

Convention on the Conservation and Management of Pollock Resources in the Central Bering Sea

Implementing Legislation

There is no implementing legislation for the Convention.

Parties

Japan, People's Republic of China (China), Republic of Korea (Korea), Republic of Poland (Poland), Russian Federation, and the United States.

Description

A. Mission/Purpose:

The objectives of the Convention are:

- "1. to establish an international regime for conservation, management, and optimum utilization of pollock resources in the Convention Area [the high seas area of the Bering Sea beyond the U.S. and Russian 200-mile jurisdictions];
2. to restore and maintain pollock resources in the Bering Sea at levels which will permit their maximum sustainable yield;
3. to cooperate in the gathering and examining of factual information concerning pollock and other living marine resources in the Bering Sea; and
4. to provide, if the Parties agree, a forum in which to consider the establishment of necessary conservation and management measures for other living marine resources in the Convention Area as may be required in the future."

B. Organizational Structure:

The Convention does not provide for a commission. It does, however, specify that Parties will convene an Annual Conference and establish a Scientific and Technical (S&T) Committee. The functions of the Annual Conference are, among other things, to establish an annual allowable harvest level (AHL) for pollock in the Convention Area, establish an annual individual national pollock quota (INQ) for each Party, adopt appropriate pollock conservation and management measures, establish a Plan of Work for the S&T Committee, and discuss cooperative enforcement measures and receive enforcement reports from each Party. Parties may also use the Annual Conference to determine the scope of any cooperative scientific research on, and conservation and management measures for, living marine resources other than pollock covered by the Convention.

The S&T Committee has the charge to "compile, exchange, and analyze information on fisheries harvests, fish stocks, and other living marine resources covered by this Convention in accordance with the Plan of Work established by the Annual Conference, and shall investigate other scientific matters as may be referred to it by the Annual Conference." The S&T Committee also makes recommendations to the Annual Conference regarding the conservation and management of pollock, including the AHL.

C. Advisory Body:

No formal U.S. advisory body has been legislated for the Convention. However, the U.S. Department of State has invited the 12-member "North Pacific and Bering Sea Fisheries Advisory Body," appointed to advise the U.S. Representative to the U.S.-Russia Intergovernmental Consultative Committee (ICC), to serve informally as the advisory body. This group consists of the following individuals:

- The Director of the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife of the State of Washington;
- The Commissioner of the Department of Fish and Game of the State of Alaska;

Five members appointed by the Secretary of State from a list of 10 nominees provided by the Governor of Alaska;
Five members appointed by the Secretary of State from a list of 10 nominees provided by the Governor of Washington.

D. Background:

The development in the mid-to-late 1980s of an extensive pollock fishery in the central Bering Sea area of the Aleutian Basin, beyond the U.S. and Russian 200-mile zones, was of great concern to U.S. and Russian fishing interests. The United States closed a domestic fishery as a result of the adverse impact this unregulated fishery was having on U.S. pollock stocks. Concern also extended to bycatch problems associated with the fishery.

The central Bering Sea pollock fishery was conducted by trawl vessels from China, Japan, Korea, Poland, and the former Soviet Union. Catch data submitted by these countries indicated that annual harvests in the area rose to approximately 1.5 million metric tons (t) in the years leading up to 1989. Largely due to drastic declines in catch and catch-per-unit-effort, leading to a total catch of under 300,000 t in 1991 and only 10,000 t in 1992, the governments involved agreed to a voluntary suspension of fishing in the area for 1993-94. During the 2-year suspension of fishing, an agreed scientific monitoring program was carried out that showed no evidence of the recovery of the resource.

On February 11, 1994, after 3 years of negotiations, the Parties initialed the Convention on the Conservation and Management of Pollock Resources in the central Bering Sea. Its major principles include: no fishing permitted in the Convention area unless the biomass of the Aleutian Basin stock exceeds a threshold of 1.67 million t (if the parties cannot agree on an estimate of the biomass, the estimate of the Alaska Fisheries Science Center and its Russian counterpart will be used); allocation procedures; 100 percent observer and satellite transmitter coverage; and prior notification of entry into the Convention area and of transshipment activities.

On June 16, 1994, the Convention was signed by China, Korea, the Russian Federation, and the United States. Japan and Poland signed it on August 4, 1994, and August 25, 1994, respectively. The Convention entered into force on December 8, 1995, for Russia, Poland, China, and the United States, on December 21, 1995, for Japan, and on January 4, 1996, for Korea.

