged about 200,000 mt for the past 4 years.

5.3.2. Russia provided a detailed report on research cruises conducted by TINRO-Center, KamchatNIRO, and VNIRO, primarily in the Russian zone (Attachment 6). The TINRO-Center research cruise extended into the U.S. EEZ. Russia reported that its standard surveys showed that pollock distribution is dependent on temperature--pollock avoid cold water below 0.5° C. The fact that Bering Sea temperatures have been increasing in recent years may be having a favorable effect on pollock survival. Russia noted that, in general, pollock stocks are beginning to show signs of recovery in the Western Bering Sea and Navarin Basin area.

5.3.3. The United States reported on the 2002 pollock stock assessment in the Eastern Bering Sea (Section III of Attachment 4). The 2002 pollock stock biomass estimate from the summer trawl surveys for the Eastern Bering is 4.82 million mt, a 16 percent increase over the 2001 estimate of 4.14 million mt. The United States noted that water temperatures in the Eastern Bering Sea in 2003 are nearly at record highs.

5.3.4. The United States observed that overall, pollock stocks appear to be improving in both the Russian and U.S. zones, but that is not the case for the Central Bering Sea.

5.4. Review the Status of Aleutian Basin Pollock Stocks.

5.4.1. The United States reiterated that because no surveys of the pollock biomass in the Aleutian Basin had been conducted in 2002-2003, the Bogoslof Island (Specific Area) pollock biomass estimate is used as a proxy for the Aleutian Basin, in accordance with the provisions of the Convention. The Bogoslof Island pollock biomass is presumed to represent 60 percent of the Aleutian Basin pollock biomass.

5.4.2. Russia reiterated that it is important for the Parties to continue to determine pollock stock structure throughout the Bering Sea in order to assess the status of stocks in the Central Bering Sea and to understand the origin of those stocks. One of the most important tools for this purpose is genetic analysis of pollock populations based on polymorphic microsatellite markers. Russia presented the results of research obtained from a comparative analysis of Bering Sea and North Kurile concentrations of pollock using 5 microsatellite loci (Attachment 6).

5.4.3. The Parties agreed to set up a Working Group to develop a comprehensive program and protocols to collect and exchange specimens for genetic research in accordance with guidelines set by the Yokohama Workshop. Representatives of the Parties to the Working Group are Akira Nishimura (Japan), Hyun-Su Jo (Korea), Alexander Glubokov (Russia), and Loh-Lee Low (U.S.).

5.5. Factors Affecting Recovery of the Stock

5.5.1. The United States summarized factors affecting the recovery/decline of the pollock stock in the Central Bering Sea, as discussed at the May 2003 Workshop in Busan. Environmental factors appear to have had the greatest impact on the pollock populations, and conditions favoring recovery of the stock in the Central Bering Sea will be difficult to predict. Extensive discussions on this topic have been held in the past, and no new information has been developed.

5.5.2. A request was made at the 7th Annual Conference for the Coastal States to provide all Parties copies of their pollock management regulations. The United States and Russia have complied with the request.

5.5.3. Due to the complexity of the U.S. regulations, Japan requested that the United States provide a summarized version. The United States responded that quotas and allocations of pollock have been summarized in Section I of Attachment 4. Furthermore, real time information about the U.S. regulatory system (openings, closings, quota status, sea lion measures, etc.) is available on the NOAA website at www.fakr.noaa.gov.

5.5.4. Russia suggested identifying a future direction for research. Russia stated that, at present, there is no direct correlation between abundance of pollock on the shelf and in the deepwater basin. In recent times, stocks have improved on the shelves, whereas the abundance of pollock in the Bogoslof Island area is at a low level. There is an assumption that the abundance of fish on the shelf and in the deepwater basin are independent. Russia recommended two goals for future research: (1) determine the factors that determine the survival of pollock in the Aleutian Basin at

their early life stages; and (2) study the regularities of long term variability of the ecological conditions in the deep water portions of the Aleutians. If there is progress in this respect, more will be known and there will be more certainty in forecasting when a recovery is expected.

