

Sept 23, 2009

Sept 23, 2009 Report of the US-Russia Bilateral Commission, Moscow, Russia

Chaired by Amirkhan Amirkhanov

**Statement read by Geoffrey Haskett for the record regarding the absence of US Commissioner Charlie Johnson:**

Charlie Johnson is unable to attend due to an emergency medical situation, however, he is doing well and we have been in contact with him. Fortunately, the two US Commissioners have had detailed discussions in preparation for this inaugural Commission meeting and have a shared understanding in their position on many issues they anticipate arising in this meeting. Therefore, we expect to be able to conduct a full meeting of the Commission as planned. Should issues arise that have not been discussed and where I am not confident of agreement, the US section will not be able to vote. We anticipate such situations to be extremely rare and will seek to resolve them through contact with Charlie Johnson during the course of the meeting.

**Agenda topic: Impact of climate change and anthropogenic factors on polar bears: regional climate change predictions and understanding in the geographic area encompassed by the Agreement, polar bear response to climate change, traditional knowledge**

Discussion of climate change presented by Stanislav Belikov and Geoffrey Haskett

**Agenda topic: Adoption of Rules of Procedure**

Discussion of rules of Procedures

Geoffrey Haskett introduced 2 changes that were requested by the US state department

These changes were agreed upon by the Commission.

Sergey Kavry requested deletion of the word agreement under Rule 13 (e). Suggested that a Native to Native agreement had not been signed. Later clarified possible deletion of the date (January 18, 2008) only.

Geoffrey Haskett responded that he did not believe that Charlie Johnson would support this change and that in Charlie's absence he could not agree to that change. He suggested that Charlie would need to be consulted with first.

No change was adopted.

Igor Mikhno suggested a change under Rule 13 (d) suggesting that the statement limited observer status to the two groups mentioned.

Geoffrey Haskett clarified that the intent was not to limit observer status to just these two organizations but to ensure that these two organizations specifically would have observer status.

After discussion it was determined that the original statement should be maintained and that an additional statement should be added clarifying that other groups could submit proposals for observer status and that the Commission would consider those proposals.

***Agenda topic: Discussion of joint approach to implementation of Article 8***

Discussion regarding the scientific working group. It was determined that at this time only one working group, the scientific working group, should be designated. Other working groups will be assigned if needed to assist the Commission in their work. It was suggested and agreed upon that the scientific working group would consist of 10 individuals total – 5 from each nation.

***Agenda topic: Domestic management measures in the US and Russia for monitoring and management of the Alaska-Chukotka polar bear population; implementation of habitat protection measures***

Valery Orlov provided a review of Russian management/monitoring programs  
Terry DeBruyn provided a review of US management/monitoring programs

Geoffrey Haskett clarified that the US critical habitat proposal is in front of the Secretary of the Interior and has not been approved yet. The details of the proposal cannot be shared yet but will be available in the near future.

Terry DeBruyn clarified that the critical habitat proposal is specific to areas in the US only.

***Agenda topic: Establishment of Commission Advisory Committees and Working Groups***

Geoffrey Haskett outlined that the scientific working group should be small and include only those with scientific background or traditional knowledge. For the US side the delegation would include a habitat expert, polar bear ecologist, population biologist, senior bear scientist, and a traditional native knowledge expert.

It was agreed that working groups in addition to the scientific working group may be needed in the future and those groups could be setup at that time.

Agreed to adopt a 10 person scientific working group with 5 members from each country.

***Agenda topic: Examination of questions relating to selection of geographic areas for coordinated activities to implement the Agreement***

Stanislav Belikov expressed concern that the western boundary as currently identified for the population is likely to change in the future. Geoffrey Haskett responded that the US cannot make a decision to make a western boundary change without consultation with the State Dept.

It was agreed upon that no changes would be made to the western boundary at this time. A change in the boundary can be reconsidered in the future based upon the recommendations of the Scientific Working Group.

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***Agenda topic: Discussion of the functions of the scientific working group: responsibilities, analysis of subsistence harvest, scientific priorities, population status, and evaluation, role of traditional native knowledge, potential funding sources for monitoring and research programs***

Pavel Andronov gave an overview of scientific activities by ChukotTINRO in the territory of the Chukotka Autonomous Region.

