

REPORT

FOURTH MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE AGREEMENT TO PREVENT UNREGULATED HIGH SEAS FISHERIES IN THE CENTRAL ARCTIC OCEAN

**Tromsø, Norway
June 3-5, 2025**

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**CONTRACTING PARTIES TO THE AGREEMENT TO
PREVENT UNREGULATED HIGH SEAS FISHERIES IN THE
CENTRAL ARCTIC OCEAN**

- Canada
- People's Republic of China
- Kingdom of Denmark, in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland
- European Union
- Republic of Iceland
- Japan
- Republic of Korea
- Kingdom of Norway
- Russian Federation
- United States of America

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean was held in Tromsø, Norway on June 3-5, 2025. A total of 84 participants attended the meeting including delegates from the 10 Parties to the Agreement, representatives of five Observers and the bureau ([Appendix 3](#)). The meeting was chaired by the COP Chairperson, Mrs. Nadia Bouffard of Canada and followed the adopted agenda ([Appendix 1](#)).

The COP **acknowledged** the report of the third meeting of the Scientific Coordinating Group (SCG) held on March 4-7, 2025 ([Appendix 4](#)) in Iceland and **approved** the SCG's recommended Program of Work for 2025-26 included in the report. The COP also **supported** four of the six SCG recommendations and the two SCG requests in its report. In respect of the two SCG recommendations concerning the identification and conservation of vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs), the COP **agreed** to continue discussions intersessionally with a view to developing a VME framework.

The COP **agreed** to continue intersessional negotiations of measures within the COP's Ad Hoc Working Group on Exploratory Fishing (EF-WG) on the basis of the revised draft measures attached as [Appendix 6](#), during virtual EF-WG meetings and an in-person EF-WG meeting to be held in Tokyo, Japan in February 2026.

The COP **mandated** the COP Chairperson to engage with the President of the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission to develop a mechanism for cooperation in respect of the application of conservation and management measures in the overlap area.

The COP **agreed** to continue discussions on the Proposed Rules for posting and accessing material and documents on the public and the restricted portions of the CAOFA website ([Appendix 7](#)) within the Website Working Group with a view to submitting a document for the COP to consider at its next meeting. The COP also **agreed** to continue discussions on a CAOFA accession process based on the Proposal from Canada on CAOFA Accession Process and Real Interest attached as [Appendix 8](#).

The calendar of CAOFA related meetings provided in [Appendix 9](#) was **approved** by the COP, recognising that some dates and venues remain to be determined.

1. Welcoming Remarks

1. The fourth in-person meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the *Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean (CAOFA or Agreement)* was opened and chaired by the Chairperson of the COP, Mrs. Nadia Bouffard of Canada from June 3-5, 2025, in Tromsø, Norway. The Mayor of Tromsø, Gunnar Wilhelmsen, Norway, welcomed participants.
2. All ten Parties to the Agreement: Canada, the People’s Republic of China, the Kingdom of Denmark, in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland, the European Union, the Republic of Iceland, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Kingdom of Norway, the Russian Federation, and the United States of America were represented at the meeting.
3. The Chairperson confirmed the admitted Observers to the meeting, consistent with the COP’s Rules of Procedure: Deep Sea Conservation Coalition (DSCC); the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES); the Norwegian Center for the Law of the Sea (NCLOS) of UiT - the Arctic University of Norway; the United Kingdom, and the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) Global Arctic Programme.
4. A total of 84 participants attended the meeting from the ten Parties, five Observers, and the bureau. Sixty-seven participants attended in-person and 17 participants attended virtually. A list of meeting participants (CAOFA-2025-COP4-REF04) is provided in [Appendix 3](#).

2. Call to order and introduction by Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson

5. The Chairperson of the COP, Mrs. Nadia Bouffard of Canada, and the Vice-chairperson, Ambassador Youngki Hong of the Republic of Korea, both welcomed the meeting participants and provided remarks to the meeting.

3. Opening remarks by delegations

6. The Parties and Observers provided opening remarks. Representatives of the Inuit Circumpolar Council being part of some Parties’ delegations provided separate remarks as part of these delegations.

4. Adoption of the agenda and arrangements for the session

7. The **adopted** agenda (CAOFA-2025-COP4-01-Rev1) is provided in [Appendix 1](#). The documents presented to the COP are listed (CAOFA-2025-COP4-REF03-Rev1) and attached in [Appendix 2](#).

5. 2025 Scientific Coordinating Group (SCG) meeting report

(a) Presentation of 2025 SCG meeting report

8. The Third Meeting of the Scientific Coordinating Group (SCG) was hosted by Iceland and held from 4-7 March 2025 in Hafnarfjörður, Iceland (SCG3). The SCG Chairperson, Dr. John

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L. Bengtson (USA) presented a summary of the adopted report of the SCG3 meeting (CAOFA-2025-COP4-02) attached as [Appendix 4](#), which includes the report of the 2024 interim meeting of the SCG (CAOFA-2024-SCG interim-04). The presentation to the COP (CAOFA-2025-COP4-03) is attached as [Appendix 5](#).

9. A total of 63 persons from all ten Parties and four Observers participated in the SCG3 meeting; 31 participants were present in person in Hafnarfjörður and 32 participated via online videoconferencing. The SCG also held an interim meeting virtually on 19-21 November 2024, with 57 participants from all ten Parties and representatives of three Observers.

(i) Progress on implementation of Joint Program of Scientific Research and Monitoring (JPSRM)

10. The SCG Chairperson summarised the work of the SCG's Mapping and Monitoring Working Group (MM-WG), which reorganised its efforts to prioritise completion of its priorities and anticipated deliverables to the COP (see paragraphs 21 to 30 of the SCG3 meeting report attached as [Appendix 4](#)). Top priorities were combined into an updated table of the SCG's Priorities and Work Plan, which included:

- a) further developing the four JPSRM Standard Methods documents to facilitate consistent development of JPSRM data collection;
- b) identifying a list of analyses needed for reliable advice to the COP;
- c) reporting to the COP on JPSRM implementation;
- d) collaborating with groups external to the SCG and JPSRM;
- e) identifying opportunities for communicating and collaborating with holders of Indigenous Knowledge and local knowledge; and,
- f) convening a meeting of the SCG and managers of national Arctic programs to develop processes and timelines to organise and facilitate the implementation of the JPSRM.

11. The SCG agreed to a new calendar of meetings for the next two years, outlining the general times when meetings of the SCG and its working groups will be held. The SCG intends to continue its current practice of meeting twice per year (spring in person/autumn virtually). Each SCG working group is expected to meet at least once per quarter throughout the year (virtually). Both the SCG and its working groups will schedule their meetings to facilitate compliance with the SCG and COP rules respectively for submitting documents prior to meetings.

12. With respect to the SCG's Data Management Working Group (DM-WG), the SCG Chairperson noted that two important priorities are to:

- a) focus on identification of information to be made available on the CAOFA website, once the work of the Website Working Group is completed; and,

- b) promote the incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge into the JPSRM database. Activities through 2025 will include identification of specific standards for each of the parameters and data types identified in the JPSRM Implementation Plan, including the development of metadata standards for historical data from multiple international sources.
13. The SCG Chairperson noted that the SCG3 participants had several productive discussions about potential characteristics of vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs) in the high seas portion of the central Arctic Ocean (CAO). Because this area has not been previously affected by fishing pressure and has had little to no mapping and monitoring, the VME characteristics in this area could include attributes unique to the CAO. Defining VME characteristics does not automatically mean that a VME will be identified. A list of essential ecosystem characteristics would help inform scientific research priorities and planning. A risk assessment is required to inform future conservation and management measures (CMMs) to identify VMEs. The SCG will continue to develop a VME definition and provide future advice to the COP regarding VMEs considering biota with specific vulnerability in the CAO.
14. The SCG Chairperson reported that at the SCG3 meeting, the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) had provided a presentation on Indigenous Knowledge and scientific knowledge working together, which described concrete examples of co-produced Indigenous and scientific research projects on a variety of topics. At the invitation of the SCG Chairperson, ICC representatives on the delegations of Canada and the United States presented to the COP a summary of their more detailed presentation to the SCG.
15. The SCG Chairperson specified that the SCG discussed the importance of:
- a) coordinating with Inuit organisations and communities to coordinate on action plans and outreach;
 - b) addressing a Standard Operating Procedure for incorporating Indigenous Knowledge into JPSRM databases; and,
 - c) facilitating communications between the SCG and Inuit regions regarding planning and implementation of the JPSRM.
16. The SCG Chairperson described SCG progress in reaching out to potential collaborators external to the SCG to assist with the implementation of the JPSRM. He reported that a recent workshop (Ecosystem-Based Management: Managing Arctic marine ecosystems requires international, multidisciplinary, and cross-sectoral cooperation), had explored opportunities for different groups to work together toward mutual goals.
17. The main goals of the workshop were to:
- a) identify the marine living resource information needs of Arctic management bodies such as the CAOFA COP, the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC), and the OSPAR Commission (established by the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic); and,

b) explore potential synergies and opportunities among scientific groups and Indigenous Knowledge groups to collaborate in acquiring and providing information to management bodies needing such information.

The workshop highlighted the high potential of closer cooperation between different scientific organisations and knowledge holders involved in the CAO. Several key organisations were identified that have expressed interest in collaborating with implementation of the JPSRM.

(ii) Resources to implement JPSRM and the work of the SCG and its working groups

18. The SCG Chairperson emphasised the need for increased engagement by, involvement in, and resources from the Parties in the work of the SCG and its working groups. Parties were encouraged to support the involvement of their respective national Arctic research programs, vessels, and personnel in the implementation of the JPSRM. He noted that the success of the JPSRM, including the development of scientific advice to the COP, is highly dependent on resources provided by the Parties.
19. In addition to the ongoing progress on the development of the CAOFA website, which is considered a useful tool to help in the sharing of documents, data and knowledge, the SCG Chairperson pointed to the need for the SCG's continued coordination of national scientific programs toward implementation of the JPSRM, and the need for nominations to co-chair the SCG's MM-WG, to assist in the heavy workload tasked to this group.
20. Finally, the SCG Chairperson noted that the SCG submitted in total six formal recommendations and two requests to the COP for its consideration and action.

(b) Discussion

21. The COP thanked Iceland for hosting the SCG in-person meeting in 2025 and thanked the SCG Chairperson for his excellent work in chairing the meeting. The COP noted the SCG3 meeting report (CAOFA-2025-COP4-02) attached as [Appendix 4](#). The COP also expressed its appreciation for the contributions of the SCG Members and the extensive work performed by the SCG working groups and the leadership of each working group in achieving this work.
22. The COP noted the very extensive progress achieved to date in implementing the JPSRM. It expressed its strong support for the SCG's 2025-2026 proposed work plan, the priorities identified in the plan, and the calendar of meetings for the 2025-2026 meeting cycle, which was seen as useful to help meet its priority work demands. The COP emphasised the need for the SCG to continue making progress towards implementing the JPSRM.
23. The COP flagged the need for the Website Working Group (W-WG) and the DM-WG to work closely together on the development of the CAOFA website, to ensure a seamless implementation.
24. The COP expressed appreciation for the presentation on Indigenous Knowledge and Scientific Knowledge Working Together given at the SCG3 meeting and summarised during the COP4

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meeting prepared by Indigenous Knowledge Holders part of the Canadian, United States (Alaska) and DFG (Greenland) delegations.

