

(SWG6/Rec.)

**Report of Sixth Meeting of the Scientific Working Group
of the High Seas Bottom Fisheries in the North Pacific Ocean**

**Busan, Korea
16-17 February 2009**

1) Opening

Mr. Il Jeong Jeong of Korea opened the sixth meeting of the Scientific Working Group at 10:00 am on Monday, 16 February 2009 and welcomed all delegations. Participants from Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, and the United States attended the meeting (Attachment 1).

2) Appointment of Facilitator and Rapporteur

Dr. Dae-Yeon Moon of Korea was selected as facilitator and LCDR Daniel Schaeffer of the United States agreed to serve as rapporteur.

3) Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was reviewed and adopted (Attachment 2). In addition, a list of documents was provided for the meeting (Attachment 3).

4) Review and Follow-up of the Outcome of the 5th Meeting of the Scientific Working Group

Participants reviewed the outcome of SWG5 and discussed the following outstanding subjects as agreed at SWG5:

a) Footprint data

Russia provided footprint data for the years 2000-2008, SWG6/WP17/R. This report includes additional data provided by fishing vessels.

b) Map of fishing status in the NWPO

Japan presented SWG6/WP3/J and the Interim Secretariat presented the revised map SWG6/ref2. These papers are modifications to previous reports based on suggestions from the SWG5 and updated data obtained from surveys.

c) Location of Net Loss or Hang-up

Japan presented the revised net loss or hang-up maps, SWG6/WP4/J, based on additional information provided by the Participants. Korea provided improved Korean fishing vessel hang-up data and asked to have the data incorporated into the report (SWG6/WP12/K).

The data showed a reduction in trawl hang-ups in recent years. Potential reasons for the reduction in the number of hang-ups were discussed and included:

- i. Experiences from previous fishing seasons to avoid hang-ups.
- ii. Changes in fishing gear and vessels.
- iii. Years of fishing have smoothed the bottom of fishing grounds.

d) Bottom Trawling Corridors or Paths

It was acknowledged that the proprietary nature of commercial fishing data limits the availability of trawl corridor data. Russia presented the paper, SWG6/WP17/R. These data are from research vessels and show vertical profiles of fished seamounts. Korea presented a report on Korean Trawl Corridors of the trial survey fishing in 2004, SWG6/WP13/K.

e) A Field Guide for identification of corals

The U.S. and Japan jointly provided a draft of the, *Field Guide to Corals*, SWG6/WP5. The field guide is not intended to be an identification guide, but a tool to assist observers and other onboard personnel with collecting the necessary data and provide guidance on the preferred ways to preserve specimens for future identification by coral experts. Korea has not previously participated in coral studies, but will begin research this year. Korea asked for information of deep sea corals for identification and monitoring.

f) Information necessary to assess associated and dependent species

Russia discussed the changes to previous documents on associated and dependant species. Substantial changes were made to these three documents. Revised documents were presented as SWG6/WP14, SWG6/WP15 and SWG6/WP16.

5) SWG Assessment Review for Bottom Fishing Activities

- a. The U.S. and Japan presented their assessments at the SWG5 meeting and did not repeat those reports at this meeting.
- b. Russia provided a summary of the report, *Report on Identification of VMEs and Assessment of Impact by Bottom Fishing Activities on VMEs and Marine Species*, SWG6/WP6/R. Russia is going to take the following measures for bottom trawl vessels in 2009:
 - i. close the part of the southeastern slope of Koko Seamount deeper than 400 m and between 34° 57' N and 34° 50N latitudes
 - ii. adopt a 24% reduction in fishing effort for splendid alfonsin
 - iii. to achieve a previous point temporarily close the fishery for target species during November and December, except for exploratory and research activity.

