

MEETING ON HIGH SEAS FISHERIES IN THE CENTRAL ARCTIC OCEAN
Washington, D.C., 19-21 April 2016

CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT¹

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 19-21 April 2016 to continue discussions concerning the prevention of unregulated commercial fishing in the high seas area of the central Arctic Ocean.

The meeting followed a previous set of talks that took place 1-3 December 2015, also in Washington, D.C.

All delegations affirmed their commitment to take interim measures to prevent unregulated commercial high seas fishing in the central Arctic Ocean as part of a "stepwise" process in advance of possibly establishing one or more additional regional fisheries management organizations or arrangements for this area. Some delegations announced that they had obtained a mandate to negotiate a legally binding instrument on this topic.

Scientific Workshop

The meeting received an update on preparations for the next in a series of scientific workshops, scheduled to take place in Tromsø, Norway on 26-28 September 2016. The terms of reference for the workshop contain two main objectives: (1) to develop a 5-year cooperative research and monitoring plan; and (2) to create a framework for implementing that plan. This workshop is intended to broaden the range of participants, as part of a robust commitment to improve scientific understanding. As such, invitations to the scientific workshop have been sent to all delegations and to a number of international organizations. The meeting expressed appreciation to Norway for hosting the workshop.

Consideration of Possible Measures

The Chair reminded delegations of three possible approaches that were "on the table" at the December 2015 meeting, which could be combined in a stepwise fashion:

- Adjusting the Declaration signed by five of the participating States with input from 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; and

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

- Negotiating in the foreseeable future an agreement or agreements to establish one or more additional regional fisheries management organizations or arrangements for the area.

All three options remain under consideration. During the April 2016 meeting, delegations expressed their willingness to develop interim measures that would prevent unregulated high seas commercial fishing from starting in the central Arctic Ocean and to establish a related joint program of scientific research. All delegations further expressed the understanding that such interim measures would incorporate the ecosystem and precautionary approaches, with inclusion of traditional and local knowledge, and be part of a “stepwise” process. In other words, the interim measures would include a commitment to keep under regular review the question of whether to establish one or more additional regional fisheries management organizations or arrangements for the central Arctic Ocean, based on the best available scientific evidence and relevant policy considerations, with the long-term objective of promoting conservation and sustainable use of living marine resources in the Arctic.

Some but not all delegations expressed a preference that the interim measures should be in the format of legally binding instrument.

The meeting considered the elements of an updated draft for an international agreement that could form the basis of such interim measures. Many delegations offered suggestions for improving the U.S. proposal. Some of the key points that remain under discussion for future meetings include:

- the provisions of the instrument related to the “stepwise” approach;
- the relationship between the instrument and other international agreements or organizations dealing with related subjects or areas;
- the joint program of scientific research, its governance, and the manner in which science would be used in implementing the instrument; and
- decision-making.

The Way Forward

Delegations will have the opportunity to submit to the United States written proposals relating to the development of measures concerning this topic by 16 May 2016. The Chairman will circulate an updated text based on suggestions made at the meeting in Washington, and any written proposals it receives, by 25 May 2016.

Canada offered to host the next meeting to consider the possible instrument and related matters in Iqaluit, Canada on 6-8 July 2016.