

**13th 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
1-2 September 2009 – Kaliningrad, Russia

Final: 02 September 2009

Delegations from Japan, Poland, the Republic of Korea (Korea), the Russian Federation (Russia), and the United States (U.S.) participated in the meeting of the Scientific and Technical (S&T) Committee of the 13th Annual Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation and Management of Pollock Resources in the Central Bering Sea in Kaliningrad, Russia.

1. Opening remarks

Patricia Livingston (U.S.), was nominated as the Chair of the Scientific and Technical Committee. A list of the participants is provided in Attachment 1.

2. Appointment of Rapporteur

Paul Niemeier (U.S.) was appointed as rapporteur. Each delegation agreed to select representatives to assist the rapporteur.

3. Adoption of Agenda

3.1. The United States offered to provide the Parties with a brief report on a short-tailed albatross breeding translocation project under Agenda item 6. Other Issues and Recommendations. The amended agenda was adopted (Attachment 2).

4. Discussion of Science Issues

4.1. Update catch and effort statistics

4.1.1. An update of pollock catch statistics for the Bering Sea, by region, was submitted in a handout (Attachment 3: Tables 1 and 2).

4.1.2. As in recent years, no pollock fishery was conducted in 2008 in the central Bering Sea Convention Area.

4.1.3. Poland asked the United States for fishing effort data. The United States responded that it will provide a summary of effort data at the next Annual Conference.

4.1.4. Russia said that in the Russian part of the Bering Sea, 40 large capacity trawlers and 15 medium capacity trawlers conduct the pollock fishery.

4.2. Review results of trial fishing

4.2.1. Korea presented results from the 2007 trial fishery (Attachment 4). It was reported that for 2007, two vessels spent 20 days (July 26 – August 14) in the Central Bering Sea area and conducted 40 hauls landing a total of 2 pollock (Attachment 4). There was no other trial fishing reported by the Parties for 2007 or 2008.

4.3. Review results of research cruises

4.3.1. Japan presented data on pollock bycatch in the Japanese salmon gillnet and subsurface trawl surveys (Attachment 5). Although not a direct measure of abundance, these salmon surveys provide indirect information of relative abundance of pollock. Japan reported that three pollock were taken as bycatch in the 2008 salmon gillnet survey. The research indicated that the pollock caught were older fish and no newly recruited fish were caught.

4.3.2. Russia provided a detailed report on trawl surveys conducted in Russian waters in 2007 and 2008 (Attachment 6). It was reported that the Navarin area pollock biomass continued to follow a downward trend. From 2006 to 2007 the pollock biomass dropped by 31%. The August - September 2007 survey showed biomass abundance decreased by an additional 5%. The results from the 2008 survey were not yet available.

4.3.3. Russia presented results of genetic research on pollock stock structure (Attachment 6).

4.3.4. The United States asked Russia about the status of the western Bering Sea pollock stocks. Russia reported it is declining, possibly as a result of climatic factors.

4.3.5. The United States reported on the 2007-2008 U.S. pollock surveys. There was no survey in the Bogoslof area in 2008. It was reaffirmed that the 2007 survey showed the biomass of 292,000 tons in the Specific Area. The United States presented new age composition data from a series of pollock surveys conducted in recent years. The 2007 data series shows the pollock to be primarily above age 5, which confirms the observation of the Japanese Party.

The United States also reported on stock assessment in the U.S. EEZ, the eastern Bering Sea, the Aleutian region, and the Bogoslof area. The details of the assessments are accessible through the Alaska Fisheries Science Center website:

<http://www.afsc.noaa.gov/REFM/stocks/assessments.htm>.

In the eastern Bering Sea, the stock assessment indicated that the 2006 year class appears to be twice the average recruitment level. However, there were four consecutive year classes, from 2002 to 2005, that were below average recruitment level. The modeling on stock biomass indicates that there have been cyclic patterns of abundance for the eastern Bering Sea stock and the stock biomass is on a declining trend. Hopefully, the entry of the 2006 year class in 2009 to the fishery will help turn the biomass trend around.

Stock assessments for the Aleutian Island region and Bogoslof area were also summarized by the United States. Pollock biomass has been declining in both areas. The fisheries regulatory body for this area, the North Pacific Fisheries Council, has regulated that no directed fishery of pollock can occur in these two areas. This action is consistent with the conservation measures of the Convention.

In 2008 the United States conducted three sets of surveys. The first set was a bottom trawl survey by two chartered fishing vessels on the eastern Bering shelf. The second set was conducted by another chartered fishing vessel on the eastern Bering Sea slope. The third set of survey was conducted by the NOAA R/V OSCAR DYSON using hydroacoustic and mid-water trawl gear to survey the off bottom component of the pollock stock. The R/V OSCAR DYSON was permitted entry into the Russian EEZ for a continuous assessment of the pollock stocks from the U.S. EEZ into the Russian EEZ of the northern Bering Sea. The Russian scientist, Dr. Mikhail Stepanenko, was onboard the R/V OSCAR DYSON for the entire duration of the cruise. The U.S. Party thanked the Russian Party for their participation in this survey and for granting entry into the Russian EEZ for this research.