Current Status

At the 14th Annual Conference of the Parties held on August 31-September 1, 2009, in Stevenson, Washington, the Parties adopted revised Rules of Procedure (Annex III of the Report of the First Annual Conference) for holding "virtual meetings" via teleconferences or other electronic forms of communication. To test the effectiveness of such meetings, the United States agreed to host the 15th Annual Conference and the S&T Committee Meeting virtually, with the understanding that the S&T Committee Meeting would be held well in advance of the Annual Conference. The Parties recommended that the Party hosting the Annual Conference distribute available scientific information at least 45 days in advance of the Annual Conference, if possible. Pending the success of the trial virtual meeting, the Parties would resume the normal rotation for hosting future virtual meetings beginning in 2011. The description of the "virtual" Annual Conference process can be found at:

http://www.afsc.noaa.gov/REFM/CBS/15th_annual_conference.htm

The United States conducted the S&T Committee Meeting from 1-25 August 2011, and the 15th Annual Conference from 22 September-6 October 2010. It was the first Annual Conference to be conducted via electronic mail (e-mail).

2012 AHL and INQs:

Japan conducted the S&T Committee Meeting from 22 August-14 September 2011, and the 16th Annual Conference from 22 September-22 November 2011.

The United States did not conduct a pollock research cruise in the Bogoslof Island area in 2011 due to research vessel repairs and lack of funding; the last survey there was in 2009. That survey revealed an estimated pollock spawning stock biomass of 73 million fish or 110,000 t in the Specific Area of the Convention--the lowest level on record. The pollock biomass for the Convention area was estimated at 183,333 t, based on the premise that the Bogoslof Island pollock spawning stock biomass is equal to 60 percent of the biomass in the Convention Area. The fish were primarily ages 7-10 from the 1999-2002 year classes. The United States plans to conduct the next Bogoslof Island pollock survey in 2012.

The Parties agreed that there was insufficient scientific and technical information to determine the pollock biomass of the whole Aleutian Basin and that the estimated biomass for the Convention Area is nowhere near the biomass target (1.67 million t) stated in the Convention necessary to trigger a commercial fishery. Japan and Korea reiterated their position that the Parties should set an AHL, even if it is small. However, there was no consensus among the Parties on how to set AHL and therefore they followed the process established in the Annex to the Convention.

Consequently, the 2012 AHL and INQ were set at zero during the Conference and the moratorium on pollock fishing in the Central Bering Sea was continued. 2012 will mark the 19th year of a moratorium on commercial pollock fishing in the central Bering Sea.

Trial Fishing: There was no trial fishing conducted in the region in 2011. The Parties agreed to roll over the terms and conditions for trial fishing adopted in 2011 for 2012. No Parties presented any plans to conduct trial fishing in 2012 at the meeting.

Work Plan for the S&T Committee: There were no recommendations for a Plan of Work for the S&T Committee for 2012. The United States plans to conduct the next Bogoslof Island pollock spawning stock survey in 2011 and invited scientists from the other Parties to participate in the survey.

Enforcement: No violations of the Convention were reported.

Transparency: The Parties agreed to the same interim observer rules for 2012 that have been employed since 1998. These rules do not address attendance by non-governmental observers--only observers from regional and intergovernmental organizations.

Future Meetings: Korea agreed to host the 17th Annual Conference and the S&T Committee Meeting in the virtual meeting format in 2012. The United States will continue to support the Annual Conference on the Alaska Fisheries Science Center's web site and to provide rapporteur services for the S&T Committee Meetings and Plenary Meetings of the Annual Conference, as needed.

The NMFS Alaska Fisheries Science Center will make the 2011 reports of the Annual Conference and the S&T Committee available on the internet at <http://www.afsc.noaa.gov/refm/cbs/>.

Staff Contacts

NOAA Fisheries:
Paul E. Niemeier
International Fisheries Affairs Division
(F/IA1)
Office of International Affairs
National Marine Fisheries Service, NOAA
1315 East-West Highway, Room 12752
Silver Spring, MD 20910
Telephone: (301) 427-8371
Fax: (301) 713-2313
E-mail: paul.niemeier@noaa.gov

Region:
Dr. James W. Balsiger, Administrator
Alaska Region (F/AK)
National Marine Fisheries Service, NOAA
709 W 9th Street
Juneau, AK 99802-1668
Telephone: (907) 586-7221
Fax: (907) 586-7249
E-mail: jim.balsiger@noaa.gov

Department of State:
Nicole Ricci
Office of Marine Conservation
(OES/OMC)
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520-7818
Telephone: (202) 647-2335
Fax: (202) 736-7350
E-mail: RicciNM@state.gov