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INTERNATIONAL TECHNICAL CONFERENCE ON THE CONSERVATION OF THE LIVING RESOURCES OF THE SEA

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE TENTH MEETING

held on 25 April 1955 at 10 a.m.

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CHAIRMAN: Mr. SUNNANAA (Norway)

OBJECTIVES OF FISHERY CONSERVATION; TYPES OF SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION REQUIRED FOR A FISHERY CONSERVATION PROGRAMME; TYPES OF CONSERVATION MEASURES APPLICABLE IN A CONSERVATION PROGRAMME; PRINCIPAL SPECIFIC INTERNATIONAL FISHERY CONSERVATION PROBLEMS OF THE WORLD AND MEASURES AND PROCEDURES APPLICABLE AND BEING APPLIED FOR THEIR SOLUTION

(Items 9, 10, 11, 12 of the Agenda) (A/CONF.10/L.3 and L.3 (Summary), L.14 and L.14 (Summary), L.15 and L.15 (Summary), L.17 and L.17 (Summary), L.18) (resumed)

Mr. MOISEEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) thanked Mr. Kesteven and Mr. Holt for valuable assistance in the final stage of the preparation of his paper on "fluctuations in the commercial fish population of the North-West Pacific in relation to meteorological and oceanographic conditions, fishery operations and other factors" (A/CONF.10/L.14), from which he then proceeded to read.

Mr. ZENKEVICH (Union of Soviet Socialistic Republics) also thanked Mr. Kesteven and Mr. Holt for assistance in the preparation of his paper on "the biological appraisal of the ocean and the problem of transoceanic acclimatizations" (A/CONF.10/L.15).

He pointed out that his paper was based on the idea that the development of the living resources of the sea could be achieved not only by the regulation of fishing and other conservation measures, but also by actively increasing existing fish stocks and by having greater recourse to transoceanic acclimatizations. Although the general lines on which such action might be developed were not yet clearly defined it was necessary to devise as quickly as possible practical measures to solve the problems which were bound to arise in that connexion. He then read extracts from his paper.

Mr. MOLLER, Observer for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, introduced document A/CONF.10/L.3. Quoting from paragraph 55, he stressed the importance of investigation and detailed observation of those characteristics of the sea which affected fish and other marine creatures. Although experts sometimes had difficulty in defining what was fundamental and what was applied research, the problem submitted to the Conference was manifestly fundamental because the scale of the underlying phenomena was as yet too great for that measure of human influence connoted by the word "applied" as used in physical sciences. It would therefore probably be agreed that large-scale investigation of such problems as ocean currents, temperature distribution, salinity, photosensitivity, hydrogen-ion concentration and other environmental factors belonged to the category of fundamental researches.

UNESCO's action would be closely co-ordinated with that of FAO and the specific measures to be taken had been described in the paper. Only in exceptional circumstances could UNESCO itself undertake research work; its action rather consisted in strengthening existing institutions. Assistance was given to scientifically less developed countries. UNESCO also organized

symposia on special topics, conferences and travel by experts, established directories and bibliographies, and helped in the organization of new research laboratories. The setting up of an International Advisory Committee on Marine Science would represent a first step in UNESCO's effort to promote necessary fundamental knowledge in the field under consideration by the Conference.

Mr. ROYAL, Observer for the International Pacific Salmon Fisheries Commission, introduced his paper on the "international Fraser River sockeye salmon fishery" (A/CONF.10/L.17) and added that, as the salmon was a freshwater fish during the first year of its life, the survival rate of the species was more directly concerned with the ecology of its freshwater existence than with that of its marine existence. In its management policies, the International Sockeye Commission had accordingly departed from the schedule of investigation as presented by Mr. Schaefer (A/CONF.10/L.1) and had paid very close attention to the environmental relationships between spawning, migration and reproduction. Its success in increasing the catch of sockeye could be largely attributed to an understanding of that relationship.

The story of the Commission's operation included the restoration of millions of dollars to the annual income of the fishing industry, and a record of 17 years international harmony. No treaty had been more successful than the Sockeye Commission Fisheries Convention between Canada and the United States.

Mr. FRIDRIKSSON, Observer for the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), said that the Conference was in the nature of an historical event since it provided opportunities for scientists in the field of fishery investigation to meet administrators and other specialists. It was now generally admitted that the resources of the sea were not inexhaustible, and the nations of the world were facing two problems, that of fishing, and that of not fishing too much. Fishing stocks should be used to the utmost capacity and, if a maximum sustainable yield was effectively maintained what would be taken would represent the entire available interest, the capital being left intact. That goal was, however, difficult to reach, particularly in some areas, such as the North Sea, where numerous species were fished, a diversity of gear was used, and a number of nations were engaged in fishing.

