

Agreement Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on Mutual Fisheries Relations (Basic Instrument for the U.S.-Russia Intergovernmental Consultative Committee – ICC)

Basic Instrument

Agreement Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on Mutual Fisheries Relations of May 31, 1988, as amended (TIAS 11442, the U.S.-Soviet Comprehensive Fisheries Agreement). Note: The obligations of the former Soviet Union under this agreement have devolved on the Russian Federation.

Implementing Legislation

Public Law 100-629 (An untitled Act that implemented the Comprehensive Fisheries Agreement. Enacted November 7, 1988).

Member Nations

The United States and the Russian Federation.

Meetings

The ICC meets alternately in the United States and Russia on an annual basis, at the discretion of the heads of delegation.

U.S. Representation

Under the Rules of Procedure established for the ICC, the United States and Russia designate a Representative and an Alternate Representative. The current U.S. Representative is Ambassador David Balton, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and Fisheries Affairs. The United States has not identified an Alternate Representative.

Pursuant to Section 5 of Public Law 100-629, a 12-member "North Pacific and Bering Sea Fisheries Advisory Body" was established to advise the U.S. Representative to the ICC. This body consists of the following individuals:

- (A) The Director of the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife of the State of Washington;
- (B) The Commissioner of the Department of Fish and Game of the State of Alaska;
- (C) Five members appointed by the Secretary of State from a list of ten nominees provided by the Governor of Alaska; and,
- (D) Five members appointed by the Secretary of State from a list of ten nominees provided by the Governor of Washington.

The current North Pacific and Bering Sea Advisory Body Representatives are:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game Representative:

Nicole Kimball, Federal Fisheries Coordinator, Anchorage, Alaska

Alaska

David Benton, Juneau, Alaska

Alvin Burch, Executive Director, Alaska Draggers Association, Kodiak, Alaska

Howard Hull, Hull Fisheries LLC, Anchorage, Alaska

Frank Kelty, Resource Analyst, City of Unalaska, Unalaska, Alaska

Simon Kinneen, Norton Sound Economic Development Corporation, Nome, Alaska

Washington Department of Fisheries and Wildlife Representative

William Tweit, Distant Waters and Columbia River Policy Lead, Olympia, Washington

Washington State

David W. Benson, Trident Seafoods Corporation, Seattle, Washington

Mark Gleason, Executive Director, Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers, Seattle, Washington

John Henderschedt, Executive Director, Fisheries Leadership and Sustainability Forum, Seattle, Washington

Paul MacGregor, Partner, Law Firm of Mundt, MacGregor, Happel, Falconer, Zulauf, and Hall, Seattle, Washington

Marlyn Twitchell, Consultant, Seattle, Washington

Description

The United States and the Russian Federation maintain the bilateral ICC fisheries forum pursuant to the U.S.-Soviet Comprehensive Fisheries Agreement, signed on May 31, 1988. The ICC is responsible for furthering the objectives of the Comprehensive Fisheries Agreement. These objectives include maintaining a mutually beneficial and equitable fisheries relationship through (1) cooperative scientific research and exchanges; (2) reciprocal allocation of surplus fish resources in the respective national 200-mile zones, consistent with each nation's laws and regulations; (3) cooperation in the establishment of fishery joint ventures; (4) general consultations on fisheries matters of mutual concern; and, (5) cooperation to address illegal or unregulated fishing activities on the high seas of the North Pacific Ocean and Bering Sea. The agreement expires on December 31, 2013.

In recent years, the ICC has also served as the forum for negotiating a bilateral fisheries management agreement for the Northern Bering Sea.

Current Status

Pursuant to Article XIV of the 1988 Agreement on Mutual Fisheries Relations, representatives of Russia and the United States conducted the 23rd Session of the ICC on Fisheries in St. Petersburg, Russia, on September 5-7, 2012. The Russian delegation was led by Mr. Alexandr Fomin, Deputy Director, Federal Fisheries Agency of the Russian Federation, and the U.S. delegation, which consisted of representatives of the North Pacific and Bering Sea Fisheries Advisory Body, the U.S. State Department, NOAA, and the U.S. Coast Guard, was led by Ambassador David Balton, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and Fisheries.

Fisheries Enforcement Cooperation: The two sides exchanged information on cooperative maritime law enforcement efforts in 2012. These efforts were focused on stemming illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing activity in the vicinity of the maritime boundary line in the Bering Sea, as well as efforts focused on curtailing illegal large-scale high seas drift netting in the North Pacific. Coordination and cooperation was excellent in 2012. There remains interest by both sides in expanding fisheries law enforcement cooperation, especially in regard to investigations of potential illegal importation of Russian fisheries products into the United States. Both Parties agreed to continue the very strong partnerships between the U.S. and Russian enforcement agencies and to furthering cooperation through the signing and entry into force of an IUU Enforcement Agreement.

Both sides reported on bilateral cooperation, including research, on the condition of Bering Sea and Sea of Okhotsk pollock stocks, sea birds, Steller sea lions, right whales, and northern fur seals.

Pollock: The dominant pollock stocks in the U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ) are located in the eastern Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands and the Bogoslof Island area. In general, the 2012 exploitable biomass, 8.3 million metric tons (t), of the eastern Bering Sea pollock stock was considered moderately high and the total allowable catch was set at 1.2 million t. The pollock biomass in both the Aleutian and the Bogoslof areas is considered low by historical standards. The survey biomass of the Bogoslof area, 67,000 t, is the lowest on record. The total allowable catch in the Aleutian area was set at 19,000 t to allow a small fishery, but actual catches were less than 1,200 t. The U.S. Bogoslof pollock fishery has been closed for 20 years, but a low total allowable catch is set to serve incidental catch needs in other groundfish fisheries. Approximately 100 t of pollock is taken annually as incidental catch in other ground fish fisheries.

