Responses pursuant to Decision 17.182 related to the table contained in Annex 3 of Resolution 12.7 (Rev. CoP17) on Conservation of and trade in sturgeons and paddlefish

Contents

Azerbaijan

I. Information:

Information on biomass and the number of sturgeon fish, determined by the results of research conducted in the Azerbaijani sector of the Caspian Sea:

Results	Acipenser gueldenstaedtii	Acipenser stellatus	Huso huso	Total
Quantity (mln.pieces)	4,8	1,58	0,23	6,61
Total biomass (thousand tons)	18,1	3,91	6,9	28,91
Biomass of commercial reserves, thousand tons	3,62	0,91	0,83	5,36

By the end of 2016, we can conclude as follows:

1. In contrast to 2013 and 2014, in 2016, during studies in the middle and southern parts of the Caspian Sea shelf, the water in the upper layer of the temperature regime was relatively high.

2. The composition of sturgeon species of fish in the region was represented by sturgeon, stellate sturgeon, beluga and thorn. As in previous years, observations at coastal stations showed a predominance of sturgeon networks - 59.2% and stellate sturgeons - 33.1%. Beluga and thorn were not detected during the trawl survey (catch) and were observed only at coastal stations.

3. During the catching by the network in 2016, sturgeon species of fish were found in all layers of coastal waters. For food, they mainly accumulated in the coastal waters to a depth of 50 m isobaths. However, there was also a deeper distribution of sturgeon species in deeper layers of marine pastures, namely: stellate sturgeon - up to 75 m isobaths, and sturgeon - up to 100 m isobaths.

4. During the analysis of the materials obtained by catching the network, differences were found between the species of fish caught in the middle and southern part of the Caspian Sea. Thus, fishing in the Middle Caspian of sturgeon fish showed that the fish feeding in these marine pastures did not reach puberty. In contrast, analysis in the Southern Caspian showed that sturgeons in this region are represented by adults with developed sex glands and ready to enter the Kura River for spawning fish.

5. As a result of studies conducted over the past few years, changes and growth in the number, species and distribution of sturgeon species in marine pastures have been observed. The results of these studies reflect the current trend in the impact of fishing on the state of the Caspian Sea.

II. As for the implementation of Resolution 12.7, in connection with the adoption of a decision on the moratorium of sturgeon species by presidents of the Caspian countries at the third Caspian Summit held on November 18, 2010 in Baku, Azerbaijan, commercial fishing and trade in sturgeon species in Azerbaijan is not conducted.

Bulgaria

Up to the present we do not have at disposal an entire pattern of the sturgeons stocks (populations) and their status in the Bulgarian aquatory of Lower Danube River and the Black sea. We face difficulties in the assessment of sturgeons' populations, including their size and trend due to lack of statistical data.

Separated researches on stocks are conducted by the Institute on Fishery Resources in Bulgaria. The available scientific information is complemented by some recent data taken from studies carried out with regard to spawning habitats[1] and migratory patterns[2]. The data are in support of literature information about the continuing natural reproduction of the four native sturgeon species occurring in the shared Bulgarian-Romanian section of Danube River - *Acipenser gueldenstaedti*, *Acipenser ruthenus*, *Acipenser stellatus* and *Huso huso*, except for *Acipenser nudiventris*.

Studies are also proving the existence of natural sturgeon hybrids in Bulgarian waters of Danube river and Black sea, as per *Acipenser nudiventris* only genetic presence in hybrids[3] had been proven. According to the regional assessment published by IUCN Red List only few records for this species were caught in Romania, Serbia and Hungary for the last 20 years. In that respect it is considered as possibly extinct from these countries. This species is also considered as extinct in Bulgarian waters, according to the recent edition of the Red book of the Republic of Bulgaria, published in 2015[4].

As conservation measure on the sturgeons' populations, a complete ban on sturgeons fishery was imposed in the Bulgarian aquatory of Danube river and Black sea[5] by joint ordinance issued by the ministers of environment and water and of agriculture and food. In addition to the above mentioned, there is no presence of sturgeons caviar quota allocations in the Republic of Bulgaria.

In respect to the above mentioned we believe that some amendments to the table "Overview about stocks shared by range States and the respective species" are possible regarding to *Acipenser nudiventris*, in view of the fact that this species is considered as possibly extinct from the region.

References:

[1]http://d2ouv-v59p0d96k.cloudfront.neVdownloads/presentation:ekip2_final.pdf

[2]https://www.researchgate.net/Bublication/306365030_Danube*beluga_sturgeon_monitoring_geneticJopulation_structure_and_migration_patterns

[3] Tsekov A., Ivanova P., Angelov M., Atanasova S., Bloesch J, 2008, Natural Sturgeon Hybrids along Bulgarian Black Sea Coast and in Danube River in Acta Zoologica Bulgarica, Tome 60 (3), 2008, pp. 31 1-316

[4] Red Data Book of The Republic of Bulgaria, Vol. 2 Animals, Sofia, Bulgarian Academy of Science, Ministry of environment and water, 2015. http://e-ecodb.bas.bg/rdb/bg/vo12lAcnudive.html

[5] Sturgeon Fishery ban in Bulgaria,2016, Ministry of environment and water, Ministry of agriculture, food and forestry. http://www.moew.government.bg/wp-content/uploads/filebase/Nature/Legislation/Zapovedi/RD-9_07.01.2016_Sturgeons.pdf

Canada

Canada does not have any additional information to provide on the table of sturgeon species for which there are shared stocks. We are in agreement with Canada and the United States of America being listed as the range States for the Saint John River/Bay of Fundy stock of Atlantic sturgeon (Acipenser oxyrinchus).