25. The SCG was encouraged to continue its engagement with Arctic Indigenous Knowledge Holders with a view to, taking into account its workload, providing concrete recommendations for the COP's consideration on how these two sources of knowledge as well as local knowledge may work together in accordance with the Agreement.
26. The Parties agreed to consider the SCG's recommendations under agenda item 8.

6. Conservation and management measures for exploratory fishing in the Agreement Area

27. The Chairperson of the COP's Ad Hoc Working Group on Exploratory Fishing (EF-WG), Mr. Adam Burns of Canada, presented the work performed to date by the Working Group both under his leadership, and that of the previous Chairperson of the Working Group, Dr. Kelly Kryc of the United States, as reflected in the Draft Conservation and Management Measures for Exploratory Fishing in the High Seas of the Central Arctic Ocean (Document CAOFA-2025-COP4-04-Rev1) submitted for the COP4 meeting.
28. The Chairperson of the EF-WG noted the numerous bracketed text and unresolved issues and suggested to resume the work of the Working Group during the COP meeting, to see if progress could be made. In this respect, he suggested as a first step, to consider a discussion based on broad policy questions related to: 1) exploratory fishing plans, in terms of their review, comment and approval; 2) VMEs, in particular with respect to encounter protocols and thresholds to minimise impacts of exploratory fishing on VMEs; 3) monitoring, compliance, and high seas boarding and inspections (HSBI); and, 4) reporting requirements. Such a policy discussion was proposed by the Chairperson as a means to help clarify the Parties' positions on key matters, before proceeding with a more detailed clause by clause review by the Working Group of the current version of the text.
29. The COP thanked Dr. Kryc of the United States for her excellent work chairing the EF-WG and agreed to set aside time for the EF-WG to continue this work during COP4 under the leadership of its new Chairperson, Mr. Burns, of Canada.
30. In his report to the COP following the EF-WG session, Mr. Burns noted that the Working Group had had a good discussion on the policy considerations underpinning the exploratory fishing measures. While he noted that the Working Group had made some progress on the draft measure reflected in a revised text of the conservation and management measure identified as CAOFA-2025-COP4-04-Rev2 and attached as [Appendix 6](#), he indicated that the EF-WG did not have a version to propose to the COP for its consideration during COP4.
31. The COP thanked the EF-WG Chairperson and its members for their efforts and recognised the need for the Working Group to continue this important work. To this end, the COP **agreed** for the EF-WG to continue to meet intersessionally virtually and to meet once intersessionally in person, using as a starting point the draft measure attached as [Appendix 6](#). The COP

thanked Japan for offering to host the 3-day intersessional EF-WG meeting at dates to be confirmed in early February 2026 in Tokyo, Japan.

32. Some Parties recognised that removing some matters out of the EFCMMs to be addressed in separate measures may be a useful way to expedite the development of the EFCMMs. The COP **agreed** to continue negotiations and endeavor to adopt conservation and management measures for exploratory fishing (EFCMMs) in accordance with Article 5(1)(d) by the time of the next COP meeting.
33. The COP also **agreed** to the need to work expeditiously on establishing a cooperative mechanism between CAOFA and NEAFC with respect to exploratory fishing measures applicable to the overlap area.

7. CAOFA Website

(a) Report of the Chairperson of the Website Working Group (W-WG)

34. In response to the Terms of Reference (Document CAOFA-2024-COP3-08) adopted by the COP when it established the Website Working Group (W-WG) during COP3 in 2024, the Chairperson of the W-WG, Mrs. Nadia Bouffard of Canada, informed the COP that the Working Group developed for the COP's consideration Proposed Rules for Posting and Accessing Material and Documents on the Public and the Restricted Portions of the CAOFA Website (Document CAOFA-2025-COP4-05) attached as [Appendix 7](#).
35. She specified that the W-WG began its work by developing objectives for the CAOFA website to guide the development of the content, structure and rules associated with the posting and accessing of material and documents on the website. These objectives were included in the Proposed Rules for the COP's consideration.
36. The W-WG Chairperson summarised the content of the Proposed Rules in respect of its public access portion and restricted portion, which would be accessed by CAOFA meeting participants. She mentioned that the Proposed Rules cover such matters as the types of documents and material that may be included on the two portions of the website; the designation process to access the restricted portion of the website; the governance for making decisions regarding the website; and any exceptions that may be sought to post documents on the website.

(b) Consideration of the Rules for posting and accessing material and documents on the public and the restricted portions of the CAOFA website

37. The COP thanked the Chairperson of the W-WG for her work on the Proposed Rules.
38. The COP expressed appreciation for the work of the W-WG to date, noting that it was a significant step forward in formalising the website for CAOFA. One Party expressed concern with the availability and stability of a budget to support the website implementation

and upkeep, as well as the feasibility of the website to facilitate the sharing of scientific data among all Parties.

39. As not all Parties were represented in the Working Group, some had questions and comments on the specific content of the Proposed Rules. The Parties **agreed** to continue discussions on the Proposed Rules by providing the W-WG Chairperson with their written comments on the Proposed Rules within three weeks of the end of COP4 (by 26 June 2025). The W-WG Chairperson was asked to produce a new draft for discussion within the W-WG, taking into account these comments. The W-WG was asked to produce a final document for the COP to consider at its next meeting.

8. Consideration of SCG Recommendations

(a) Decisions sought from the COP

40. In its report of the SCG3 meeting (CAOFA-2025-COP4-02) attached as [Appendix 4](#), the SCG made 6 recommendations and 2 requests seeking COP decisions, which were considered under three themes.

(i) Development of CAOFA website

41. In respect of the SCG's first recommendation in paragraph 70 of its report [Appendix 4](#), the COP **reiterated** its support for a CAOFA website, and in particular, recognised the usefulness of the website for sharing material, documents, data, and knowledge and supporting outreach efforts by providing an online presence for the COP, the SCG and the JPSRM. In considering the W-WG Proposed Rules for Posting and Accessing Material and Documents on the Public and Restricted Portions of the CAOFA Website, the COP **agreed** that the document formed a good basis for discussion and referred the matter back to W-WG to consider the Parties' comments prior to resubmitting a version to the COP for decision at its next meeting.

(ii) Encourage and support involvement of the Parties' Arctic research programs, vessels, and personnel in the work of SCG, its working groups and the JPSRM

42. The COP **approved** the SCG Program of Work for 2025-2026 as outlined in the SCG3 meeting report with a particular focus on the high priorities identified therein, emphasising the need for the SCG to continue developing methods for data collection and research.
43. The COP expressed its **support** for the SCG's recommendations and request in paragraphs 71 to 74 of its report. The COP particularly expressed its gratitude to the leadership and members of the SCG and its working groups for their outstanding dedication and hard work over the past years, highlighting their particularly heavy workload.
44. The COP **encouraged** all Parties to continue to contribute resources and personnel towards the work of the SCG and its working groups, and in particular towards the implementation of the JPSRM. The COP also encouraged the Parties to publicise the JPSRM within their

respective national science programs, with a view to identifying opportunities for synergies and integration of JPSRM priorities.

45. In respect of the SCG's request in paragraph 72 of its report attached as [Appendix 4](#), the COP **nominated** Dr. Robert Foy of the United States to co-chair the Mapping and Monitoring Working Group of the SCG together with Dr. Kevin Hedges of Canada, and **nominated** Ms. Sheila Atchison of Canada to co-chair the Data Management Working Group together with Dr. Lizong Wu of China.
46. The COP recognised that in addition to the national scientific programs of each Party, many other organisations conduct scientific research work and studies and hold knowledge relevant to the implementation of the JPSRM. With the objective of leveraging synergies for scientific research in the CAO, the COP expressed **support** for the idea introduced during the COP4 meeting, of holding a workshop aimed at taking stock of existing scientific information, research and study programs related to the objectives and overarching questions of the JPSRM and identify knowledge gaps related to the JPSRM. This was seen as a useful means of forming the basis of international cooperation, and in particular, establishing specific cooperative scientific initiatives in the context of the implementation of the JPSRM. The COP **encouraged** the SCG to consider including such a workshop in its work plan and **encouraged** the Parties to consider hosting such a workshop.
47. To advance coordination of research under the JPSRM, the COP also **welcomed** the United States' offer to host a virtual meeting of the Mapping and Monitoring Working Group of the SCG to begin addressing Task 6 of the SCG's 2025-2026 Priorities and Work Plan. This virtual meeting would focus on critical, initial tasks such as tracking ongoing national surveys and establishing a working plan. This virtual meeting would be followed by an in-person workshop of members of the MM-WG and representatives of national scientific programs of the Parties to identify priority areas for scientific research in respect of the Pacific and Atlantic gateways in addition to the CAO.

(iii) Consider identification of VMEs in the CAOFA Area and development of conservation and management measures, as a first step, specific to coral, sponge habitat, hydrothermal vents, and seamounts in the CAOFA Area

48. The COP considered the deliberations and advice from the SCG summarised in its SCG3 meeting report [Appendix 4](#) concerning the need to identify VMEs in the CAOFA Area and whether to develop conservation and management measures to protect VMEs with a first step specific to coral, sponge habitat, hydrothermal vents, and seamounts in the CAOFA Area, as outlined in its recommendations in paragraphs 75 and 76 of the SCG3 meeting report.
49. The COP also considered the meeting participants' views on the matter, as well as the work of the international community reflected in the various United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolutions, the FAO's International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-sea

Fisheries in the High Seas (DSF Guidelines) adopted in 2008, and the various measures adopted by regional fisheries management organisations to address the potential impacts of fishing on VMEs, including those adopted by NEAFC.