4.4. Review the status of Aleutian Basin pollock stocks The United States reiterated that there is no direct measure for the Aleutian Basin stock. An extensive survey is needed but is not feasible at this time. The U.S. Party summarized the 2007 data and concluded it does not expect the biomass to change for next year. Therefore, the extrapolated biomass for the Central Bering Sea Convention Area is 486,667 tons again for this year.

4.5. Factors affecting recovery of the stocks No new factors were discussed. Climate and recruitment factors were mentioned as possible contributors.

4.6. The effects of the moratorium and its continuation

4.6.1. The United States stated, in terms of recovery time scales, although 15 years may be a long time for fishermen, this is not a long time for the recovery of fish stocks. The U.S. Party emphasized the United States fishes conservatively in its own zone so as not to affect the Aleutian Island and Bogoslof pollock stocks.

4.6.2. Japan requested that the United States present information on fisheries restrictions used in its waters, including details on conservation and management measures. The United States offered to provide the Parties references to websites where they can obtain information on fisheries regulations and the timing when new stock assessment information is available.

4.7. Methodologies to determine Allowable Biological Catch (ABC) and Allowable Harvest Level (AHL)

4.7.1. All Parties agreed again this year that since there was insufficient science and technical information available to allow the parties to establish the Aleutian Basin pollock biomass, the biomass will be determined as per the Annex of the Convention, Part 1, Section b.

4.7.2. Japan supported last year's recommendation for setting ABC in the convention area which was based on methodology used by the U.S. for setting the Bogoslof region ABC domestically. This was supported by Korea. Poland has no recommendation with respect to ABC setting. The United States and Russia stated that there is no evidence to support applying the percentage distribution of pollock in the Bogoslof area to the Aleutian Basin, so they do not support using this methodology for ABC setting of Aleutian Basin pollock.

4.7.3. Japan and Korea supported last year's recommendation made by Poland regarding setting AHL, but this year Poland concurred with Russia and U.S. that there is insufficient data to determine AHL. Thus, the Parties recommend that the default method in the Annex of the Convention, Part 1, Section C, is the most appropriate.

4.8.1 There was no consensus among the Parties on how to set AHL and therefore the process must follow that established in the Annex of the Convention.

5. Discussion of Enforcement and Management Issues

5.1. Trial fishing terms and conditions for 2009

5.1.1. The U.S. Party presented information on U.S. Coast Guard activity in the Convention Area. There were no observed violations.

5.1.2. The U.S. Party asked that countries planning on conducting trial fishing give the other Parties as much lead time as possible, preferably more than one month. Korea said that it has not made trial fishing plans for 2009, but will provide information to the other Parties one month in advance if trial fishing will be conducted.

6. Other Matters and Recommendations

6.1.1. The United States presented work by research scientists from the United States and Japan on a translocation program for short-tailed albatross. The United States requested assistance from the other Parties for nominations to the Short-tailed Albatross Recovery Team.

7. Report to the Annual Conference

7.1. The Chair of the S&T gave the S&T report to the Annual Conference.

8. Closing Remarks

8.1. The Chair thanked all the participants of the S&T for their discussions, and thanked the rapporteurs for compiling the written report. With that, the Chair closed the S&T meeting on Tuesday, September 2, 2008. Participants thanked the Chair.

S&T Committee List of Attachments:

List of Participants (see Conference Report)

1. Scientific and Technical Committee Agenda
2. Information for Discussions by the Scientific and Technical Committee submitted by the United States Party to the 13th Annual Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation and Management of the Pollock Resources in the Central Bering Sea
3. Report on the Korean Trial Fishing for Walleye Pollock in the Convention Area of the Bering Sea in 2007
4. 2008 survey information: Walleye pollock bycatch in Japanese salmon surveys
5. Papers submitted by the Russian Federation to the 13th Annual Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation and Management of Pollock Resources in the Central Bering Sea

Attachment 2

Agenda for the Scientific and Technical Committee
13th CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION
AND MANAGEMENT OF POLLOCK RESOURCES IN THE CENTRAL BERING SEA
1-2 September 2008 at Kaliningrad, Russia

1. Opening of the Conference
2. Appointment of Rapporteur
3. Adoption of the Agenda
4. Discussion of Science Issues
 - 4.1. Update catch and effort statistics
 - 4.2. Review results of trial fishing
 - 4.3. Review results of research cruises
 - 4.4. Review the status of Aleutian Basin Pollock stocks
 - 4.5. Factors affecting recovery of the stocks
 - 4.6. The effects of the moratorium and its continuation
 - 4.7. Methodologies to determine Allowable Biological Catch (ABC) and Allowable Harvest level (AHL)
 - 4.8. Recommendation on AHL
5. Discussion of Enforcement and Management Issues
 - 5.1. Terms and Conditions for Trial Fishing in 2009
6. Other Issues and Recommendations
(added: short-tailed albatross translocation project)
7. Report to the Annual Conference
8. Closing Remarks