Russia confirmed they would complete an assessment of the impact of bottom longline fishery prior to permitting longline fishing vessels to fish. Russia will consider the issues raised by the other Participants, which included the 24% reduction and closure area, and revise its submission.

c) Korea presented a summary of the report, Reports on Identification of VMEs and Assessment of Impacts Caused by Bottom Trawl Fishing Activities on VMEs and/or Marine Species, SWG6/WP6/K. Korea has two fishing vessels operating in the area in 2008. Korea will take the following measures in 2009:

- i) Korea will effect a 25% reduction in bottom fishing effort for alfonsin by fishing closure from October 01 to December 31.
- ii) Korea will temporarily close fishing on C-H Seamount.
- iii) Korea will prohibit the expansion of fishing effort North of 40°N until appropriate management measures, including observer coverage are in place.

In addition, Korea will make the following efforts:

- i) 100% observer coverage for all Korean bottom trawl vessels which will start in late 2009 in order to have time to properly train observers.
- ii) Korea will participate in the development of the coral field guide.

It was agreed that the revised reports of Russia and Korea be submitted to the Interim Secretariat.

6) Discussion of Definition of Encounter with VMEs

Participants discussed the U.S. proposal, *Encounter Provision for NWPO*, SWG6/WP7 (SWG5/WP14/U.S.). The discussions revealed a number of areas that required further elaboration and discussion in order to reach a consensus. The U.S. agreed to incorporate the comments from Participants and presented a revised encounter provision paper, SWG6/WP7/Rev1. Participants discussed the revised proposal but could not agree to all measures, in particular the provisions in paragraph 4. Participants will revisit the proposal at the next SWG.

7) Discussion on Establishment of Exploratory Protocol for New Fishing Areas

The Interim Secretariat presented a revised draft text of an exploratory protocol, SWG6/WP9, taking into account comments made at SWG5 and consistency with the present Interim Measures. Participants discussed the draft protocol and the U.S. revised the text to reflect comments of the Participants. The US presented the paper with revisions, *Draft Exploratory Fisheries Protocol in the North Pacific Ocean*, SWG6/WP9/Rev2. Participants accepted the final revision of the document and agreed to submit the document (Attachment 4) to the Intergovernmental Meeting for consideration.

8) Discussion on the Interim Measures on VMEs and marine species

The U.S. raised for discussion the proposed measures included in its assessment presented at SWG5 in December, noting that the proposals had been revised based on comments received from the other Participants. The revised U.S. paper includes a proposal to close only Colahan Seamount as a stock rebuilding area and only the southern section of Koko below 35° 05'N latitude. Other Participants considered the revised proposal but no consensus was reached.

9) Other matters

a. Integrated Research Plan

U.S. proposed that future research efforts be harmonized to ensure standardized data collection and validation efforts, ecosystem monitoring and stock assessment. Japan requested the U.S. to provide a more detailed proposal for consideration.

b. Stock Assessment Collaboration

The U.S. commented there is a need to conduct joint stock assessment, including the planned stock assessment for North Pacific armorhead. Participants agreed in concept, but needed more details on the U.S. plan. The U.S. was asked to develop a plan and as a result presented the paper, *Proposed Armorhead Stock Assessment Work Plan*, SWG6/WP11/US. Participants considered and agreed in principle to the U.S. proposal subject to identification of necessary funding, and to move forward with the stock assessment as outlined in SWG6/WP11/US (Attachment 5). Concerns remain over data composition and confidentiality.

10) Adoption of the record of meeting

The report of the meeting was adopted by consensus.

11) Acknowledgement of Dr. Akihiko Yatsu

With the conclusion of SWG6, Dr. Akihiko Yatsu will be ending his role as one of the founding members and leading scientists of the SWG as he now will assume new duties in representing Japan in other international scientific forums. Dr. Yatsu's leadership skills and seamount fisheries expertise have been vital in the progress achieved by the SWG. Dr. Yatsu served as chairman during several SWG meetings and is respected for his ability to balance all points of view while presiding over many difficult scientific issues. Dr. Yatsu also took on the lead role of assembling and continuously revising the fisheries statistics for seamount target species and also working on the first stock assessment of alfonsin. We express our thanks and appreciation to Dr. Yatsu for his dedication and service toward the development of the SWG and progress toward the sustainable management of seamount fisheries.

12) Closing of meeting