50. China presented its document titled *Suggestions on Issues Pertaining to Vulnerable Marine Ecosystem (VMEs) Under the Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries In the Central Arctic Ocean* (CAOFA-2025-COP4-REF02), summarising the rules and practices of the United Nations, FAO, RFMOs and other related international bodies on VMEs. The Chinese paper encouraged the COP to rely on these tools and relevant international practices in respect of the scope of application, definition and identification of VMEs when discussing the definition of VMEs and related conservation and management measures. China noted that ecosystems such as sea-ice habitats, high-yield areas and the feeding grounds, spawning grounds, wintering grounds and migration channels of species had not been classified as VMEs by regional fisheries management organizations and arrangements and was of the view that these features should not be included in the category of VMEs under the framework of CAOFA.
51. The COP **noted** the need to develop measures on VMEs in the context of exploratory fishing in the high seas portion of the CAO.
52. Several delegations expressed their views on the description and interpretation of existing international tools on VMEs provided in the document, particularly in respect of their application to the CAO. A debate ensued on the scope of definition of VMEs – what characterises potential VMEs particular to the CAO - and on the sequencing of steps to be taken to define and identify VMEs in the CAO, to develop measures to avoid encounters of VMEs and/or to manage the potential impacts of exploratory fishing activities on these VMEs when encountered, including the need to conduct impact assessments.
53. The COP was reminded of the particular sensitivity of the CAO ecosystems due to the cold climate and the slow growth and reproduction of many living marine organisms in the CAO. The importance of sea ice, sea-ice habitats, and the temporal nature of these areas was raised as a significant feature of the Arctic marine ecosystem. Some highlighted that the ice edge zone is a unique characteristic of the CAO, and important for biological production. Many pointed to sea ice areas as being critically important to Arctic Indigenous Peoples and local communities who rely on them. Indigenous Knowledge Holders participating as part of some delegations underscored that sea ice and ice edge environments support biological productivity, that they are essential for marine mammal respiration and movement, and that they are critical breeding and birthing habitats that depend on stable pressure ridges, multi-year ice, and shore-fast ice features. The COP **noted** that there is little to no mapping and monitoring of the CAO ecosystem, and the lack of current information regarding the impact

of fishing activities in these areas on the CAO ecosystem, and it **emphasised** the need for the SCG to address this gap in knowledge.

54. The COP **noted** that further discussion is required in respect of defining and identifying VMEs and developing a framework for conservation and management measures on VMEs. The COP **agreed** to advance this VMEs discussion of a framework in the margins of the in-person intersessional meeting of the EF-WG in Japan. The COP **noted** that this does not preclude the SCG continuing its work.

(b) New Questions for the SCG

55. Factoring in the heavy workload of the SCG and its working groups, the COP requested that the SCG continue its engagement with Arctic Indigenous Knowledge Holders and local knowledge holders with a view to providing concrete recommendations for the COP's consideration on how scientific knowledge, Indigenous Knowledge and local knowledge may work together in accordance with the Agreement.

9. Discussion on a process to accede to the Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement

56. The COP Chairperson introduced the agenda item by reminding meeting participants of the United Kingdom's interest to join the CAOFA expressed during COP3 in 2024, and the COP's decision to develop processes and procedures for receiving and considering such proposals for accession to the Agreement.
57. Canada presented its proposal for such a process entitled *Proposal from Canada on CAOFA Accession Process and Real Interest* (Document CAOFA-2025-COP4-06) attached as [Appendix 8](#).
58. The Parties thanked Canada for its proposal which contains various elements for discussion. There was general support for establishing requirements for applications to accede to the Agreement as well as for criteria to be elaborated for determining a State's real interest in acceding to the Agreement. Various views were expressed on the nature and extent of these criteria. Due to lack of time during the meeting, Canada agreed to consult the Parties intersessionally with a view to submitting a document to the COP for decision at its next meeting.

10. CAOFA linkages and cooperation with other international mechanisms

59. The Chairperson introduced the agenda item by noting that cooperation with other international organisations and mechanisms is key to the success of the CAOFA. She highlighted how this was recognised by the Parties when they negotiated the Agreement, and it is reflected in various provisions of the Agreement - whether in respect of the need to facilitate cooperation on scientific activities to increase knowledge under Article 4(1) or the need for the JPSRM to take into account work of relevant scientific and technical organisations under Article 4(4). When concluding the Agreement, the Parties recognised the need and the importance for them to continue to fulfil their duty to cooperate, and they

recognised the roles played by other existing and future mechanisms relating to fisheries management under Article 14 of the Agreement.

60. In their interventions, the Parties **recognised** the importance of CAOFA and its bodies – the COP and the SCG – to perform their duties and functions, including the implementation of the JPSRM, as well as to cooperate and work with other international and regional organisations, as necessary, in particular with NEAFC, to advance its work and priorities and to share information. While cooperation and engagement with other organisations to exchange information was seen as useful, the Parties were mindful of the fact that no budget had been assigned to the Chairperson for such engagement.
61. The COP **identified** as a key priority to focus on developing a mechanism to cooperate and coordinate with the NEAFC in respect of the area of overlap between CAOFA and NEAFC. This was seen as particularly pressing for ensuring a consistent approach for conservation and management measures applicable to the overlap area. In this respect, the COP **mandated** its chairperson to engage with the President of NEAFC and develop a proposed cooperation mechanism for the COP’s consideration.

11. Climate changes pertaining to CAOFA

62. Consistent with the Resolution on Climate Change adopted by the COP in 2023, the COP considered the matter of climate changes and the impacts of such changes on the CAO as a standing item for discussion during COP meetings.
63. The COP heard from an Indigenous Knowledge Holder who was part of one delegation, and who represented the views of the Indigenous youth in the Inuit Circumpolar Council Youth Engagement Program, about the impacts Indigenous Peoples are witnessing due to climate change and how these changes are particularly affecting the Arctic Indigenous youth, their communities, and their future.
64. The COP recognised the importance of the topic of climate change and the need to consider its potential impacts, to collect scientific data, Indigenous Knowledge, and local knowledge in this respect, and to consider any recommendations from the SCG in respect of these potential impacts of climate change on the CAO and its ecosystems. In particular, the COP **asked** the SCG to provide information and scientific advice on the effects of climate changes on fish stocks and their ecosystems, including sea ice and the sea-ice edge environments, and scientific advice on conservation and management measures to address these impacts, including on the means of mitigating and adapting to these impacts.
65. In this respect, the COP was referred to the Seventeenth round of Informal Consultations of States Parties (ICSP) to the 1995 United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement (UNFSA) held May 15-17, 2024 (report ICSP17/UNFSA/INF.3), where the impacts of climate changes on sustainable fisheries management, particularly focused on how to adapt fishing plans to these changes was discussed. Specifically, reference was made to annex 1 of the report which lists key points relating to sustainable fisheries management in the face of climate changes.

12. Next CAOFA meetings

66. The calendar of COP and SCG meetings was **adopted** by the COP attached as [Appendix 9](#), though the COP recognised that some meeting dates still need to be confirmed.

67. In respect of future meetings of the COP, the COP **thanked** the EU for agreeing to host the next in-person COP5 meeting in early June 2026 at dates and a venue to be confirmed. As host, the EU confirmed that as any other Party, it is committed to follow the relevant provisions of the COP Rules of Procedure which state that the host shall make all efforts to equally enable all Parties to participate at the COP meeting. The host is expected to inform and assist, as necessary, any participant with travel entry requirements.

68. The COP further **thanked** China's offer to host the SCG4 in-person meeting in March 2026 at specific dates and venue to be confirmed.

13. Report of COP meeting

69. The COP **adopted** the report of the fourth in-person COP Meeting on 26 August 2025.

14. Other business

70. No other business was raised by the Parties.

15. Meeting closure

71. The Chairperson thanked delegations for attending the fourth meeting of the COP in Tromsø, Norway and closed the meeting at 4:30pm on June 5 2025.

**MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES (COP) TO THE
AGREEMENT TO PREVENT UNREGULATED HIGH SEAS FISHERIES
IN THE CENTRAL ARCTIC OCEAN**

June 3-5, 2025

Tromso, Norway

9:00–17:30 local time, each day

Coffee Break 10:30-11:00

Lunch Provided 13:00-14:00

Coffee Break 15:30-16:00

Chairperson: Mrs. Nadia Bouffard

PROVISIONAL AGENDA

Day 1

1. Welcoming Remarks from Mayor of Tromso, Norway
2. Call to order and introduction by Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson
3. Opening remarks by Delegations
4. Adoption of agenda

Documents:

- [Provisional Agenda - CAOFA-2025-COP4-01](#)
- [Chairperson's Memorandum to Participants - CAOFA-2025-COP4-REF01](#)

5. 2025 SCG meeting report

Document:

- [SCG3 Meeting Report 4-7 March, 2025 - CAOFA-2025-COP4-02](#)

(a) Presentation by SCG Chairperson

Document:

- [SCG Chairperson Presentation to COP - CAOFA-2025-COP4-03](#)

(i) Progress on implementation of Joint Program of Scientific Research and Monitoring (JPSRM)

- SCG Priorities and Work Plan 2024-2026
Table 1 of SCG3 Meeting Report - CAOFA-2025-COP4-02
- Data management and linkages to CAOFA website

- Definition and characteristics of vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs) in the context of exploratory fishing
- Collaboration with Indigenous Knowledge holders
- Collaboration with national and international science programs

(ii) Resources to implement JPSRM and the work of the SCG and its working groups

(b) Discussion

6. Conservation and management measures to govern exploratory fishing in the Agreement Area

Documents:

- [Draft Proposal from the EF-WG - CAOFA-2025-COP4-04](#)

(a) Presentation of EF-WG Chairperson

(b) Consideration of conservation and management measures to govern exploratory fishing in the Agreement Area

Day 2

6. Conservation and management measures to govern exploratory fishing in the Agreement Area (Continued)

7. CAOFA website

(a) Report of the Chairperson of the Website Working Group (W-WG)

(b) Consideration of the Rules for posting and accessing material and documents on the public and the restricted portions of the CAOFA website

Document:

- [Draft Rules from the CAOFA W-WG - CAOFA-2025-COP4-05](#)

* Reception to be hosted by Norwegian Government at 7PM

Day 3

8. Consideration of SCG Recommendations

(a) Decisions sought from the COP:

- (i) Development of CAOFA website;
- (ii) Encourage and support involvement of the Parties' Arctic research programs, vessels, and personnel in the work of SCG, its working groups and the JPSRM; and
- (iii) Consider identification of VMEs in the CAOFA Area and development of conservation and management measures, as a first step, specific to coral, sponge habitat, hydrothermal vents, and seamounts in the CAOFA Area.
 - [People's Republic of China Suggestions on Issues Pertaining to Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems \(VMEs\) Under the Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries In the Central Arctic Ocean - CAOFA-2025-COP4-REF02](#)

(b) New questions for the SCG

9. Discussion on a process to accede to the Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement

Document:

- [Proposal from Canada on CAOFA Accession Process and Real Interest - CAOFA-2025-COP4-06](#)

