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INFORMATION ON ACTIVITIES OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION RELEVANT TO THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON STRADDLING FISH STOCKS AND HIGHLY MIGRATORY FISH STOCKS

(Submitted by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO)

INTRODUCTION

The interactions of nations are becoming more complex. As countries strive to develop their economic and productive capacities, they increasingly come in conflict over the use of exploitable natural resources within an environmental context. The dispute and uncertainty concerning the allocation and management of straddling and highly migratory fish stocks is a prime example. Proper adjudication of these conflicts and subsequent national and dynamic management of the resources require improved understanding, information, management systems and predictive capabilities.

High seas fisheries have been subjected to increasing exploitation in recent years. This has caused concern that these living resources will become overutilized. Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea clearly provide for the conservation and proper management of fisheries under coastal States' exclusive economic zones. Chapter 17 of Agenda 21 deals with the protection of the oceans and, in particular, the rational use and development of its living resources. It contains specific programme areas emphasizing sustainable use and conservation of high seas living resources and living marine resources under national jurisdiction. However, consensus agreements on managed utilization practices for high seas fisheries in international waters are yet to be defined. Additionally, those stocks that straddle exclusive economic zones or are highly migratory form a special case in which the interests of coastal States come in conflict with those nations supporting distant water fleets on the international high seas. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) confirmed that the inadequacy of current internationally agreed-upon measures regarding these valuable renewable living resources requires urgent United Nations action.

ROLE OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION

The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO is the sole intergovernmental agency concerned with the whole of the marine environment. Its main activities are to promote ocean science, collection and management of systematic ocean observations, and training and capacity-building for developing nations. As a member of the United Nations system, it facilitates international and intergovernmental collaboration. Rational management of the oceans and their resources depends upon an adequate scientific and informational base within a consensus management and legal framework. Although IOC is not involved in formulating legal or management mandates, it fully participates in providing the scientific basis for these actions.

IOC is uniquely qualified to provide for the present Conference technical and scientific support which is fully consistent with its role as referred to in chapter 17 of Agenda 21. Factors affecting the conservation and utilization of high seas fishery stocks need to take into account information on the biological parameters of the stocks as well as influences of the abiotic environment. IOC is the lead United Nations agency for the coordination of international oceanography programmes and maintains a jointly sponsored programme with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) on Ocean Sciences in relation to Living (marine) Resources (OSLR).

Physical processes in the upper 200 metres of the high seas control or influence most of the annual biological production and population dynamics of fisheries stocks. Long-term climate variability affects stock and species shifts in abundance and distribution. IOC is the primary international agency with the responsibility of developing the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS). GOOS is a global framework for systematic ocean observation to meet the needs for forecasting climate variability and change, and for assessing the health and state of the marine environment and its resources. As such, it can play an integral role in providing information management capabilities for decision-making regarding straddling and migratory fish stocks. An ongoing relevant activity is the Continuous Plankton Recorder (CPR).

It is likely that the management procedures adopted by the present Conference will be implemented through international or intergovernmental organizations at the regional and/or subregional level. IOC has experience in coordinating and maintaining intergovernmental oceanographic research on a regional basis. There are currently five regional subsidiary bodies operating within the purview of IOC. These can support and augment regional management schemes possibly adopted by this Conference.

Capacity-building is one of the basic mandates of UNESCO. IOC has existing programmes on training and mutual assistance of developing countries. Successful management regimes will require development of infrastructure and increase in capabilities to conduct monitoring, surveillance and research by the less developed States. IOC is prepared to assist in this process.

IOC and FAO jointly sponsor the Ocean Sciences in relation to Living Resources (OSLR) programme. The purpose of OSLR is to promote improvements in scientific understanding which will lead to more effective development,

management and conservation of the living marine resources of coastal and oceanic nations. Several relevant OSLR projects are:

International recruitment programme - aimed at increasing our understanding of the processes influencing recruitment of fish stocks using a multidisciplinary approach to understand the physical and biological processes that control the abundance of key populations of marine animals in space and time in an effort to predict the effects of global climate changes on production;

Global ocean ecosystems dynamics research and monitoring (GLOBEC.I) - co-sponsored by ICSU's Scientific Committee on Oceanic Research, seeks to understand the physical and biological processes that control the abundance of key populations of marine animals in space and time in an effort to predict the effects of global climate changes on production;

Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS) and Large Marine Ecosystems (LME) - OSLR currently is involved in the formulation of a Living Resources Panel for GOOS. OSLR supports the Continuous Plankton Recorder (CPR), likely the current major instrumented sampling system for long-term, large-scale biological monitoring within GOOS. The Global Environmental Facility (GEF)-Large Marine Ecosystems (LME) funded regional studies in developing country areas will be focal points for living resource observation within GOOS. OSLR is facilitating the development of these regional studies.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

On the basis of activities and studies carried out in the IOC programmes, we wish to make the following concrete proposals:

1. Consensus management should be agreed to by all parties based on the best available information and reasoned, negotiated practices and recommendations. The goal should be sustainable production with equitable allocation for all participating States. Information and practices used should be or include:

(a) Scientific inquiry into the whole stock and its entire area of distribution;

(b) Baseline impact assessment to ascertain a standard for the stock level against which to measure changes;

(c) Establishing or augmenting suitable monitoring programmes to provide timely, adequate and sufficient data;

(d) Ensuring availability and use of adequate information, management and analytical tools, and promoting information exchange between all nations;

(e) Considering management options within a multi-species approach which accounts for species interactions and consequences;

(f) Considering or assessing the by-catch or incidental catch of species as well as the potential "discard" problem.

2. Conservation and management regulations should be implemented through intergovernmental or regional bodies of consenting and compliant nations. It should be acknowledged that regional differences and situations will exist. Consequently, management techniques need to be flexible to meet changing circumstances. There may not be world-wide a priori practices.

3. It is incumbent upon this Conference to expedite the adoption of policies to subject nations to responsibility (liability) of prudent conservation measures for straddling and migratory fish stocks within the framework of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and as advocated in chapters 15 and 17 of Agenda 21. All nations exploiting these living resources should be obligated to cooperate and accept reasonable proposals and conservation measures.

IOC stands ready to participate in and contribute to further international developments and actions, within the IOC mandate and in accordance with available resources, drawing upon the expertise in and results obtained from the IOC programme.