ICES had been dealing with ocean fishing problems for 50 years and had made a number of recommendations to Member Governments, but its voice had at times gone unheeded, e.g. when in 1923 it had recommended the closure of an extensive area on the continental coast of Europe as a nursery for plaice in the North Sea and, in 1946, the partial closure of a nursery area in Faxa Bay. On the other hand, certain conclusions reached by ICES had provided the background for the International Conferences of 1937 and 1946 and, while making the fishing problem its main problem, ICES was at present acting as scientific adviser, through a special Liaison Committee, to the Permanent Commission set up under the 1946 Convention. It also carried out an annual census of the environmental conditions of the fish stocks of the sea, their fluctuations from year to year, and their migrations. Long-term research programmes were implemented and changes in important factors kept under observation, e.g. the temperature in boundary areas, influential in the distribution of important species.

He thanked Mr. Kask for outlining the history of ICES (see A/CONF.10/L.4 paras. 12-16, A/CONF.10/SR.6) and Mr. Lucas for reminding the Conference of some of its pioneers, among whom Mr. Otto Petterson of Sweden should also have been mentioned. However, the Committee of the Council had recently been re-arranged and document A/CONF.10/L.4 was therefore not quite up-to-date. There were at present 13 member countries and the Council was composed of 2 delegates from each country, though a number of experts also attended its meetings. It co-ordinated and standardized research work on fisheries problems, carried on either in laboratories or in research vessels. There were 4 area committees dealing with the Distant Northern Seas, Near North Seas, Baltic and Belt Sea, and the Atlantic. The 12 subject Committees included the Liaison Committee and Committees dealing with herrings, sardines, codfish, mackerel, salmon and trout, whaling, shellfish, comparative fishing, plankton, hydrography and statistics. Each Committee held an annual meeting to survey the results obtained and to plan research work for the coming year. Those meetings were very valuable and were attended by a number of scientists. Special scientific meetings were also held almost every year concurrently with the Council meetings and dealt with a variety of topics, such as the effect of the war on the stocks of commercial fish and the rearing of fish. Another important duty of the Council was the publication of periodicals dealing with administrative as well as scientific problems.

Mr. JAMES, Observer for the International North Pacific Fisheries Commission, said that the purposes of the International North Pacific Fisheries Convention had already been fully described by Mr. Herrington and Mr. Kask in their paper (A/CONF.10/L.4) and by the Japanese representative in his statement at the eighth meeting (A/CONF.10/SR.8). The Convention had been negotiated by Canada, Japan and the United States in 1951 and had come into force in June 1953. The Commission had been organized in January 1954 and had started work at its temporary headquarters at Vancouver in August 1954. Its main concern was to develop an integrated research programme and, for that purpose, it had set up a committee on biology and research. There had as yet been little time to develop a comprehensive research programme, but the Commission would rely extensively on the experience gained by other international agencies which had preceded it.

The research was actually financed and conducted by the research agencies of the Contracting Parties and the Commissions staff would be mainly concerned with the co-ordination of studies and ultimately with the analysis of results. Studies of salmon and king-crab in the East Bering Sea would be actively pursued in 1955. With regard to salmon, the programme might include such techniques as the tagging of adult fish in the high seas as well as the marking of young fish in coastal waters. There would also be racial studies in the form of morphometric and meristic observations, bio-chemical and serological studies and even an attempt to relate the parasitic fauna to the geographic origin of the host. Accordingly, the programme would require the participation of sub-sciences which had not hitherto been very prominent in fisheries research. The aim would be to identify stocks of salmon while they were pelagic and to determine whether the salmon of Asiatic and North American origin intermingled, and the patterns of their migration. The research on the king-crab involved more simple problems and it would initially concentrate on population analysis along classic lines.

The Commission recognized that hydrography and oceanography could supply important background information in its research programme.

Since the investigation was all conducted by national agencies as part of their larger programmes, a great deal of co-operation and co-ordination was obviously needed. He was glad to be able to state that mutual understanding of national outlooks and resources for research had gone far beyond all expectations. The exchange of staff and information had contributed to that satisfactory atmosphere.

Mr. LIENESCH (Netherlands), speaking as Vice-Chairman of the International Whaling Commission, introduced the paper by Mr. R. Kellogg on the International Whaling Commission (A/CONF.10/L.18). He drew special attention to the fact that the shortening of the whaling season in the Antarctic had resulted in increasing stocks and oil production. It was also interesting to note that any infringements of the whaling regulations were reported to the Commission. The Commission's biological studies were carried out in an atmosphere of co-operation and in full agreement with private industry. Scientific information was still incomplete, and there were at times differences of opinion, but there was general agreement on the need for research and regulations and a general willingness to follow the recommendations based on the latest scientific reports. In conclusion, he drew special attention to the final paragraph of Mr. Kellogg's paper.

The CHAIRMAN thanked all those who had introduced papers and called for general discussion on the items before the Conference.

Mr. LUCAS (United Kingdom) said that the papers prepared by Mr. Moiseev and Mr. Zenkevich (A/CONF.10/L.14 and L.15) were of great interest, because they not only gave information on the work done in a very productive region, but also touched on certain problems of general concern, such as the question of acclimatization. Those and similar matters were receiving active consideration in Western Europe and elsewhere. For example, the idea of transplanting plaice in the North Sea was being taken up again, so that, even in regions which had been thoroughly fished for generations, there might still be possibilities of transplanting. International co-operation was exceedingly important in such matters and both the benefits and the dangers of each proposal must be fully taken into account.