10. CAOFA linkages and cooperation with other international mechanisms

11. Climate changes pertaining to CAOFA

12. Next CAOFA Meetings (Dates, Venues, Topics)

(a) COP

(b) SCG

13. Report of Meeting

14. Other Business

15. Meeting Closure

CAOFA 2025 COP4 MEETING – DRAFT LIST OF DOCUMENTS

WORKING DOCUMENTS		Circulated	Status
CAOFA-2025-COP4-01-Rev1	Provisional Agenda	Draft for Comments March 26, 2025 Final May 5, 2025 Rev1 May 27, 2025	Rev 1 Adopted June 3, 2025
CAOFA-2025-COP4-02	Report of March 4-7, 2025 SCG Meeting	May 5, 2025	
CAOFA-2025-COP4-03	SCG Chairperson Presentation to COP on SCG March 2025 Meeting	June 3, 2025	Provided by SCG Chairperson and appended to Meeting Report
CAOFA-2025-COP4-04	Draft Proposal from the EF-WG	May 5, 2025	Rev#2 to be appended to Meeting Report
CAOFA-2025-COP4-05	Draft Rules from the CAOFA W-WG	May 5, 2025	
CAOFA-2025-COP4-06	Proposal from Canada on CAOFA Accession Process and Real Interest	May 5, 2025	
REFERENCE DOCUMENTS			
CAOFA-2025-COP4-REF01	Chairperson's Memorandum to Participants	May 5, 2025	
CAOFA-2025-COP4-REF02	PRC's Suggestions on VMEs	May 5, 2025	
CAOFA-2025-COP4-REF03	List of Documents	May 5, 2025	
CAOFA-2025-COP4-REF04	List of Participants at COP4	June 5, 2025	Provided by Norwegian Gvt at the meeting
CAOFA-2025-COP4-REF05	CALENDAR OF CAOFA MEETINGS 2025-26	July 5, 2025	

APPENDIX 3
CAOFA-2025-COP4-REF04
LIST OF COP4 PARTICIPANTS

CAOFA PARTIES				
	Firstname	Lastname	Role	Organisation
EU				
1	Fiona	Harford	Head of Delegation	European Commission, Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Unit B2 Regional Fisheries Management Organisations
2	Bernard	Blazkiewicz	Alternate	European Commission, Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Unit B2 Regional Fisheries Management Organisations
3	Dr Sarah	Davie	Adviser (EU SCG representative)	MRAG Europe Ltd
4	Leszek	Dybiec	Adviser	Fisheries Department, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Poland
5	Erik	Molenaar	Adviser	Netherlands Institute for the Law of the Sea (NILOS) & associate, Utrecht Centre for Water, Oceans and Sustainability Law (UCWOSL), Utrecht University, the Netherlands
6	David Pablo	Nordlund Sierra	Adviser	Acuerdos y Organizaciones Regionales de Pesca, Dirección General de Pesca Sostenible, Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación, España
	Ismael	Yague Sabido	Adviser	Acuerdos y Organizaciones Regionales de Pesca, Dirección General de Pesca Sostenible, Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación, España
	Luís	Belmonte	Adviser	Acuerdos y Organizaciones Regionales de Pesca, Dirección General de Pesca Sostenible, Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación, España
	Carmen Margarita	Mancebo Robledo	Adviser	Acuerdos y Organizaciones Regionales de Pesca, Dirección General de Pesca Sostenible, Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación, España

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7	Fredrik	Arrhenius	Adviser	Ministry of Rural Affairs and Infrastructure Division for Fisheries, Game Management and Reindeer Husbandry, Sweden
8	Teodora	Ivanova- Staykova	Adviser	General Secretariat of the Council
9	Maria José	Santana	Adviser	General Secretariat of the Council
Korea				
1	Ggochnim	Bak	Head of Delegation	Green Diplomacy Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
2	Gyeongmin	Kim	Second Secretary	Green Diplomacy Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
3	Seung-eun	Lee	Policy Analyst	Overseas Fisheries Information System
4	Yena	Park	Senior Researcher	Korea Maritime Institute
5	Jeehye	Kim	Senior Researcher	Korea Maritime Institute
6	Hyoungchul	Shin	President	KOPRI
7	Hyoungsul	La	Principal Research Scientist	Division of Ocean & Atmosphere Science, KOPRI
8	Jeehoon	Kim	Senior Research Scientist	Division of Ocean & Atmosphere Science, KOPRI
9	Jihoon	Jeong	Head	Office of Global Cooperation, KOPRI
Japan				
1	Joji	Morishita	Head of Delegation	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
2	Taisuke	Iwano	Alternate	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
3	Tomohiro	Kondo	Representative	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
	Yutaka	Hiroe	Representative	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
	Haruki	Mitome	Representative	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
	Hiromichi	Ueno	Representative	Hokkaido University
Russian Federation				
1	Dmitry	Kremenjuk		Deputy Head of the Department of Fleet, Ports and International Cooperation, Federal Agency for Fisheries of the Russian Federation

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2	Yulia	Zhuzhginova		Second Secretary of the Legal Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation
Canada				
1	Adam	Burns	Head of Delegation (HoD)	Assistant Deputy Minister, Programs Sector/Fisheries and Harbour Management, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO)
2	Matt	Sweeting-Woods		Deputy Director, International Fisheries Policy, DFO
3	Herb	Nakimayak		Vice President, International Affairs, Inuit Circumpolar Council – Canada (ICC-C)
4	Benjamin	McTaggart		Policy Advisor, ICC-C
5	Susanna	Fuller		Vice-President, Conservation and Projects, Oceans North
	Robert	Apro		Senior Policy Advisor, International Fisheries Policy, DFO
	Hilary	White		Science Advisor, EOS, DFO
	Alain	Dupuis		Science Advisor, EOS, DFO
	Kevin	Hedges		Research Scientist, Arctic and Aquatic Research Division, Ontario and Prairie Region, DFO
USA				
1	Demian	Schane	Head of Delegation	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
2	Lauren	Fields	Signatory Point of Contact	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
3	Elana	Mendelson	Signatory Point of Contact	Department of State
4	Pallavi	Javor	Advisor	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
5	John	Bengtson	SCG Chairperson/Advisor	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
6	Mike	St. Jeanos	Advisor	U.S. Coast Guard

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LIST OF COP4 PARTICIPANTS

7	Vernae	Angnaboogok	Advisor	Inuit Circumpolar Council - Alaska
8	Marie	Greene	Advisor	Inuit Circumpolar Council - Alaska
9	Cyrus	Harris	Advisor	Inuit Circumpolar Council - Alaska
10	Scott	Highleyman	Advisor	Ocean Conservancy
11	Dave	Benton	Advisor	Ocean Conservancy
12	Becca	Robbins Gisclair	Advisor	Ocean Conservancy
13	Derek	Campbell	Advisor	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
	Candace	Nachman	Advisor	U.S. Coast Guard
	Mike	Burke	Advisor	U.S. Coast Guard
	Mari	Cullerton	Advisor	U.S. Coast Guard
Kingdom of Denmark in Respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland (DFG)				
1	Birgitte	Jacobsen	HoD	Ministry of Fisheries, Hunting, Agriculture and Self-Sufficiency, Greenland
2	Sverri	Skaalum Joensen	Delegate	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Industry and Trade, Faroe Islands
3	Aviaja	Tindbæk Jørgensen	Delegate	ICC Greenland
4	David	Ottosen	Delegate	ICC Greenland
People's Republic of China				
1	Li	Xiangfeng	Head of the delegation	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China
2	Zheng	Yue	delegate	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China
3	Yang	Lei	delegate	Chinese Arctic and Antarctic Administration
4	Lin	Hui	Advisor	Polar Research Institute of China

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5	Xu	Zhiqiang	Advisor	The Institute of Oceanology, Chinese Academy of Sciences
6	Wu	Lizong	Advisor	Polar Research Institute of China
7	Ying	Yiping	Advisor	Yellow Sea Fisheries Research Institute, Chinese Academy of Fishery
8	Zhang	Yanxuedan	Advisor	Shanghai Ocean University, College of Marine Living Resource Sciences and Management
Norway				
1	Kristoffer	Bjørklund	HoD	Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries
2	Petter	Meier	Delegate	Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries
3	Liv	Vedsegård	Delegate	Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries
4	Sofie	Munch-Ellingsen	Delegate	Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries
5	Alf Håkon	Hoel	Delegate	Institute of Marine Research
6	Åge	Høines	Delegate	Institute of Marine Research
7	Maria	Fossheim	Delegate	Institute of Marine Research
Iceland				
	Thorvardur Atli	Thorsson	HoD	Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Iceland

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 LIST OF COP4 PARTICIPANTS

OBSERVERS

	Firstname	Lastname
Deep Sea Conservation Coalition (DSCC)		
	Eunhee	Kim
	Duncan	Currie
World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Arctic Program		
	Vanessa	Dick
	Matt	Spencer
International council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES)		
	Carl M.	O'Brien
United Kingdom		
	James	Sharples
	Michelle	Hackett
Norwegian Centre for the Law of the Sea		
	Vito	De Lucia
	Irene	Dahl

APPENDIX 4

**FINAL REPORT OF THE
THIRD MEETING OF THE CAOFA
SCIENTIFIC COORDINATING GROUP**

Hafnarfjörður, Iceland

4-7 March 2025

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Third Meeting of the Scientific Coordinating Group (SCG) to the *Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean* (CAOFA) was opened and chaired by the SCG Chairperson Dr. John L. Bengtson of the United States. The meeting was hosted by Iceland from 4-7 March 2025 in Hafnarfjörður, Iceland.

A total of 63 persons participated in the SCG3 meeting: the SCG Chair and Vice Chair, 55 participants from the ten Parties to the Agreement, and six representatives from four observer organizations. Of the 63 participants, 31 were present in person and 32 participated via online video-conferencing. The SCG also held a 2024 Interim Meeting held virtually on 19-21 November 2024. A total of 57 persons participated online in that meeting.

The SCG's Mapping and Monitoring Working Group (MM-WG) reorganized its efforts to prioritize completion of its priorities and anticipated deliverables to the COP, which were combined into an updated table of the SCG's Priorities and Work Plan for 2025-2026. The top priorities included: 1) further develop the four JPSRM Standard Methods documents to facilitate consistent development of JPSRM data collection, 2) identify a list of analyses needed to develop reliable advice to the COP, 3) report to the COP on JPSRM implementation, 4) reach out and collaborate with groups external to the SCG and JPSRM, 5) identify opportunities for communicating and collaborating with holders of Indigenous Knowledge, and 6) convene a meeting of SCG Members and managers of national Arctic programs to develop processes and timelines to promote research coordination under the JPSRM.

Two important tasks for the Data Management Working Group (DM-WG) are to: 1) focus on identification of information to be made available on the CAOFA website, which will be addressed after the report from the Website Working Group is completed at COP4, and 2) to promote the incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge into the JPSRM database. Activities through 2025 will include identification of specific standards for each of the parameters and data types identified in the JPSRM Implementation Plan, including the development of metadata standards for historical data from multiple international sources. The SCG also recognized that there are data currently available from CAOFA Parties that could be incorporated into the centralized database as soon as a formal data management plan is available. Efforts in 2026 will be to identify international data sets that may specifically inform the CAOFA Parties in implementing the JPSRM.

