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Terms of Reference for Third Meeting of Scientific Experts on Fish Stocks in the Central Arctic Ocean

Though commercial fishing in the central Arctic Ocean is not imminent, there is a need for further scientific research and monitoring on the state and nature of living marine resources and associated ecosystems, and increased understanding of the impact of climate change on Arctic ecosystems in general and fish stocks in particular.

Following discussions in Oslo, Norway, on 22 June 2010, and in Washington, D.C. in April-May 2013, where senior officials of Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark, Norway, the Russian Federation and the United States of America (the Arctic Ocean coastal States) stressed the need for further scientific research on fish stocks and their ecosystems in the Arctic Ocean, two Meetings of Scientific Experts on Fish Stocks in the Arctic Ocean were held--in Anchorage, Alaska, on 15-17 June 2011, and in Tromsø, Norway, on 28-31 October 2013.

The Anchorage workshop addressed current information on fish stocks, reviewed ongoing and planned scientific activities, identified current information gaps and indicated priorities in research requirements. The Tromsø workshop continued the consideration of these issues, and also discussed developments in other international scientific fora and ways to strengthen scientific cooperation with existing initiatives.

At a meeting of senior officials of the five Arctic Ocean coastal States in Nuuk, Greenland, on 24-26 February 2014, the outcomes of the Tromsø meeting were reviewed. Representatives of the States agreed that the scientific dialogue on living marine resources in the central Arctic Ocean should be continued.

Building on the Terms of Reference that were agreed before the Anchorage and Tromsø meetings, the purpose of these supplementary Terms of Reference is to describe the issues which the scientific experts are requested to consider in a third meeting. With the need for continuity in mind, this meeting will follow up on the previous meetings by:

1. Continuing the review of current programs for research and monitoring environmental parameters and patterns of fish distribution and abundance; establishing an inventory of research and monitoring programs and preparing a report on the status of and gaps in knowledge on the distribution and abundance of fish in the central Arctic Ocean. Such an inventory should include programs occurring in immediately adjacent shelf areas (i.e., within EEZs), which are linked and have relevance to the central Arctic Ocean (high seas).

2. Developing a framework for a Joint Program of Scientific Research and Monitoring for the Central Arctic Ocean, including the definition of baseline information needs and methods necessary to determine the likelihood of sustainable fisheries being present. Additionally, this framework should include one or more components that investigate the role of fishes and shellfish in the marine ecosystems (and vice versa) in the Central Arctic Ocean, as well as linkages with the shelf areas and likely impacts of climate change.

3. Considering the development of an action plan (e.g., notional schedules, areas of operations, costs) for the Joint Program of Scientific Research and Monitoring.

4. Considering how to promote cooperation with the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and the North Pacific Marine Science Organization (PICES), as well as other relevant scientific entities and academic programs.

5. Considering workshops to address specific issues, including questions relating to modelling of ecosystem properties, survey design, sampling methods and projecting future states of the Central Arctic Ocean, its biota and ecosystems.

The meetings should include relevant scientific expertise from the Arctic Ocean coastal States, as well as other relevant scientific expertise from ICES, PICES, and other relevant bodies. The meetings will continue to consider the traditional and local knowledge held by the indigenous peoples of the Arctic region.

The third meeting of scientific experts should be held no later than June 2015, at a venue yet to be determined.

The outcomes of this third scientific workshop will advance scientific understanding of the status of fish stocks in the Central Arctic Ocean, their role in Arctic marine ecosystems, and linkages with adjacent seas.

The scientific experts will report back to their respective Governments, who will decide on further steps to be taken.