Amirkhan Amirkhanov presented a preliminary draft of the regulatory function of the scientific working group.

Mike Young stated that under Article 8 the scientific working group should be charged with providing scientific information that addresses the definition of sustainable harvest level. Stanislav Belikov and Scott Schliebe clarified the definition of sustainable harvest level in the drafting stage of the treaty. Sustainable harvest level under the treaty means "a harvest level which does not exceed net annual recruitment to the population and maintains the population at or near its current level, taking into account all forms of removal, and considers the status and trend of the population, based on reliable scientific information." The charge to the scientific working group should include addressing these key elements and should include a timetable that allows a report to the Commission 30 days prior to the next meeting. We also believe that the scientific working group should be charged with providing recommendations on harvest to the Commission.

It was agreed that the scientific working group be head by two co-chairs –Stanislav Belikov and Scott Schliebe. These co-chairs are charged with nominating 5 candidates and alternates as necessary by October 1, 2009 to serve on the scientific working group for each country. The group should hold their first meeting as soon as practical.

***Agenda topic: Discussion of types of cooperation under the Alaska-Chukotka Native-to-Native Agreement***

Eduard Zdor stated that in the framework of our agreement, the joint Native-Native commission should have one meeting per year. Public awareness needs to be increased regarding how harvest management will be done, how polar bear habitats can be protected, and how local knowledge can be used.

***Agenda topic: Participation of Native Peoples in Conservation and Management of the Alaska-Chukotka polar bear population in Russia (the Chukotka Autonomous Region)***

Yury Tototto commented that recommendations from the Chukotka regional social organization will be provided to the Commission and stated that a meeting was held prior to coming to Moscow amongst marine mammal hunters. He indicated the need to establish monitoring centers. A part of this work should be increasing awareness of

indigenous people and clarifying to locals that harvest can only be possible once a mechanism for protection can be put in place.

Geoffrey Haskett confirmed that the US delegation fully supports Native involvement in the Commissions activities.

Sergey Kavry provided a presentation on the participation of Natives peoples in the conservation and management of the Alaska-Chukotka population

Vladimir Etylin highlighted the cultural importance of the harvest and the need to ensure the direct participation of the indigenous people in harvest monitoring. He acknowledged that the current lack of harvest has resulted in gaps in transmission of traditional knowledge and cultural aspects of harvest. He highlighted that if we do not inform our youth in the methods for protecting polar bears we will fail. They will take them as trophies, rather than as part of their subsistence culture. As indigenous peoples we need to work to redefine this attitude. This is not just harvesting, this needs to include reinstatement of traditional use.

Eduard Zdor stated the interest of indigenous people in Russia for harvest to resume. He provided a joint letter from indigenous people in the US and Russia making recommendations from Native Chukotka and Alaska groups.

It was acknowledged that it needs to be made clear to the public and the media that any harvest will be limited to indigenous people.

***Agenda topic: Participation of Native Peoples in Conservation and Management of the Alaska-Chukotka polar bear population in the United States (Alaska)***

Presentation on behalf of Charlie Johnson by Rosa Meehan and Scott Schliebe.

Rosa Meehan indicated the importance of working with Native people and it is supported in domestic legislation. Primary benefits are communication and exchange of scientific information and traditional knowledge.

Scott Schliebe gave examples of coordinated activities such as harvest management workshops which have been shared with Russian colleagues. In Alaska we developed a very comprehensive booklet about the harvest program and monitoring requirements. It explained why we collect harvest data, how we use the data, and why the information is so important to ensuring a sustainable harvest. We would be willing to provide that booklet and provide the translation as a basis for harvest monitoring in Chukotka.

Geoffrey Haskett pointed out that the Alaska Nanuuq Commission is the main group we work with, but there are other Native organizations that we work with, including the North Slope Borough. A lot of these groups share members.

It was agreed upon that materials generated from workshops in the US on harvest monitoring would be shared with Russian colleagues.

***Agenda Topic: Discussion of the Procedure for adopting a Report***

The procedure for adopting a report of the meeting was agreed upon as outlined under Rule 17. A final report would need to be signed by all commissioners and would include only the major points of the meeting. The report would not be a comprehensive transcript of all discussions and presentations. All discussions and presentations are captured in a recording of the meeting.