Mr. TSURUOKA (Japan) said he had been extremely interested in the papers submitted by the Soviet Union experts, particularly as there had in the past been lack of precise information from the USSR research centres. He hoped that in future the experts from Japan and the Soviet Union would exchange information on the results of their work and would study the common problems together in full knowledge of all scientific information.

To illustrate the need for an exchange of information, he remarked that, fully to understand Mr. Moiseev's paper, further information would be required on several points. In the first place, Mr. Moiseev had stated that in 1954, of the main school of sockeye salmon moving to deposit their spawn in Lake Kurill in Kamchatka, only 320,000 fish had reached the spawning ground instead

of the 2 to 2.5 million fish normally needed to fill the spawning ground, while 3.8 million salmon had been caught at sea by Japanese vessels. The latter figure had been taken from Japanese statistics, but it would seem necessary to know the number of fish caught by the USSR during the same period. He pointed out that, according to the tag experiments conducted by his country, the rate of exploitation by Japanese fishermen had never yet been shown to be excessive.

Secondly, he would like to know the volume of the catch of chum salmon, which was far greater than that of sockeye salmon.

Thirdly, according to Mr. Moiseev, the Pacific herrings, like the salmon, were strongly influenced by hydrometeorological conditions. Mr. Moiseev had also stated that about 150,000 metric tons of sexually immature herrings, belonging to age-groups of less than 2 or 3 years, had been caught in 1940. In that connexion Mr. Tsuruoka would like to know where such a large quantity of young herring had been caught, since Japan had never registered such a high catch.

Mr. LIU (China) wished to make a few supplementary points which would reinforce some of the ideas set forth in the background papers.

In the first place, he dwelt on the problem of the conservation management unit. In some cases the unit might simply be the population, but in others, such as trawl and tuna fisheries, it might be advisable to consider several populations as a whole (A/CONF.10/L.1, page 33). It would be difficult to apply the conservation management unit to tuna or spear fish, because several different species were often caught at the same time and the percentage of each species caught varied considerably.

Secondly, the adoption of a conservation management unit must take the age-groups of a population into consideration and not only the population as a whole, because the rate of growth and mortality varied according to the age-group. It was worthwhile preserving the groups with a high rate of growth, but at the same time the fish which were likely to die from natural causes might as well be caught regardless of their age, unless there was some greater indirect benefit to be derived from allowing them to die in the ocean.

Thirdly, he referred to part IIB of Mr. Schaefer's paper (A/CONF.10/L.1): "Protection of fish, the conservation of which will result in greater average catch or more desirable quality". On that point he emphasized that the control of the level of fishing intensity should be based on the different age-groups of a population. The natural dynamic equilibrium of the population should be investigated for the determination of an adequate recruitment, otherwise the regulations designed to ensure adequate recruitment might be a great hindrance to the fishing industry, because in many instances the best fishing season was the spawning season of the fish and the best fishing centres were often the spawning ground of the fish.

Finally, the remarked that many pelagic fish had a broad geographical range, which usually extended into the territorial waters of several countries, and he raised the question whether it would be legal to interfere with national sovereignty for the purposes of the international conservation of the living resources of the sea.

Mr. D'ANCONA (Italy) said that he had followed the papers by the two Soviet Union experts with great interest. The idea of transplanting fish was most interesting but must be approached with caution since experience had not always shown it to be successful. For example, the transplanting of fresh water fish from America to Europe had not proved particularly successful.

Another point which deserved international attention, especially on the part of the countries in that neighbourhood, was the continually increasing migration of fish from the Red Sea, through the Suez Canal, into the Mediterranean.

Mr. HULT (Sweden) drew attention to the fact that, in the annotation to item 9 of the Agenda, in the Chairman's statement at the second meeting, (A/CONF.10/SR.2) and in various other statements and papers, priority was given to fishing for direct human consumption.

The Conference had not yet considered the problem that would arise if one country wished to exploit a fish population for direct human consumption and another country wished to exploit the same population for other purposes, such as the processing of fish oil and fish meal to feed cattle and poultry. Much had been said about the maximum sustainable yield, but it was not clear whether that meant a large quantity of fish which was not fit for human consumption or smaller quantity of high quality fish which would be excellent for direct human consumption. As long as a fish population was at a level permitting unrestricted fishing, both for direct human consumption and for processing, there was no problem. But a very difficult one would arise if the fish population were exploited to such a degree that fishing for processing had a detrimental influence on fishing for human consumption. His delegation thought it essential that the Conference make a careful study of that problem in the course of its discussions.

Mr. HERNANDEZ (Chile) said that his country, with its long Pacific coast-line, was deeply concerned with the conservation of the living resources of the sea. His Government had taken a number of administrative measures to that effect, such as prohibiting the fishing of certain species in particular areas, or altogether during the spawning season. Fisheries, which provided a vital food for the population, had increased considerably in Chile, so that biological research of the sea had become an urgent necessity. The Institute of Maritime Biology, attached to the University of Chile, was building up an extensive research service. The exchange of information was also important in order that all countries might gain a better understanding of marine phenomena.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.