There was considerable discussion about potential characteristics of vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs) in the Central Arctic Ocean. Because this area has not been previously affected by fishing pressure and has had little to no mapping and monitoring, its VME characteristics in the area could include attributes unique to the Central Arctic Ocean region. Defining VME characteristics does not automatically mean that a VME will be identified. A list of essential ecosystem characteristics would help inform scientific research priorities and planning. A risk assessment is required to inform future conservation and management measures (CMMs) to establish VMEs and avoid significant adverse impacts. The SCG will continue to develop a VME definition and to provide future advice to the COP regarding VMEs considering biota with specific vulnerability in the Arctic Ocean.

The Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) provided a presentation on Indigenous Knowledge and scientific knowledge working together, including concrete examples of co-produced Indigenous and scientific research projects on a variety of topics. The presentation also touched on coordinated Inuit/Government science and marine management frameworks as well as a basic overview Indigenous Knowledge and data management within CAOFA.

The SCG agreed to a new calendar of its meetings over the next two years. The calendar outlines the general times when meetings will be held; specific dates will be agreed in consultation with leaders, participants, and hosts. The SCG thanked the China Delegation and accepted its invitation to host the in-person SCG4 meeting in 2026.

The SCG succeeded in drafting, reviewing, and adopting its report prior to the meeting's adjournment. The report included eight formal recommendations and requests to the COP for its consideration and action. In closing the SCG3 meeting, the Chair extended his congratulations and thanks to all of the meeting's hosts, organizers, leaders, and participants for their contributions, dedication, and commitment to the goals of CAOFA. The Third Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group was adjourned on Friday, 7 March 2025.

**FINAL REPORT OF THE
THIRD MEETING OF THE CAOFA
SCIENTIFIC COORDINATING GROUP (SCG)**

Hafnarfjörður, Iceland

4-7 March 2025

Chairperson: Dr. John L. Bengtson

Agenda item 1: Call to order and introduction by the Chairperson

1. The Third Meeting of the Scientific Coordinating Group (SCG) to the *Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean* (CAOFA) was opened and chaired by the SCG Chairperson Dr. John L. Bengtson of the United States. The meeting was hosted by Iceland and held from 4-7 March 2025 in Hafnarfjörður, Iceland.
2. The Chair welcomed participants and thanked them for their work to prepare for the SCG3 meeting. In particular, he expressed appreciation to members of SCG's Mapping and Monitoring Working Group and the Data Management Working Group for their work in recent months.
3. The Chair also thanked the meeting's Icelandic hosts, Mr. Thorvardur Atli Thorsson and Dr. Gudmundur J. Oskarsson, for their excellent efforts and attention to detail in arranging such a great meeting at the Marine and Freshwater Research Institute of Iceland, located on the harbor in Hafnarfjörður.

Agenda item 2: Welcoming remarks by the Vice Chairperson and hosts

4. The SCG Vice Chairperson Dr. Hauke Flores extended greetings to all delegations. Recognizing the great involvement with many participants online and onsite, he expressed positive expectations for the Third Meeting of the SCG. In particular, he appreciated the many scientific contributions announced by the delegations on short notice.
5. On behalf of the Iceland Delegation to CAOFA, Dr. Thorsteinn Sigurdsson, Director of the Marine and Freshwater Research Institute, welcomed participants to the meeting.

Agenda item 3: Adoption of the agenda and appointment of rapporteurs

6. The Chair outlined the main points of the provisional agenda and asked SCG3 participants if they wished to propose any revisions.
7. With minor revisions, the final agenda for the Third Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group was **adopted** (CAOFA-2025-SCG3-01.Rev1). The final agenda is provided in Appendix 1. A list of the working materials and documents presented to the SCG (CAOFA-2025-SCG3-02.Rev1) is provided in Appendix 2.

8. The co-chairs of the SCG Mapping and Monitoring Working Group (Drs. Kevin Hedges and Hauke Flores) and SCG Data Management Working Group (Drs. Robert Foy and Lizong Wu) were appointed as rapporteurs to assist the SCG Chair and Vice Chair (Dr. Flores) in preparing a report of the meeting.

Agenda item 4: Opening remarks by Member Delegations and observers

9. The Heads of all ten delegations delivered opening remarks. Representatives of the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) Alaska and ICC Canada contributed additional opening remarks as part of their respective delegations.

10. Consistent with the SCG's agreed process, four organizations were also present at the SCG3 meeting as observers:

- United Kingdom,
- International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES),
- World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Arctic Programme, and
- Deep Sea Conservation Coalition.

11. A total of 63 persons participated in the SCG3 meeting: the SCG Chair and Vice Chair, 55 participants from the ten Parties to the Agreement, and six representatives from four observer organizations. Of the 63 participants, 31 were present in person in Hafnarfjörður and 32 participated via online video-conferencing.

12. A list of participants (CAOFA-2025-SCG3-03) is provided in Appendix 3.

Agenda item 5: Review of the 2024 Interim Meeting of the SCG

13. The 2024 Interim Meeting of the CAOFA SCG was held virtually on 19-21 November 2024. A total of 57 persons participated online in the interim meeting including SCG Members from all ten Parties to the Agreement and representatives of three observer organizations. The interim meeting report (CAOFA-2024-SCG interim-04) is attached as Appendix 4.

14. A main emphasis of the 2024 Interim Meeting of the SCG was to review the Draft SCG work plan for 2024-2025 (CAOFA-2024-SCG -02), which was based on the tasks described in the report from the SCG2 meeting in Boston in April, 2024. The SCG noted that many of the tasks outlined at the SCG2 meeting overlapped with each other and could be combined. The work plan was revised as "Table 1. CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group (SCG) Priorities and Work Plan: 2024-26" in the report of the 2024 Interim Meeting of the SCG meeting (CAOFA-2024-SCG interim-04).

15. The revised 2024-2026 work plan addressed the relative temporal urgency of its 13 tasks by indicating those tasks should be completed prior the SCG3 meeting in March 2025 and those that were deferred for completion until after the SCG3 meeting.

16. The Chair provided an update on progress in seeking collaboration with international science programs in support of the CAOFA Joint Program of Scientific Research and Monitoring (JPSRM). There are many potential Arctic scientific groups and initiatives that share mutual goals with the JPSRM. Several of these groups have now expressed interest in exploring steps to establish collaborations with the JPSRM, including:

- a. the Arctic Council's Circumpolar Biodiversity Program;
- b. the ICES/PICES/PAME Working Group on the Integrated Ecosystem Assessment of the Central Arctic Ocean (WGICA);
- c. the Pacific Arctic Group (PAG); and
- d. the Arctic Council's PAME expert group on Arctic Ecosystem-Based Management (EBM).

Additional examples include using international efforts such as Ocean Decade, the International Polar Year (IPY), and others. The JPSRM Framework and Implementation Plan documents list many examples of groups that may be in a position to develop very constructive collaborations in support of the JPSRM. The SCG discussed outreach materials for these engagements described in more detail in paragraph 28.

Agenda item 6: Mapping and Monitoring Working Group (MM-WG)

17. The Mapping and Monitoring Working Group (MM-WG) co-chairs presented a report on activities and work completed during the last year. The MM-WG had very little activity in the last year. Delegations nominated individuals to be part of writing teams to complete the Standard Methods documents related to data and sample collections for fish species, marine mammals and seabird species, other taxa from key trophic levels, and ecological linkages and impacts, but a lead was only identified for one writing team. Meetings of the individual writing teams did not occur and none of the Standard Methods documents were completed. The MM-WG co-chairs recognized that the approach to establish multiple writing teams to complete all of the Standard Methods documents at the same time did not work and suggested reorganizing efforts to prioritize completion of one or two Standard Methods documents at a time and complete all of the documents incrementally.

18. The co-chairs met in November 2024 after the 2024 Interim Meeting of the SCG to discuss development of a presentation and planning of outreach meetings. The purpose of these efforts would be to discuss CAOFA and the JPSRM with research program and vessel managers in all ten delegations, but outreach meetings were not held before March 2025.

19. Numerous activities with relevance to the JPSRM have already been undertaken and are planned for the coming years. These efforts are already contributing significant data to the JPSRM, carried by a strong commitment to collaboration between the Parties. Several delegations presented summaries of some of their recent research activities as well as upcoming research plans to be conducted in support of the JPSRM.

20. Regarding field programs, the SCG has made some progress in implementing the JPSRM through the development of standard methods. Efficient communication among the CAOFA

Parties and external partners will facilitate the utilization of research activities of all actors operating in the CAO, thereby strengthening the success of the JPSRM.

21. The SCG reviewed the list of 2024-2026 activities and anticipated deliverables to the COP, which were summarized in Table 1 of the report from the 2024 Interim Meeting of the SCG (CAOFA-2025-SCG3-09). That table was again updated during the SCG3 meeting, and is included in this report as the “CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group (SCG) Priorities and Work Plan: 2025-2026,” which includes the following priority tasks for the MM-WG.

22. *Task 1: Further develop the four JPSRM Standard Methods documents to facilitate consistent development of JPSRM data collection.* It was decided to focus on the two standard methods considered most urgent (i.e., protocols regarding hydroacoustic sampling and fish sampling with trawled nets). The status of these documents will be discussed during the next quarterly online meeting of the MM-WG in April 2025. The MM-WG intends to finalize these two standard methods by July 2025.

23. A shared online folder will be circulated for access by all SCG Members to hold draft and completed Standard Methods documents. The MM-WG is also collecting relevant protocols from other field programs, including EU’s EFICA project, the Nansen Legacy, and MOSAiC.

24. While Standard Methods documents for collecting fish data using trawls and hydroacoustics are prioritized for completion, SCG Members are encouraged to review and suggest revisions to all documents and to add Standard Methods documents for additional sampling methods to the folder for review by SCG Members. When revisions to the initial documents are completed, additional documents will be prioritized for completion.

25. An additional document was proposed that would compare and contrast sampling methods that collect the same or similar data to help inform decisions about sampling programs to prioritize non-destructive methods while balancing the need for data precision, accuracy, and replication. The comparison document would include information about environmental conditions (e.g., open water, through ice, seasonality) and other logistic considerations required of each method, particularly considering differences between vessel-based methods, moorings, sea-ice buoys and other platforms of opportunity (e.g., drift stations), ultimately describing the what, when, where, and how of each method.

26. *Task 2: Identify a list of analyses needed to develop reliable advice to the COP:*

- a. *On species distributions and abundance in JPSRM priority areas;*
- b. *To assess ecological linkages among species; and*
- c. *To forecast potential changes in Central Arctic Ocean ecosystems that would affect resource availability.*

The list of analyses will help the MM-WG and SCG to ensure that data are collected with sufficient replication and rigor to support robust and objective science advice to the COP. In addition to the four current tasks, the MM-WG agreed to identify existing datasets that could be shared among the Parties, with a completion timeframe after the spring 2026 SCG meeting.