The Russian delegation presented the results of Russian studies of living marine resources in the Bering Sea conducted during the intersessional period. From September 2011 to August 2012, 13 research cruises were carried out in the Bering Sea. Studies of pollock in the Western Bering Sea zone and the Karaginskiy subzone, showed that the resource is stable. The Russians noted that in the Western Bering Sea area, yields from the 2006, 2008 and 2009 pollock year classes were above average. Due to the low year classes after 2009, the total allowable catch (TAC) for 2013 will be below the TAC for 2012.

The abundance and biomass of pollock in the Okhotsk Sea continues to remain at a high level. In 2012, the total biomass is estimated at 9.8 million t, up to 2.1 million t less than in 2011 due to the reduction in biomass of the 2004 and 2005 year classes.

Seabirds: The U.S. side presented research on the status of seabirds. Due to low population abundance, short-tailed albatross (STAL) is listed as endangered under U.S. law. The U.S. conservation program to monitor and regulate the potential bycatch of STAL in trawl and longline fisheries in the U.S. EEZ continues. The United States is continuing to work with Russia on introducing seabird avoidance gear and mechanisms in the longline fisheries in Kamchatka, Russia.

Marine Mammals: The United States presented research on the status of domestic and trans-boundary Steller sea lions. The eastern and western stocks constitute the two main stocks of Steller sea lions in the North Pacific. Between 1990 and 2011, the population of the eastern stock showed an increase but concerns remain for the western Steller Distinct Population Segment (wDPS). As a result of precipitous population decline between the 1970s and 2000 and a lack of population-wide recovery in the past decade, the western DPS of Steller sea lions is designated as endangered under U.S. law. Under this designation, the population that constitutes the western stock also includes sea lions in Russian waters. Therefore, the status of those sea lions within the Russian EEZ is taken into account when considering U.S. management measures for fisheries off of Alaska. Monitoring of these stocks is a high priority for U.S. fisheries management. The U.S. side expressed its appreciation for the joint U.S.-Russia surveys of sea lion rookeries and haulouts conducted in the two sides' respective waters to monitor population trends.

Regarding fur seals, the United States presented graphs of pup trends declining in the Pribilof Islands and increasing in the Bogoslof Island area.

The Russian delegation reported on Russia's marine mammal research. It noted that the number of sea lions is established by natural factors, rather than fishing. In particular, in the Bering, Chukchi and East Siberian seas, the number of marine mammals (Pacific walrus, beluga, and four species of seals), which are hunted by the indigenous people of the north, is based, primarily on reduction of the Arctic ice cover. The Russian side proposed to exchange information on the status of straddling stocks of marine mammals for which quotas are established for aboriginal subsistence.

Pacific Salmon: The United States presented information on the status of Chinook salmon in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska. Chinook runs have been generally poor statewide in recent years in Alaska and in particular in 2012. Escapement goals were only met in some rivers, if at all, due to the closures and restrictions in the commercial, sport and in some cases subsistence fisheries. Total sport and commercial Chinook harvest in 2011 statewide was approximately 573,000 fish. These numbers are preliminary and do not include subsistence harvest.

The Russian delegation presented information regarding the condition of Asian salmon populations. Catches of pink and chum salmon are at an all-time high.

16th Annual Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Conservation and Management of Pollock Resources in the Central Bering Sea: Both sides noted the importance of the implementation of the provisions of the Convention on the Central Bering Sea and continuation of the pollock fishing moratorium to rebuild pollock stocks in the Central Bering Sea.

Arctic Fisheries: The United States presented information on its Arctic research plans and projects on fisheries, ecosystems, and marine mammals. The United States has a new "Arctic Ecosystem Integrated Survey Program" for 2012 and 2013. Surface, mid-water, and bottom trawls are used to study ocean physics, plankton, fish, and invertebrate communities. Bottom trawl surveys will be conducted in two high Arctic areas for the first time in 20-35 years. A pelagic survey spanning from the northern Bering Sea to the Arctic Ocean is also planned as part of a northward extension of the U.S. survey for the North Pacific Anadromous Fish Commission, Bering and Aleutian Salmon International Survey program. In addition, the United

States is also focusing research to study “loss of sea ice” and ocean acidification in the Arctic. A food-web modeling project of the Chukchi and the Beaufort Seas is also ongoing.

The Russian delegation presented the results of its Arctic research in the last decade. It noted that in the last two years due to lack of funding, planned fisheries research in the Chukchi and East Siberian seas was canceled.

Other Issues: The two sides also discussed the status of the North Pacific Fisheries Commission and the possible location of its Secretariat; the status of the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organization; the U.S. proposal to create a marine protected area in the Ross Sea region of the Antarctic Ocean in the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR); the filling of the North Pacific Anadromous Fish Commission Executive Director position; the outcome of Rio 2012 and the meeting of the Food and Agriculture Organization Committee on Fisheries (COFI); the status of the Draft Agreement Between the Government of the Russian Federation and the U.S. Government on Conservation and Management of Living Resources in the Northern Bering Sea; and the status of the draft U.S.-Russia Agreement Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Russian Federation Concerning Interaction and Cooperation in Detecting, Deterring, and Combating Illegal Harvesting and Commercial Trade of Marine Resources (Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing).

Time and place for the 24th ICC meeting: The United States will tentatively host the 24th ICC Meeting the first week in September 2013 in Alaska.

Staff Contacts

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