We have no comments with regards the other shared stocks, since we are not in a position to assess that information.

Islamic Republic of Iran

Islamic Republic of Iran as a Sturgeon Range State in the Caspian Sea have five sturgeon species including *Huso huso, Acipenser stellatus, Acipenser nudiventris*, *Acipenser gueldenstaedtti*, and *Acipenser persicus*, where the stocks of Persian sturgeon (*A.persicus*) are distributed mainly in Southern Caspian Sea.

I.R. Iran for the benefit of conservation of all five sturgeon species in the Caspian Sea, has restricted commercial catch and voluntary allocated all catch for rehabilitation, restocking and research purposes and have zero quota for commercial catch and wild caviar export.

At the same time, the Government annually spends huge investment for sturgeons fingerling release (several millions), sea guard as well as conducting research on restocking, tagging (CWT), molecular population genetic, gene banking, hydrobiology and stock assessment.

Our studies indicate that no significant changes of stock status and structure occurred since moratorium and banning of commercial catch in the Caspian Sea and need further assistance for scientific and affordable approach for rehabilitation of sturgeon resources.

Iran has developed a national plan for conservation and sustainable exploitation of Caspian Sea's bio-resources including sturgeons' populations. This plan has proposed to the Government secretariat office for approval. Considering interactions among sturgeon populations in the sea and impact of human activities in whole the sea on sturgeon resources, we believe a regional action plan should be develop and a joint stock assessment of shared stocks should be conducted based on agreed method which approved in CITES Animal Committee. For this reason we request CITES to provide financial and technical support for implementing a project including capacity building, training workshop and evaluating of stock assessment methodology for sturgeon resources in the Caspian Sea.

Ukraine

In response to your letter dated 18 April 2017 the State Agency of Fisheries of Ukraine, as a CITES Management Authority of Ukraine, responsible for sturgeon fish species and products derived from them, does not agree with the amendment to the table «Overview about stocks shared by range states and the respective species» (Annex 3 Resolution Conf. 12.7 (Rev. CoP 17) proposed by the Russian Federation due to the following.

Preliminary research results in the framework of the project POP 18/ 22.04.2013, «Evaluation of survival and distribution in the Black Sea of young sturgeons stocked experimentally in the Lower Danube», Romania (2013-2015) show that more than the 99% of the returned CWT tagged sturgeon youth were recorded in the Danube River and the North-Western part of the Black Sea. During said research there also were indentified the individual cases of tagged individuals in Turkey near the mouth of the Sakarya River (South-West part of the Black Sea). No information was received from the Black Sea countries concerning tagged individuals in the Eastern part of the Black Sea (Georgia). Preliminary data of the Romanian genetic research also allows us to make a conclusion that the area of distribution of the Danube populations (Russian sturgeon, stellate sturgeon, European sturgeon) is limited to the lower part of the Danube River (below the Iron Gate dam) and the North-Western part of the Black Sea. Besides, the North-Western shelf of the Black Sea is the main place of wintering and nursery grounds for the Danube populations of anadromous sturgeons.

Therefore, from the biological point of view it is not justified to consider the Danube River as a home range of anadromous sturgeons separately from the Northwestern part of the Black Sea.

The area definition of the shared sturgeon stocks, the list of species and relevant Range States are contained in the valid document «Regional Strategy for the Conservation and Sustainable Management of Sturgeon Populations of the N-W Black Sea and Lower Danube River in accordance with CITES» (2003).

Taking above into account Ukraine is opposed to the amendments to the table «Overview about stocks shared by range states and the respective species» (Annex 3 Resolution Conf. 12.7 (Rev. CoP17) proposed by the delegation of the Russian Federation.

United States of America

This letter is in response to your letter of 18 April 2017, reminding Parties of the invitation in Decision 17.182 to submit data relating to the content of the table of shared stocks contained in Annex 3 to resolution Conf. 12.7 (Rev. CoP17), *Conservation of and trade in sturgeons and paddlefish*. As a range State for Acipenseriformes species, we appreciate this opportunity to provide input on the table in Annex 3 to the Resolution.

We agree with the information in the table showing the United States and Canada as range States for the Saint John River/Bay of Fundy stock of *Acipenser oxyrinchus* and have no additional information to provide in that regard. The United States does not have a position on the contents of the table for shared stocks outside of North America and we do not have any data to provide relevant to those stocks. As we noted at 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties, we believe this matter is best decided by the range States in the regions where those stocks occur.