

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

September 15-18, 2003
Portland, Oregon USA

1. Opening of the Conference.

The Chairperson, Dr. James Balsiger, the Regional Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Alaska Region, welcomed the delegations of the Parties to the Convention on The Conservation and Management of the Pollock Resources in the Central Bering Sea to the Eighth Annual Conference. The Chairperson invited the representatives of the Republic of Korean Government, Japanese Government, and the Russian Federation Government and the United States Government to present opening Statements.

2. Welcome Address and Statements of the Delegates

- 2.1. Opening statements provided by the Parties are included in Appendix 1.
- 2.2. A list of the participants is presented in Appendix 2.

3. Election

3.1. Chairperson

Dr. James Balsiger (U.S.) was elected as Chairperson of the Eighth Annual Conference.

3.2. Vice-Chairperson

Mr. Ichiro Kanto (Japan) was elected as Vice-Chairperson.

3.3. Chairman of Scientific and Technical Committee

Dr. Richard Marasco (U.S.) was elected the Chairperson of the Scientific and Technical Committee.

3.4. Rapporteur

Mr. Stetson Tinkham (U.S.) was appointed as rapporteur.

4. Adoption of the Agenda

The Agenda was adopted (Appendix 3).

5. Report of the Scientific and Technical Committee

The Chair of the Scientific and Technical (S&T) Committee reported on the S&T Committee Meeting of September 15 – 17, 2003. The S&T Committee produced the S&T Report, which was distributed to the parties.

The Chair summarized the Scientific and Technical Committee's discussion as follows:

The United States noted the catch data for the Western Bering Sea is still needed; Russia provided the needed data during the meeting. Detailed pollock catch and effort statistics for the Central Bering Sea are available on the website developed and maintained by the United States.

Korea reported that two of its vessels participated in 2003 trial fishing operations in the Convention area. Only two pollock were caught in a combined total of 13 mid-water trawls.

The United States reported on the March 2003 echo integration trawl survey of pollock in the southeastern Aleutian Basin near Bogoslof Island. The pollock biomass estimate for the Bogoslof Island area was about 198,000 mt.

Russia provided a detailed report on research cruises conducted by the TINRO-Center, Kamchat NIRO, and VNIRO, primarily in the Russian zone. Russia noted that, in general, pollock stocks are beginning to show signs of recovery in the Western Bering Sea and Navarin Basin area.

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.

The United States reiterated that no surveys of the pollock biomass in the Aleutian Basin were conducted in 2002-2003. Therefore, the Bogoslof Island pollock biomass estimate should be 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.

The Committee members 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 established earlier at the Yokohama workshop.

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 isolate.

Russia proposed two goals for future research: (1) determine the factors that influence the survival of pollock in the Aleutian Basin at their early life stages; and (2) study the long term variability of the ecological conditions in the deep water portions for the Aleutians.

Japan stated that it continues to believe that fisheries on the shelf area can have a significant impact on pollock in the Central Bering Sea. They requested continuation of careful management of shelf pollock by the coastal states.

The Basin stock has not improved despite ten years of moratorium. There are other management measures that can be used to promote stock rebuilding. There was no agreement among the Parties on continuing the moratorium on commercial pollock fishing in the Central Bering Sea.

The Russian delegation indicated that they have obtained positive results by employing moratoriums.

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council process was determined to be an appropriate procedure to establish Allowable Biological Catch (ABC), based on the March 2003 Bogoslof survey results. Japan suggested adopting 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.

The United States indicated that the North Pacific Fishery Management Council does not automatically set Total Allowable Catch (TAC) equal to ABC. TAC has been set below ABC almost 99% of the time.

Japan stated that AHL should be established, even at 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. Korea agreed with Japan. Russia and the United States stated that the AHL should be set at zero. Since consensus could not be reached on an AHL, the committee did not have an AHL recommendation for 2004.

Committee members 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.

The Scientific and Technical Committee recommends that the terms and conditions for the 2004 trial fishing be the same as those for 2003.

A website for the Conventions has been developed and is temporarily located at: http://www.afsc.noaa.gov/refm/cbs/convention_conferences.htm. The United States will explore options for relocating the website and report back to the Parties at the next Annual Conference.

The Conference adopted the Report of the Scientific and Technical Committee, which is attached as Appendix 4.

6. Action Items

6.1. The Review of Scientific Data and Conservation Measures of the Coastal States Related to Pollock Fishing in the Bering Sea

Information provided at the S&TC was adopted by the parties..

6.2. The Establishment of a Plan of Work for the Scientific and Technical Committee

The Parties agreed with the S&TC's plan of work that consists of: a) forming a working group on genetic standards, b) assigning the Comprehensive Research Plan Working Group to assess the feasibility of synoptic surveys, and c) investigating a neutral host for the convention website (Items 5.4.3, 5.9.6, and 7.2 of the S&TC report) constitute a plan of work for the coming year.

6.3. The Establishing of the Terms and Conditions for Trial Fishing in 2003

The S&TC recommended adopting 2003 terms and conditions for 2004 trial fishing. The Parties agreed.

6.4. The Establishing of the Allowable Harvest Level

- 6.4.1 Japan recommended the 2004 ABC of 2,401 mt be set as the AHL. Korea agreed.
- 6.4.2 Russia recommended that the AHL for 2004 be set at zero. The United States agreed, based on the hydroacoustic survey of the Bogoslof area and the results of trial fishing,
- 6.4.3 The Chairman brought all Parties' attention to Article VII and Annex I of the Convention. Pursuant to these provisions, if attempts to reach consensus on the AHL fail, the Coastal States establish AHL and it was established at zero for 2004.