5.5.5. Korea stated that the Parties need to consider a compromise that satisfies the sustenance of both fisheries resources and fishing industries and sustain fisheries at a level acceptable for both managers and scientists.

5.5.6. Japan stated it had not observed much migration from the shelf to deep water in recent years. It believes that historical data suggests that there is some correlation between shelf and deep water pollock. Japan continues to believe that fisheries and fishery management on the shelf area can have a significant impact on pollock in the Central Bering Sea, and requests continuation of careful management of shelf pollock.

5.6. The Effects of the Moratorium and Its Continuation

5.6.1. The United States stated that indications of stock improvements from the Coastal States' respective EEZs might be a precursor for the Aleutian Basin. The United States is seeing a continual improvement in pollock stocks on the Eastern Bering shelf. It is a positive sign if these stocks migrate to the Aleutian Basin. There has not been an improvement in the Aleutian Basin pollock stock despite many years of a moratorium. The United States reiterated that it continues to conservatively manage its shelf stocks and does not allow a directed fishery on the Bogoslof Island pollock spawning stocks, despite the fact that such a fishery would be very lucrative.

5.6.2. Japan stated its official stance that, in spite of more than 10 years of a moratorium, there has been no recovery of pollock stocks in the Convention Area. Judging from such results, Japan understands that we are not constrained to the moratorium as the only appropriate conservation measure and stock management methods including the whole distribution area of the Aleutian Basin pollock should be implemented.

5.6.3. Russia stated that the sharp reduction of catch in the Karagin zone due to careful management during the past 7 years allowed Russia to see favorable results of that moratorium in 2002. The stock in the Karagin zone has nearly doubled and concentrations of pollock are being observed on the slope. In the Eastern zone, the situation is more complicated. It is probable that high densities of fish on the shelf prevent fish on the slope from recovering. Russia believes that the moratorium should be continued because of the many uncertainties involved in the recovery of the pollock stocks and in deference to the precautionary approach.

5.6.4. There was no general agreement among all Parties to continue the moratorium on commercial pollock fishing in the Central Bering Sea.

5.7. Methodologies to Determine Allowable Biological Catch (ABC) and Allowable Harvest Level AHL)

5.7.1. At the May 2003 Pollock Workshop in Busan, it was agreed that an intermediary step of

establishing an ABC should be conducted prior to determining the AHL. The North Pacific Fishery Management Council process was determined to be an appropriate procedure to do this, based on the March 2003 Bogoslof survey results.

5.7.2. The United States reviewed the formulation and determination of ABC procedures in Section IV of Attachment 4. The 2003 ABC was calculated to be 2,774 mt for the Specific Area and 4,623 mt for the Convention Area.

5.7.3. Japan stated, that since Bogoslof stocks are at a historically low level, it would be safer to calculate ABC, taking natural mortality into consideration from 2003 to 2004.

5.7.4. The United States said there is one procedure with two sets of alternative assumptions to project the Bogoslof biomass from 2003 to 2004. This results in a biomass of 198,000 mt, assuming that biomass remains the same, or a decline by natural mortality. Thus, ABC for 2004 for the entire Aleutian Basin would be calculated to be 4,623 mt (assuming no biomass change) or 2,401 mt (if biomass changes).

5.7.5. Japan suggested to adopt specifically for 2004 an ABC of 2,401 mt (assuming biomass is reduced by natural mortality). No Parties objected and the ABC for 2004 was set at 2,401 mt.

5.8 Recommendations on AHL

5.8.1. The United States said that its North Pacific Fishery Management Council does not necessarily automatically convert an ABC to a TAC, or AHL. As an example, the Council has chosen not to fish on the highly lucrative Bogoslof pollock spawning stocks or Aleutian Island stocks.