***Additional agenda topics: research activities in the US and Russia***

Presentation by Karyn Rode on US-based research of the Chukotka-Alaska population

Presentation by Nikita Ovsyanikov on research on Wrangel Island

***Agenda topic: Determination of approaches to and taking of decisions on possible harvest quota for polar bears for the 2009-2010 season***

It was agreed upon that no change in current harvest management would be made until advice and recommendations are obtained from the scientific working group. It was decided that the scientific working group should be identified as soon as possible so that a meeting can be held and recommendations made prior to the next Bilateral Commission meeting. It was suggested but not finalized that the next Bilateral Commission meeting occur in June 2010 and that a report from the scientific working group be provided 30 days prior to the next meeting of the Bilateral Commission.

Igor Mikhno asked whether the United States would have a moratorium on harvest prior to a decision being made by the Bilateral Commission

Geoffrey Haskett indicated that once recommendations are available from the scientific working group, the Commission will make a decision for the shared population. The intent of the United States is to maintain the status quo until we have a determination from the Commission based upon a recommendation from the scientific working group. Until we have a decision by the bilateral commission based on the recommendation of the scientific working group, we are ruled by our own domestic legislation.

Amirkhan Amirkhanov stated that a governmental act is required to lift the moratorium in Russia. This act is meant to be based on the recommendation of the Commission. So in 1956 law it is stated clearly that harvest is prohibited. By signing an agreement it has already defined that it is moving in the direction of allowing a legal harvest by Russian indigenous people. This is part of the constitution of the Russian federation. A governmental resolution is required, but it can be done only with the recommendation of the scientific advisory group. This moratorium will continue until we get a recommendation from the scientific working group.

Sergey Kavry expressed the need to determine the status of the population as soon as possible to liberate indigenous people to pursue their subsistence rights.

Eduard Zdor reminded the Commission that the first recommendation that was adopted in the Native-to-Native joint commission meeting (Native-to-Native commission) was for the scientific advisory group to provide an estimate that can be used to base sustainable harvest level.

**Agenda topic: Preparation of draft documents**

It was determined that draft documents of the rules of procedure for the Commission and the scientific advisory group as well as the minutes of the meeting would be reviewed and agreed upon on Friday.

**Sept 25 Report**

**Agenda topic: Assuring financial support for implementation of the Agreement and functioning of the Commission; its committees and working groups**

Clarifications were given on this point by Amirkhan Amirkhanov.

**Agenda topic: Final adoption of Rules of Procedure**

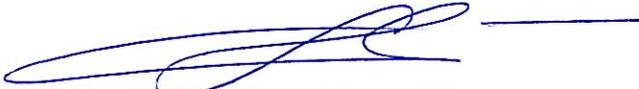
A point was made that it is not necessary that the specific groups that will have observer status be listed in the Rules of Procedure. However, the Commission concluded that no change should be made to the current language which recognizes the Association of Traditional Marine Mammal Hunters of Chukotka and the Alaska Nanuuq Commission having observer status.

It was agreed to adopt the Rules of Procedure without change to Rule 13(e). It was agreed that this Rule will be revisited when Charlie Johnson is present.

The structure of the scientific working group was agreed upon.

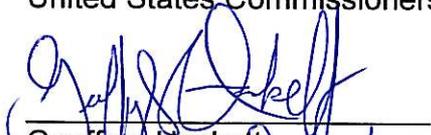
The next meeting of the Bilateral Commission will be held in June 2010, in Anchorage, Alaska, United States.

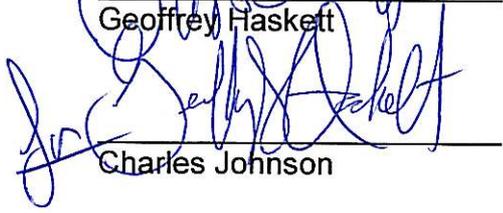
Russian Federation Commissioners:

  
Amirkhan Amirkhanov

  
Sergey Kavry

United States Commissioners:

  
Geoffrey Haskett

  
Charles Johnson

Moscow, 25 September 2009