CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES
OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA

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Twenty-fifth meeting of the Animals Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 18-22 July 2011

Sturgeon and paddlefish

PROGRESS REPORT ON THE EVALUATION OF THE EXISTING STURGEON STOCK ASSESSMENT
AND TOTAL ALLOWABLE CATCH (TAC) DETERMINATION METHODOLOGY
IN THE CASPIAN RANGE STATES
(agenda item 16.2)

Membership (as decided by the Committee)

Chair: Representative of Asia (Mr Pourkazemi);

Vice-Chair: Representative of Africa (Mr Zahzah);

Party observers: Azerbaijan, China, Poland, the Russian Federation, Spain and the United States; and

IGOs and NGOs: the European Union, IUCN, the Association of Northeast Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Caviar Petrossian and IWMC – World Conservation Trust.

Mandate

Analyse, *inter alia*, the Annex to document AC25 Doc. 16.2, and draft recommendations to be presented to the Standing Committee. Such recommendations shall concern actions to be undertaken regarding:

a)   Progress in implementing the provisions of Resolution Conf. 12.7 (Rev. CoP14) that are relevant to the Animals Committee;

b)   The Animals Committee's evaluation of the assessment and monitoring methodologies used for shared stocks of Acipenseriformes species.

Recommendations

The Working group on sturgeon recommends to the Animals Committee:

1.   To take note of the range states of the Caspian Sea commitment to improving the current status of the sturgeon conservation and to ensure sustainable use of the resource.

2.   To agree that insufficient sturgeon stock assessment expertise in the region and appropriate institutional structure to support such activities are the major impediments to the progress in implementation of FAO recommendations for improving the stock assessment methodology and TAC estimation.

3.   To request CITES, FAO and other international organizations to provide financial and technical support in stock assessment activities, including training and capacity building.

4.   To recommend to the Caspian Sea range states to establish a regional sturgeon stock assessment committee under the existing institution that will be responsible for data analysis, stock assessment and

development of management recommendations. The committee should include sturgeon biologists and stock assessment scientists. Creation of such committee is critical for establishing a transparent and objective process of collegial data review, analysis and management advice. The tasks for the committee should include those provided in the Annex to these recommendations.

5. To request CITES and FAO support in providing stock assessment experts that could serve on such committee as independent experts, providing objective technical assistance to this group at the initial stage.

6. To recommend to the range states to hold regular regional workshops to develop common stock assessment methodology and approaches to IUU fishing, fishery management and restoration of stocks.

7. To recommend to the Caspian Sea range states to provide progress report on an annual basis starting with the next Animal Committee meeting.

8. The working group recommends that the Animals Committee take note that the Caspian Sea range States with exception of Azerbaijan have not responded to the communication from the Secretariat as noted in document AC25 Doc. 16.2, paragraph 6, and urges the Caspian Sea range States to report to the Secretariat on the progress in implementing the report.

In addition, the working group recommends:

9. To the Animals committee to allow the Working Group to continue its work intersessionally to review the Resolution Conf. 12.7 (Rev. CoP14) regarding caviar labelling, product sources and species identification, etc and if necessary propose draft amendments.

10. To the Animals Committee to ask the Standing Committee to instruct the Secretariat to better assist the Caspian Range States in implementation of Resolution Conf. 12.7 (Rev. CoP14) through fund raising and technical support, specifically regarding combating illegal catch and trade, increasing public awareness and encouraging fishery community involvement in management and conservation of sturgeon.

11. To the Animals Committee to urge the Parties involved in caviar trade to reinforce their control of such trade due to serious concern of the legality of sturgeon products on the market.

TASKS FOR THE STOCK ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

Develop a three phase work plan.

Phase 1

1. Complete data inventory, improve of existing survey methodology, develop of clear management goals, establish biological reference points and stock rebuilding plans.

2. Improve the existing assessment methodology based on trawl survey by:

    –   Developing time series of average catch per trawl by species as an index of relative abundance.
    –   Evaluating trends in relative abundance (catch per trawl or unit area). Calculate confidence limit intervals for mean catch per trawl and coefficient of variation.
    –   Analyzing accumulated data with respect to possible changes in survey design to improve survey precision (consider stratified random, systematic, cluster designs, etc).
    –   Evaluating survey precision and required sample size for various levels of precision
    –   Considering uncertainty in current estimates of catchability coefficient and ways of reducing the uncertainty.
    –   Considering design of a new study for catchability coefficient estimation.

Phase 2

1. Develop a rebuilding plan for each stock that is considered overfished.

    –   Specify the rebuilding time frame.
    –   Specify target stock biomass for rebuilding period.
    –   Establish a monitoring procedure to control progress on rebuilding and make appropriate adjustments.

2. Develop biological reference points and establish a management control rule for each stock.

    –   develop target and limit reference points for stock biomass.
    –   develop target and limit reference points fishing mortality.

3. Review candidate assessment models and select those applicable given data availability. Candidate models included but not limited to, are production models, age structured VPA/ statistical catch at age, equilibrium dynamic pool models (YPR and SPR analysis), etc. Once a suite of models is selected for the analysis, the committee will conduct a data workshop and a stock assessment workshop to produce estimates of mortality and population size and evaluate the status of stocks in relation to reference points.

4. Whenever the stock status is considered satisfactory to allow commercial harvest, develop TAC on a precautionary basis.

5. Initiate regional cooperation for population (stock) identification using molecular genetics tools.

Phase 3

1. Upon successful completion of these tasks, review progress and revise the work plan according to the recommendations listed above as well as in document AC25 Doc. 16.2 and following the outcomes of the committee's work and emerging needs.

2. Report progress to the range states which in turn should report to the CITES.