6.4.4 Japan stated that a specific and scientifically based quota of ABC could be provided for Aleutian Basin pollock resources. Providing that the Parties to the Convention conduct preservation, management and optimum utilization of pollock resources in a rational way, quota based on the above mentioned ABC should be set as AHL, even if it is low and would not immediately begin commercial fishing. Moreover, Parties to the Convention need to continue future assessment of the moratorium's effectiveness, reasons why resources have not recovered in spite of a long period of moratorium, and the value in continuing the moratorium.

6.5. The Establishment of the Individual National Quotas

Since the AHL for 2004 was set at a zero level, no individual national quotas (INQ) were established.

6.6. The Adoption of Appropriate Conservation and Management Measures Based upon the Advice of the Scientific and Technical Committee

No new recommendations were made by the Parties.

6.7. Trial Fishing Plans

6.7.1 Korea will conduct trial fishing activity in 2004, but details are not available at this time.

6.7.2 Japan noted it is possible Japan will conduct trial fishing, and will inform all Parties when concrete plans are developed.

6.7.3 Russia plans on conducting trial fishing late in 2003. Based on the results of this trial fishing, decisions will be made on trial fishing in 2004.

6.7.4 The United States has no plans for trial fishing next year. The United States noted that Parties should provide appropriate documentation for trial fishing plans at the annual conference.

6.8. Reception of Reports Relating to Measures Taken to Investigate and Penalize Violation of the Convention

The United States reported on possible violations of the Convention to the Scientific and Technical Committee meeting. The United States requested a final report from the Government of South Korea on the investigation of the Oyang-Ho No.2.

The United States proposed re-activation of the enforcement committee. Russia supported the United States recommendation, since there are signs there that stocks are likely to recover in the near future and matters for which the enforcement committee is responsible have not been resolved.

Japan stated that although there is a small possibility of illegal fishing in the convention area, it is not immediately necessary to improve the efficiency of enforcement in convention area. Korea supported the Japanese statement.

As a compromise, the United States proposed placing appropriate management and enforcement issues in the tentative agenda for the 2004 conference for comment. Japan did not support this proposal and there was no agreement on how to proceed on unresolved management and enforcement issues.

The United States noted Article XI item 2.b of the convention states that each Party shall ensure that fishing operations for pollock by its fishing vessels that violate the provisions of

the Convention constitute an offense under the national legislation of the party whose vessel is involved. The United States requested all Parties provide copies of their domestic legislation concerning this matter. Japan agreed to provide such information.

6.9. The Consideration of Matters Related to the Conservation and Management of Living Marine Resources other than Pollock in the Convention Area

The United States requested that parties determine the species composition of all catches taken during trial fishing operations.

6.10. Meeting Observers

The Parties agreed to the same observers rules for 2004 that were used from 1998-2003 (See Report of the Second Annual Conference 1997 Part 6.J.10).

7. Ninth Annual Conference

7.1. Time and Location

Japan offered to host the Ninth Annual Conference in Tokyo, Japan, tentatively the week of 14 September 2004. Japan also recommended that the schedule of meetings be discussed at the next Annual Conference.

7.2. Election of Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson

7.2.1 Takashi Mori was elected chairperson

7.2.2 Korea will identify a vice-chairperson

8. Other Business

Japan commented on driftnet fishing in the North Pacific. In the period June – August of 2003, Japanese fishermen spotted driftnets in the open seas of the Pacific Ocean. These findings were reported to members of the North Pacific Anadromous Fish Commission and the United States Coast Guard. Japan stated they learned in this period 3 Chinese vessels and 2 Korean vessels were sighted. Japan requested that these countries ensure large-scale, high seas driftnet fishing by their vessels will not occur again on the high seas.

The United States also commented that the 4 Chinese and 2 Korean vessel interdiction cases will be discussed in detail at the October 2003 NPAFC annual Meeting.

Korea requested additional information on the Korean vessels reported by Japan. The United States provided the names and locations of the vessels. Korea noted that driftnet fishing itself is not illegal.

The Parties adopted a press release which is provided as Appendix 5.

9. Closing Statements

The closing statements of the Parties are provided in Appendix 6.

Appendices:

1. Opening Statements
2. Delegation Lists
3. Plenary Agenda
4. Report of the Scientific and Technical Committee
5. Press Release
6. Closing Statements

**8th ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE
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**8TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE
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September 15-18, 2003 -- Portland, Oregon, USA

Agenda for the Annual Conference

1. Opening of the Conference
2. Welcome Addresses and Statements of the Delegates
3. Election (Chair, Vice-Chair, Chair of Scientific & Technical Committee, and Rapporteur)
4. Adoption of the Agenda
5. Report of the Scientific and Technical Committee
6. Action Items
 - 6.1. The review of scientific data and conservation measures of the Coastal States related to pollock fishing in the Bering Sea
 - 6.2. The establishment of a Plan of Work for the Scientific and Technical Committee
 - 6.3. The establishment of the Terms and Conditions for Trial Fishing in 2004
 - 6.4. The establishment of the Allowable Harvest Level
 - 6.5. The establishment of the Individual National Quotas
 - 6.6. The adoption of appropriate conservation and management measures based upon the advice of the Scientific and Technical Committee
 - 6.7. Trial Fishing Plans
 - 6.8. Reception of reports relating to measures taken to investigate and penalize violations of the Convention
 - 6.9. The consideration of matters related to the conservation and management of living marines resources other than pollock in the Convention area
 - 6.10. Meeting Observers
7. Ninth Annual Conference
 - 7.1. Time and Location
 - 7.2. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair
8. Other Business
9. Closing Statements