5.8.2. The Chair clarified that the S&T Committee does not set AHL, but makes recommendations on a process for setting the AHL to the Plenary.

5.8.3. Japan stated that an AHL should be established, even if it is a small amount, as long as it is based on sound scientific methods. Japan said that the 2004 AHL should be set at the ABC.

5.8.4. Korea agreed with Japan that the 2004 AHL should be set at the ABC level.

5.8.5. Russia recommended setting the AHL at zero for 2004.

5.8.6. The United States supported Russia's recommendation that the AHL be set at zero.

5.8.7. The Parties agreed to inform the Plenary that the S&T Committee could not reach consensus on an AHL recommendation for 2004.

5.9. Comprehensive Research Plan

5.9.1. The United States reported on the status of the cooperative research plan to coordinate the survey efforts of the Parties. For 2003, the only dedicated pollock survey efforts in the Bering Sea were conducted by the United States and Russia. There were no opportunities for direct cooperation, as the surveys were conducted at different times. For 2004, the United States and Russia are developing cooperative research efforts for dedicated pollock shelf surveys in the Eastern and Western Bering Seas.

5.9.2. In the winter 2005, the new U.S. R/V *OSCAR DYSON* will be available for research work.

5.9.3. Japan expressed concern about estimating pollock biomass in the Bogoslof Island region when the R/V *MILLER FREEMAN* is not scheduled to conduct an assessment in 2004. The U.S. side responded that the Parties may have to rely on prior surveys and that projections will be necessary.

5.9.4. Japan said that it could not promise in this lowest stock level that a Japanese research vessel would be available to participate in a comprehensive research plan.

5.9.5. Japan asked the United States the reason that the *MILLER FREEMAN* could not be used to conduct the 2004 survey of the Bogoslof region. The United States explained that competing research priorities in other parts of Alaska is the main reason. The United States reiterated that it will conduct surveys of the Bogoslof area every two years, and will return to an annual survey if the pollock stock situation improves.

5.9.6. Parties agreed that the Comprehensive Research Plan Working Group should communicate prior to the next Annual Conference to examine the feasibility of conducting a synoptic survey of the Bering Sea and report on its findings at the next Annual Conference.

6. Discussion of Enforcement and Management Issues

6.1. Trial Fishing Terms and Conditions for 2004.

6.1.1. The United States presented an overview of trial fishing activity observed in the Convention Area for 2002-2003 (Attachment 7).

6.1.2. The S&T Committee agreed to recommend to the Plenary that the terms and conditions for 2004 trial fishing be the same as those for 2003.

6.2. Number and Priority Placement of Observers Required by Article XI

No issues were raised.

6.3. Methods to Determine Catch Weight

No issues were raised.

6.4. Components of a Management System

No issues were raised.

7. Other Matters and Recommendations

7.1. The United States has developed a web site for the Convention with information that contains reports on the Convention, reports from the Annual Conferences, records of workshops, documents and data records, and information on key contact persons from each Party. The website is temporarily located at:

http://www.afsc.noaa.gov/refm/cbs/convention_conferences.htm.

7.2 For logistic reasons, the website needs to be moved to a neutral web host. Such a move is estimated to cost \$1,000-\$2,000 per year. The United States will explore options for relocating the website and report back to the Parties at the next Annual Conference.

8. Report to the Annual Conference

9. Closing Remarks

List of Attachments

1. List of S&T Committee Participants.
2. S&T Agenda.

The following attachments will be made available on the Convention website:

3. Report of the Workshop on the Central Bering Sea Pollock Resources, May 19-21, 2003, Busan, Korea.
4. Information Submitted to the Scientific and Technical Committee by the United States for the 8th Annual Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation and Management of Pollock Resources in the Central Bering Sea.
5. Report on the Korean trial fishing on walleye pollock in the Convention area of the Bering Sea in 2003.
6. Information Submitted to the Scientific and Technical Committee by the Russian Federation.
7. U.S. Coast Guard District 17 Fisheries Law Enforcement