Report of the Third Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group

CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group (SCG) Priorities and Work Plan: 2025 - 2026						Version: 7 March 2025
Task No.	Temporal priority	Task description	SCG2 report paragraphs	SCG Group	To be completed before September 2025 Interim meeting of the SCG	To be completed before 2026 SCG4 in-person meeting (estimated as March 2026)
					Team leaders & members (<i>Who</i>)	Team leaders & product (<i>Who & What</i>)
1	HI	<u>FURTHER DEVELOP THE FOUR JPSRM STANDARD METHODS DOCUMENTS:</u> To facilitate consistent development of JPSRM data collection. Request that the drafting teams indicate what specific types of data will be needed in association with the methods being described.	23	MM	Complete 2 standard docs (fish trawls and hydroacoustics). Lead: Hauke Flores Discuss during quarterly meetings 1 st draft by: 07/01/2025 Make list of SM documents, and list of contributors	Complete four Standard Methods documents, as requested at the SCG2 meeting
2	HI	<u>IDENTIFY A LIST OF ANALYSES NEEDED TO DEVELOP RELIABLE ADVICE TO THE COP TO:</u> a. Provide advice to the COP regarding species distributions and abundance in JPSRM priority areas; b. Assess ecological linkages among species; and c. Forecast potential changes in Central Arctic Ocean ecosystems that would affect resource availability.		MM	Request that the Standard Methods drafting teams indicate what specific types of analyses will be needed in association with the methods being described. Start identifying needed analyses.	First version available to SCG
3	HI	<u>REPORT TO THE COP ON JPSRM IMPLEMENTATION, INCLUDING:</u> a. Progress on developing information products as described in JPSRM Implementation Plan Section 10.3; and b. Effective science planning, vessel coordination, and integration of scientific information and Indigenous Knowledge.		SCG, MM-WG, DM-WG	Update list of research activities. Lead: WG Co-leads. Review by April 2025	Update list of programs and seasonality.
4	HI	<u>COLLABORATION WITH GROUPS EXTERNAL TO THE SCG AND JPSRM:</u> Noting the importance of collaborating with international science programs to support the JPSRM, SCG Members will identify individuals from within the SCG Membership with current membership in International bodies to initiate and report back on engagement/collaboration opportunities.	60	SCG	Design outreach products (poster, powerpoint, flyer). Lead: Kevin Hedges By: July 2025	Include this information in outreach flyers
5	HI	<u>IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNICATING AND COLLABORATING WITH HOLDERS OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE:</u> SCG Members will identify opportunities for communicating among national research programs and collaborating with Indigenous Knowledge holders and local knowledge holders.	59	SCG	Continue to coordinate with Inuit organizations and communities to ensure that Indigenous Knowledge holders have access to and awareness of the CAOFA process.	Identify entities with various types of information, clarify actions that would be appropriate, and address procedures for incorporating Indigenous Knowledge into JPSRM databases.

Report of the Third Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group

Task No.	Temporal priority	Task description	SCG2 report paragraphs	SCG Group	To be completed before September 2025 Meeting of the SCG	To be completed before 2026 SCG4 in-person meeting (estimated as March 2026)
					Team leaders & members <i>(Who)</i>	Team leaders & product <i>(Who & What)</i>
6	MED	<p><u>CONVENE A MEETING OF SCG MEMBERS AND MANAGERS OF NATIONAL ARCTIC PROGRAMS TO DEVELOP PROCESSES AND TIMELINES FOR:</u></p> <p>a. Scheduling vessels for joint expeditions into the JPSRM study area;</p> <p>b. Organizing teams of scientists, Indigenous Knowledge holders, and local experts to plan and conduct joint research;</p> <p>c. Facilitating collaboration in meeting the data needs identified in the JPSRM Framework and the JPSRM Implementation Plan;</p> <p>d. Establishing annual meetings of SCG Members and program managers with Arctic research vessels to discuss planning and coordination of research cruises; and</p> <p>e. Beginning to design a process to discuss collaborative research planning for 2025.</p>		MM	Online meeting (1 st meeting April/May 2025, internal). Lead: Bob Foy	2 nd meeting to be held to plan detailed response
7	HI	<p><u>TASKS FOR DATA MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP:</u></p> <p>a. <i>Re-establish the participant list from each SCG Member</i> with a focus on only one or two people per Party to manage the meetings that focus on technical aspects of data management [in November/December];</p>	47.a	DM	Participant list determined during next online meeting in April. Lead: Bob Foy plus Iceland, DFG, Korea.	TBD
		<p>b. <i>Identify data and information to be made available on the Agreement website</i> (public). The SCG also discussed adding data to the secure portion of the portal to assess the sharing of existing national datasets (to be conducted in coordination with COP website WG -- next meeting on 15 January, SCG Members welcome to join meeting); and</p>	47.d	DM	Identify web content.	TBD Depending on COP website group, clarify at April meeting.
	MED	<p>c. <i>Establish the Data Management Team and review the Terms of Reference</i> to address any gaps in guidance for operationalizing the DMSP; and</p>	47.c	DM		TBD
	<p>d. <i>Develop Standard Operating Procedure</i> to collate Data Sharing Protocol requirements that include core metadata standards (and include evaluation of external data) and collect and share metadata for other (National) scientific data relevant to JPSRM.</p>	47.e, 47.f	DM	First draft provided in SCG-3 (2025). Finalized: 06/2025, for meeting in July 2025. Lead: DM-WG co-chairs	Finalize by June.	

Report of the Third Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group

Task No.	Temporal priority	Task description	SCG2 report paragraphs	SCG Group	To be completed before September 2025 Interim Meeting of the SCG	To be completed before 2026 SCG4 in-person meeting (estimated as March 2026)
					Team leaders & members (<i>Who</i>)	Team leaders & product (<i>Who & What</i>)
8	MED	<u>CONVENE A MEETING OF THE DM-WG TO ADDRESS THE FOLLOWING FOUR TASKS:</u> <i>a. Discuss bringing together all relevant knowledge systems under the JPSRM</i>	49.a	DM	Completed by Fall SCG meeting 2025. Lead: DM-WG co-chairs	
		<i>b. Develop processes and procedures for incorporating Indigenous Knowledge and local knowledge into the JPSRM database.</i> The SCG should review guidelines and procedures regarding consultation, acquisition, and ownership of Indigenous Knowledge consistent with Section 6.2 of the JPSRM Implementation Plan and the DMSP with the intent that these guidelines and procedures be periodically reviewed and updated as necessary to ensure they remain up to date and culturally appropriate,	49.b	DM	Completed by Fall SCG meeting 2025. Lead: DM-WG co-chairs	
		<i>c. Report to the COP with recommendations regarding Section 7.3: Involving Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Knowledge in the JPSRM.</i> Report will include recommendations for guidelines and procedures regarding consultation, acquisition, and ownership of Indigenous Knowledge, and procedures for incorporating Indigenous Knowledge into the JPSRM database, methods, and analysis	49.c	DM	Completed by Fall SCG meeting 2025. Lead: DM-WG co-chairs	
	MED	<i>d. Develop a process to ensure the accuracy and authority of unpublished evaluations results;</i> all data and reports used by the JPSRM shall adhere to DMSP standards and processes, and be peer-reviewed and published.	49.d	DM	Lead: DM-WG co-chairs	After completion of SOP document
9	MED	<u>MAP THE ADOPTED JPSRM AND EF DATA TYPES AND STANDARD METHODS TO CURRENT DM PROTOCOLS IN THE DMSP</u> The SCG discussed the need for the DM-WG to work with the MM-WG to make sure there is not overlap in effort: first step may be to start listing existing data sets of relevance to JPSRM (in time for SCG 2025/26 meetings <u>after March 2025</u>).	47.b	DM		Pending progress in finishing the Standard Methods; then proceed to discussions between MM-WG and DM-WG
10	HI	<u>UNDERSTANDING VULNERABLE MARINE ECOSYSTEM (VME) HABITATS, RELATED SPECIES, AND THEIR DISTRIBUTIONS:</u> Inform spatial and temporal restrictions under CMMs for exploratory fishing, sensitivity to different types of fishing/sampling gear, and development of encounter protocols or move-on provisions. This topic needs to be considered in connection with discussions being undertaken by EF-WG and within SCG. Therefore, this task can be addressed both prior to and after the SCG's March 2025 meeting.	57.a	SCG	First draft of white paper was discussed in SCG-3	Finalization pending on-going discussion in SCG Link to EF WG process meeting above and MM-WG actions

Report of the Third Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group

Task No.	Temporal priority	Task description	SCG2 report paragraphs	SCG Group	To be completed before September 2025 Interim Meeting of the SCG	To be completed before 2026 SCG4 in-person meeting (estimated as March 2026)
					Team leaders & members <i>(Who)</i>	Team leaders & product <i>(Who & What)</i>
11	MED	<p><u>REVIEW EXPLORATORY FISHING BY:</u></p> <p>a. Creating a new SCG working group to review exploratory fishing plans;</p> <p>b. Providing advice to the SCG on minimum scientific requirements of exploratory fishing plans;</p> <p>c. Developing a process and procedures to facilitate the provision of comments and feedback on any exploratory fishing plans;</p> <p>d. Identifying opportunities for coordination among exploratory fishing plans to include Indigenous Knowledge, minimize duplication, maximize the scientific value of exploratory fishing data collection, and minimize the ecosystem impacts of exploratory fishing; and</p> <p>e. Ensuring data collected during exploratory fishing and subsequently provided to the Data Management Team meet standards established by the JPSRM Data Management and Sharing Protocol.</p>		SCG	To review during the 2025 Interim Meeting of the SCG (09/2025), pending potential EF proposals by Parties. Revisit at the 2025 Meeting of the SCG	
12	MED	<p><u>IDENTIFYING ONLINE COMMUNICATIONS PLATFORMS:</u></p> <p>The SCG tasks itself and the DM-WG with identifying an online communications platform that is accessible to all SCG Members that can be used for online editing/revisions. Noting that the COP's WEB-WG is reviewing needs and options for communications, the SCG will maintain this task on our agenda, but will defer immediate action pending progress by WEB-WG.</p>	62.a	SCG, DM	Progress on this task will be undertaken after SCG March 2025 meeting as website capabilities become clearer	

27. *Task 3: Report to the COP on JPSRM implementation, including:*
- a. *Progress on developing information products as described in JPSRM Implementation Plan Section 10.3; and*
 - b. *Effective science planning, vessel coordination, and integration of scientific information and Indigenous Knowledge.*

A list of relevant research activities was developed by the Experts on Fish Stocks in the Central Arctic Ocean (FiSCAO) and updated by the Provisional Scientific Coordinating Group (PSCG). The SCG will update that list and add metadata regarding the location, timeframe, data parameters and samples, partners, and partnership opportunities for each activity. This will remain a living list and will be updated annually by the MM-WG. SCG Members began updating the list of activities during the SCG3 meeting, and a final review of the updated list will be conducted during the upcoming WG-MM quarterly meeting in April 2025.

