

**MEETING ON HIGH SEAS FISHERIES IN THE CENTRAL ARCTIC OCEAN**  
**Washington, D.C., 1-3 December 2015**

**CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT<sup>1</sup>**

**Introduction**

Delegations from Canada, the People's Republic of China, the Kingdom of Denmark, the European Union, Iceland, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Kingdom of Norway, the Russian Federation and the United States of America met in Washington, D.C. from 1-3 December 2015 to discuss their common interest in preventing unregulated commercial fishing in the high seas area of the central Arctic Ocean.

The meeting followed the signing of the Declaration Concerning the Prevention of Unregulated High Seas Fishing in the Central Arctic Ocean by Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark in respect of Greenland, the Kingdom of Norway, the Russian Federation and the United States of America on 16 July 2015 ("the Declaration").

The meeting was exploratory in nature. A number of delegations made clear that they did not at present have a mandate to negotiate any particular instrument relating to the topic.

**Scientific Matters**

The meeting reviewed the outcomes of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of Scientific Experts on Fish Stocks in the Central Arctic Ocean held in Seattle, Washington, 14-16 April 2015. Delegations expressed the desire to cooperate in advancing scientific research and monitoring related to this topic and considered various approaches for doing so. The meeting considered the key questions of whether and when there might exist a stock or stocks of fish sufficient to support a sustainable commercial fishery in the high seas area of the central Arctic Ocean and the effects of any such fishery on the ecosystems.

Norway offered to host a follow-up meeting on scientific matters. Delegations reviewed possible Terms of Reference (ToR) for this meeting, with a view to finalizing these ToR in the near future. The meeting also considered several options for organizing future scientific collaboration on this topic.

**Policy Matters**

The Chairman noted the commitments of all participants to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing as reflected in numerous international instruments.

In light of the outcomes of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of Scientific Experts, noted above, the meeting expressed the belief that it is unlikely that there will be a stock or stocks of fish in the high seas area of the central Arctic Ocean sufficient to support a sustainable commercial fishery in that area in the near future. But the meeting also noted that the rapid changes occurring in the Arctic

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<sup>1</sup> This Chairman's Statement attempts to capture the basic elements of the meeting but does not necessarily reflect the views of any individual delegation.

region make such predictions uncertain and therefore recognized the need for a precautionary approach. The meeting also expressed an interest in strengthening international scientific collaboration, given the very limited scientific information that is available today on this topic.

The meeting noted the existence of an applicable international legal framework for fisheries management, as reflected in the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, the 1995 UN Fish Stocks Agreement and numerous other international instruments. However, the meeting also noted that, at present, there is no international mechanism to regulate commercial fishing in the high seas area of the central Arctic Ocean, except for the portion of this area that is within the Convention Area of the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission.

The meeting recognized the interests of Arctic residents, particularly Arctic indigenous peoples, in this topic and expressed the intention to continue to engage with them.

The meeting considered various approaches to prevent unregulated commercial fishing in the high seas portion of the central Arctic Ocean. Not all of these approaches are mutually exclusive. Indeed, a number of these approaches could be combined in a step-by-step or evolutionary fashion. Suggested approaches include:

- adjusting the Declaration signed by five of the participating States with input from the other participants such that a new, broader non-binding statement could be adopted;
- negotiating a binding international agreement of the kind proposed by the United States, discussed in more detail below; and
- negotiating in the foreseeable future an agreement or agreements to establish one or more additional regional fisheries management organizations or arrangements for the area.

The United States presented a proposal for an international agreement that would, among other things, commit parties to:

- authorize their vessels to conduct commercial fishing in this high seas area only pursuant to one or more regional or subregional fisheries management organizations or arrangements that are or may be established to manage such fishing in accordance with modern international standards;
- establish a joint program of scientific research with the aim of informing future fisheries management decisions and improving understanding of the ecosystems of this area; and
- ensure that any non-commercial fishing in this area follows scientific advice and is well-monitored.

Although the U.S. proposal was not subject to negotiation at this meeting, some delegations provided preliminary reactions to it and suggested ways in which the proposal could be strengthened or clarified. The United States will circulate an updated proposal to all participants in advance of the next meeting on this topic.

**The Way Forward**

Delegations accepted the offer of Norway to host the follow-up scientific meeting, which is expected to occur in September or October 2016. The ToR for that meeting will be finalized through correspondence in advance.

The United States offered to host a follow-up meeting to continue the policy discussions and will proceed with the planning for that meeting unless another delegation steps forward soon with an offer to host it. The meeting is expected to occur in the spring of 2016. The venue and precise timing of the next meeting will be decided through correspondence.