28. *Task 4: Collaboration with groups external to the SCG and JPSRM.* The SCG recognizes that enhancing outreach activities is important to increase awareness of CAOFA and data needed under the JPSRM among colleagues, relevant international organizations, and international conferences. The MM-WG co-chairs will draft a poster, presentation, and fact sheet to support outreach prior to the quarterly MM-WG online meeting in July 2025. When SCG Members attend international meetings, they are encouraged to give the presentation and share the poster and fact sheet with colleagues and report back to the SCG on discussions relevant to CAOFA. The JPSRM Framework and Implementation Plan both identified organizations and research initiatives that could be engaged in mutually beneficial collaborations. When reaching out to external groups it is important that the SCG consider and highlight the benefits that a partnership would bring to the JPSRM (i.e., what is needed and can be provided by the group) as well as the benefits that would be gained by the external group to develop mutually productive and long-lasting collaborations. The SCG encourages Parties to increase outreach and raise awareness of CAOFA and the JPSRM.

29. *Task 5: Identifying opportunities for communicating and collaborating with holders of Indigenous Knowledge.* See Agenda Item 9 (paragraphs 55-58).

30. *Task 6: Convene a meeting of SCG Members and managers of national Arctic programs to develop processes and timelines for:*

- a. *Scheduling vessels for joint expeditions into the JPSRM study area;*
- b. *Organizing teams of scientists, Indigenous Knowledge holders, and local experts to plan and conduct joint research;*
- c. *Facilitating collaboration in meeting the data needs identified in the JPSRM Framework and the JPSRM Implementation Plan;*
- d. *Establishing annual meetings of SCG Members and program managers with Arctic research vessels to discuss planning and coordination of research cruises; and*
- e. *Beginning to design a process to discuss collaborative research planning for 2025.*

31. The SCG **recommended** that the COP complete development of a website to facilitate sharing of documents and to support outreach efforts by providing an online presence for the SCG and JPSRM.

32. The SCG *recommended* that the COP support the SCG’s continued coordination of national scientific programs toward implementation of the JPSRM, including the identification of priority areas as described in the JPSRM Implementation Plan and executed by national research programs.

33. China presented a document entitled, “*Proposals for Implementing the Joint Program of Scientific Research and Monitoring*” (CAOFA-2025-SCG3-05), which noted the lack of systematic or quantitative surveys of fish populations in the Central Arctic Ocean. The paper reported the findings from the Chinese National Arctic Research Expedition (CHINARE) in the Chukchi Shelf/Plateau areas, and recommended the SCG continue to facilitate and expedite the implementation of the JPSRM in an effective and efficient way, including:

- a. Identify and update priority areas for mapping and monitoring in light of new scientific information available;
- b. Organize and conduct joint scientific investigations to produce scientific data on the priority elements and parameters closely relevant to the aim and scientific questions of the JPSRM;
- c. Agree upon the investigation methods, the data standards, etc., and coordinate investigation plans to facilitate the mapping and monitoring of the key elements in the priority areas; and
- d. Encourage the use and sharing of best practices and collaboration among Parties.

34. The SCG thanked China for its proposal for methods in facilitating and expediting implementation of the JPSRM and its associated invitation for additional collaboration. The SCG agrees with suggestions made in the proposal outlined in paragraph 33a-d above, noting this reflects the continuing efforts to implement the JPSRM. Building upon the proposal from China, the SCG tasked the MM-WG with holding a workshop to support Task 6.

35. The United States offered to host a virtual workshop of the MM-WG in April/May and possibly an in-person meeting in the fall 2025 to bring together national scientific programs and discuss research coordination under the JPSRM consistent with the discussions under the MM-WG. This meeting will discuss priority areas for research focusing on the Pacific and Atlantic gateways in addition to regions of the CAO. In addition to the recommendations in the proposal from China (see paragraph 33), the following points provide a draft agenda of the April/May 2025 MM-WG virtual meeting on research coordination:

- a. Overview of upcoming research programs from each Party;
- b. Review of GIS layers detailing project areas (extent polygon or points) with ancillary information about sampling methods, date range, parameters, sample collection, Parties involved, opportunities for collaboration;
- c. Parties will be asked to submit a GIS shapefile in advance of the meeting;
- d. Discussion of research collaborations;
- e. Who to contact to become involved in a program;
- f. Deadlines for contact and planning;
- g. Opportunities and timeframe to co-develop the research plan;
- h. Constraints; and
- i. Required agreements, certificates, and other documents.

36. The Chair reminded the SCG that no nominations had been received during the past year for someone to serve as the second co-chair of the MM-WG. During the interim, the SCG Vice Chair has been filling that role on a temporary, acting basis but is unable to continue to fill that position in addition to the Vice Chair's duties. The SCG is urgently seeking someone who can help to lead the MM-WG as a co-chair with Dr. Hedges.

37. The SCG *requested* Parties and SCG Members to consider nominating representatives who could serve in the important role of co-chair of the SCG's Mapping and Monitoring Working Group (MM-WG).

38. The SCG *recommended* that the COP be aware that the success of the JPSRM, with its related research and scientific advice, depends on the availability of sufficient resources, as provided by the Parties.

Agenda item 7: Data Management Working Group (DM-WG)

39. The co-chairs of the Data Management Working Group (DM-WG) provided an update on current activities since the 2024 Meeting of the SCG in November 2024. The tasks, as captured in Table 1 of the report of the 2024 Interim Meeting of the SCG (CAOFA-2025-SCG3-04), included re-establishing the participant list from each SCG member. While the co-chairs had reached out to each Party, not all Parties responded to the call for participants.

40. A second task focused on identification of information to be made available on the CAOFA website, which will be addressed after the report from the Website Working Group is completed at COP4.

41. A third task regarding the incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge into the JPSRM database will be considered after the Inuit Circumpolar Council discussion at SCG3.

42. To address the development of standard operating procedures (SOPs) to collate Data Sharing Protocol requirements under the JPSRM, a draft document was submitted for discussion at this meeting. A breakout session of the SCG3 discussed the following recommendations for revision of the draft SOPs:

- a. Incorporate Indigenous Knowledge based on regional approaches;
- b. Develop a licensing protocol (e.g., see ICES standards); and
- c. Add standards for data security including considerations for confidential data.

43. The SCG discussed the next steps for the DM-WG in addition to continuing the task list from the 2024 Interim Meeting of the SCG. Phase I will focus on activity through 2025 to include identification of specific standards for each of the parameters and data types identified in the JPSRM Implementation Plan (CAOFA-2024-COP3-04 Table 4), including the development of metadata standards for historical data from multiple international sources. The SCG also recognized that there are data currently available from CAOFA Parties that could be incorporated into the centralized database as soon as a formal data management plan is available.

Phase II in 2026 will be to identify international data sets that may specifically inform the CAOFA Parties in implementing the JPSRM.

44. The SCG *recommended* that the COP encourage Parties to support the involvement of their Arctic research programs, vessels, and personnel with the MM-WG, DM-WG, and JPSRM and to participate in their respective workshops in order to leverage synergies for scientific research in the Central Arctic Ocean.

Agenda item 8: Exploratory fishing

45. Due to time constraints, the SCG3 meeting deferred final agenda items 8b, c, and d (exploratory fishing) to a future meeting and focused solely on final agenda item 8a (Defining Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VME)).

46. The SCG reviewed a discussion paper (CAOFA-2025-SCG3-08) regarding development of a VME definition and noted that VMEs for the CAOFA will be:

- a. Defined in alignment with the provisions outlined in the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-Sea Fisheries in the High Seas; and
- b. Tailored to the unique ecosystems of the Central Arctic Ocean, as well as available scientific knowledge, Indigenous Knowledge, and local knowledge.

47. The SCG acknowledged that the Central Arctic Ocean has not been previously affected by fishing pressure and has had little to no mapping and monitoring. Given that, characteristics for VMEs could be considered in the CAOFA Area that account for the unique attributes of the Central Arctic Ocean region.

48. There was considerable discussion about potential VME characteristics in general. The following list, largely drawn from the FAO Guidelines, has been put forward, but there was insufficient time during the current meeting to discuss these points in detail:

- a. *Uniqueness or rarity* – an area or ecosystem that is unique or that contains rare species whose loss could not be compensated for by similar areas or ecosystems. These include:
 - 1) Habitats that contain endemic species;
 - 2) Habitats of rare, threatened or endangered species that occur only in discrete areas;
 - 3) Nurseries or discrete feeding, breeding, or spawning areas; or
 - 4) Unique bottom features such as sea mounts, geothermal vents, subsea ridges, canyons, and slopes.
- b. *Functional significance of the habitat* – discrete areas or habitats that are necessary for the survival, function, or spawning/reproduction of vulnerable species, particular life-history stages (including: nesting sites, nursery grounds, rearing, breeding, feeding, resting, transport, or refuge areas), or of rare, threatened or endangered marine species (e.g., deep sea corals and sponge fields). Specific to the Arctic, functionally significant

habitat includes sea ice features, which include but are not limited to polynyas, leads, ice edges, marginal ice zones, and under-ice features or habitats.

- c. *Fragility* – an ecosystem that is highly susceptible to degradation by anthropogenic activities.
- d. *Life-history traits of component species that make future recovery difficult* – ecosystems that are characterized by populations or assemblages of species with one or more of the following characteristics:
 - 1) Slow growth rates;
 - 2) Late age of maturity;
 - 3) Low or unpredictable recruitment; or
 - 4) Long-lived.
- e. *Structural complexity* – an ecosystem that is characterized by complex physical structures created by significant concentrations of biotic and abiotic features. In these ecosystems, ecological processes are usually highly dependent on these structured systems. Further, such ecosystems often have high diversity, which is dependent on the structuring organisms.
- f. *High productivity areas that support multiple trophic levels and Arctic Indigenous Peoples and local communities.*
- g. *Areas important to the life-history stages of ecological key taxa and their dependent species harvested for cultural, social, and food security needs of Arctic Indigenous Peoples, and local communities* – for example:
 - 1) Migration pathways;
 - 2) Foraging;
 - 3) Resting;
 - 4) Molting;
 - 5) Overwintering; or
 - 6) Breeding areas.

49. There was discussion and acknowledgement that defining VME characteristics does not automatically mean that a VME will be identified. A list of essential ecosystem characteristics would also help inform scientific research priorities. A risk assessment is required to inform future conservation and management measures (CMMs) to establish VMEs and avoid significant adverse impacts.

50. ¹Given the current data available, including risk assessments in other areas, the SCG **recommended**, at least as a first step, that the COP consider identification of VMEs for:

- a. Cold water corals and sponges;
- b. Hydrothermal vents; and
- c. Seamounts.

¹ *Chair's note: due to an oversight during adoption of its report, the SCG adopted two nearly identical paragraphs regarding VMEs (paragraphs 50 and 54). Both paragraphs have been retained in this final report to ensure that the full texts as adopted by the SCG are included here for future reference.*

51. The SCG will continue to discuss the list of criteria in order to provide future advice to the COP regarding VMEs considering biota with specific vulnerability in the Arctic Ocean.
52. The SCG discussed using a list of potential VME characteristics to help inform research planning.
53. The SCG will continue to develop a VME definition during a MM-WG meeting in April 2025 and during the fall 2025 Interim Meeting of the SCG.
54. The SCG *recommended* that the COP consider identification of VMEs, their vulnerabilities, and conservation and management measures, as a first step, specific to coral, sponge habitat, hydrothermal vents, and seamounts in the CAOFA Area. The development of these particular CMMs will build a common understanding of VMEs and CMMs among the Parties.

Agenda item 9: Indigenous Knowledge and scientific knowledge working together

55. The Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) provided a presentation to the SCG on Indigenous Knowledge and scientific knowledge working together. The SCG Members heard about concrete co-produced Indigenous and scientific research projects on bowhead whales, beluga whales, Arctic char, ringed seals, ocean currents, winter net sampling for fish and plankton, coordinated Inuit/Government science and marine management frameworks, and providing basic overview and background on the current and future discussions on Data Management within CAOFA.
56. The SCG thanked the ICC for its excellent presentation. ICC representatives described several impressive examples of co-production of knowledge through collaborations utilizing both scientific knowledge and Indigenous Knowledge. Those examples indicate great potential as research templates for future applications in the JPSRM.
57. Based on what ICC shared, there are both implications to and pathways forward in Section 10.1 of the JPSRM implementation plan “Involving Arctic Indigenous Peoples in the JPSRM” (parts A, B, and C). Informed by the ICC presentation, the SCG discussed the importance of:
- a. Continued coordination with Inuit organizations and communities to coordinate on action plans and outreach to ensure that Indigenous Knowledge holders continue to have access to and awareness of the CAOFA process;
 - b. Addressing a Standard Operating Procedure for incorporating Indigenous Knowledge into JPSRM databases. Given the time needed to meaningfully engage Inuit and Indigenous Knowledge holders, this shall be an evolving, ongoing process that reflects the time scale needed for informed, equitable and ethical engagement; and
 - c. Facilitating communications between the SCG and Inuit regions regarding planning and implementation of the JPSRM. As a part of that planning, ICC will make available appropriate links for communications with Inuit regions and their organizations, along with relevant publications and guidelines developed by said regions to facilitate JPSRM work.

Report of the Third Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group

Table 1. Partial list of organizations that may be interested in sharing Inuit Knowledge with JPSRM researchers.	
Organizations	Web Links
<i>Alaska</i>	
North Slope Borough Department of Wildlife Management	https://www.north-slope.org/departments/wildlife-management/
Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission	https://www.aewc-alaska.org/
Native Village of Kotzebue	https://www.kotzebueira.org/programs/environmental/
Kawerak, Incorporated	https://kawerak.org/
Association of Village Council Presidents	https://www.avcp.org/natural-resources/#1579643062903-8b26e2ca-0caead3-889af0d2-6859
Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska	https://iccalaska.org/
<i>Canada</i>	
Inuvialuit Regional Corporation	https://irc.inuvialuit.com/staff-directory/
Fisheries Joint Management	https://www.fjmc.ca
Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated	https://www.tunngavik.com/contact-us/
Makivvik	https://www.makivvik.ca/contact/
Nunatsiavut Research Advisory Committee (Nunatsiavut Government)	https://nunatsiavutresearchcentre.com/ngrac/
Atanniuvik – (Nunavik Research Governance Organization)	https://atanniuvik.ca/
Inuit Circumpolar Council Canada	https://www.inuitcircumpolar.com/icc-canada/
<i>Greenland</i>	
Inuit Circumpolar Council Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland)	https://www.inuit.org/#
ArcticHub	https://arctichub.gl/

58. Table 1 provides a partial list of organizations for researchers to approach when seeking partnership with Inuit Knowledge holders and researchers under JPSRM activities. Please note that this list is not fully representative of all community and regional organization contact information. ICC encourages all to endeavor to research and reach out to appropriate organizations.

Agenda item 10: Future work of the SCG

Priority tasks and work plan 2025-2026

59. The SCG’s priority tasks and work plan for 2024-2026 was revised considering recent progress and outcomes of discussions during the SCG3 meeting (see paragraph 21). The revision

entailed further prioritization of tasks in order to efficiently facilitate activities as required by the JPSRM Implementation Plan. The revised work plan is included in this report on pages 5-8.

Collaboration with international science programs

60. The SCG Chair and Vice Chair participated in the workshop *Ecosystem-Based Management: Managing Arctic marine ecosystems requires international, multidisciplinary, and cross-sectoral cooperation*, which was sponsored and organized by the Norwegian Chairmanship of the Arctic Council in Copenhagen, 10-12 December 2024. The main goals of the workshop were to identify knowledge needs/gaps and identify potential synergies among governance bodies such as the CAOFA Conference of Parties (COP), North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC), or the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (OSPAR) in relation to available knowledge from knowledge providers, such as scientific bodies and organizations providing Indigenous Knowledge.

61. The workshop highlighted the high potential of closer cooperation between the different organizations and knowledge holders involved in the Central Arctic Ocean with respect to an improved understanding of its changing marine ecosystems and the requirements of its stakeholders. Several key organizations were identified, from which high synergy with CAOFA can be expected, including the ICES/PICES/PAME Working Group for the Integrated Ecosystem Assessment of the Central Arctic Ocean (WGICA), the Arctic Council's Circumpolar Biodiversity Monitoring Programme (CBMP), the Pacific Arctic Group, and the Arctic Council's Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP). These organizations, along with key players such as the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), the North Pacific Marine Science Organization (PICES), and the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), were identified as important potential collaboration partners for the JPSRM.

Annual calendar of SCG and working group meetings

62. The Chair drafted and tabled a proposed annual calendar to facilitate progress by the SCG in addressing the many tasks before it. The provisional calendar (CAOFA-2025-SCG3-10) called for virtual meetings by both working groups on at least a quarterly basis and both a virtual and an in-person SCG meeting annually for the foreseeable future. The timing of the meetings was arranged to accommodate deadlines for submitting documents to meetings of the SCG and COP as stipulated in their respective Rules of Procedure.

63. The SCG agreed in concept to the proposed frequency and timing of the SCG and working group meetings, and will strive as soon as feasible to confirm specific dates for meetings to be held within the next 12 months. A revised, provisional version of the calendar is provided on page 17 of this report as the "CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group (SCG) and working groups planning calendar: 2025-2026." The SCG intends to maintain its annual calendar online as soon as a suitable place can be established on the CAOFA website.

CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group (SCG) and working groups planning calendar: 2025-2026

Note: aside from meetings already scheduled, the time periods shown in the calendar are suggested periods when meetings are encouraged to be scheduled; the actual dates will be confirmed through consultation among Co-chairs, participants, and hosts.

2025																											
January							February							March													
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa							
			1	2	3	4							1				4	5	6	7	8						
5	6	7	8	9	10	11	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15							
12	13	14	15	16	17	18	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22							
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29							
26	27	28	29	30	31		23	24	25	26	27	28		30	31												
Working group meetings														SCG3: Iceland													
April							May							June													
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa							
		1	2	3	4	5					1	2	3			3	4	5	6	7							
6	7	8	9	10	11	12	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	8	9	10	11	12	13	14							
13	14	15	16	17	18	19	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	15	16	17	18	19	20	21							
20	21	22	23	24	25	26	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	22	23	24	25	26	27	28							
27	28	29	30				25	26	27	28	29	30	31	29	30												
Working group meetings														COP4: Norway													
July							August							September													
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Working group meetings														Interim SCG meeting (provisional dates)													
October							November							December													
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Working group meetings																											

2026																											
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Working group meetings														SCG4: China (provisional dates)													
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Working group meetings																											
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Working group meetings														Interim SCG meeting (provisional dates)													
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Working group meetings																											

Proposed working group meetings	Proposed SCG meetings	COP meetings
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SCG meetings are proposed during or near the 3rd or 4th weeks of March and September on specific dates yet to be agreed. MM-WG and DM-WG meetings are proposed during the months of April, July, and October on specific dates yet to be agreed. Specific meeting dates during the weeks indicated will be confirmed by Co-chairs in consultation with participants and hosts.

Report of the Third Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group

64. Likely months in which future SCG and working group meetings will be held over the next 12 months are:

April 2025	MM-WG meeting and DM-WG meeting
April/May 2025	MM-WG scientific coordination meeting
July 2025	MM-WG meeting and DM-WG meeting
September 2025	SCG interim meeting (virtual)
October 2025	MM-WG meeting and DM-WG meeting
January 2026	MM-WG meeting and DM-WG meeting
March 2026	SCG4 meeting (in person)

Next meetings of the SCG

65. The SCG agreed to hold an interim meeting virtually in the autumn 2025, perhaps during September. Dates for that meeting will be confirmed as soon as feasible.

66. The China Delegation extended an invitation to host the Fourth Meeting of the SCG (in person) in China during spring 2026. The meeting may be scheduled during the month of March, but specific dates for that meeting will be confirmed as soon as feasible based on finding the most convenient time for both the host and participating delegations.

67. The SCG thanked the China Delegation for its invitation to host the in-person SCG4 meeting in 2026. The SCG accepted the invitation and looks forward to working with China's local hosts to organize the meeting.

68. The Chair reminded participants that it was not too early to begin planning for the SCG's 5th in-person meeting, which is likely to be held in the spring (March-April) of 2027. Participants were encouraged to confer within their respective delegations to explore the possibility of hosting the 2027 in-person SCG meeting. Members were invited to contact the Chair to express potential interest and to discuss the possibility of hosting the 2027 in-person SCG meeting.

69. The SCG *requested* that the COP assist the SCG in identifying a host for the SCG's 5th in-person meeting, to be held in the spring of 2027.

Agenda item 11: Summary of SCG recommendations and requests to the COP

70. The SCG *recommended* that the COP complete development of a website to facilitate sharing of documents and to support outreach efforts by providing an online presence for the SCG and JPSRM (see paragraph 31).

71. The SCG *recommended* that the COP support the SCG's continued coordination of national scientific programs toward implementation of the JPSRM, including the identification of priority areas as described in the JPSRM Implementation Plan and executed by national research programs (see paragraph 32).

72. The SCG *requested* Parties and SCG Members to consider nominating representatives who could serve in the important role of co-chair for the SCG's Mapping and Monitoring Working Group (MM-WG) (see paragraph 37).

73. The SCG *recommended* that the COP be aware that the success of the JPSRM, with its related research and scientific advice, depends on the availability of sufficient resources, as provided by the Parties (see paragraph 38).

74. The SCG *recommended* that the COP encourage Parties to support the involvement of their Arctic research programs, vessels, and personnel with the MM-WG, DM-WG, and JPSRM and to participate in their respective workshops in order to leverage synergies for scientific research in the Central Arctic Ocean (see paragraph 44).

75. ²Given the current data available, including risk assessments in other areas, the SCG *recommended*, at least as a first step, that the COP consider identification of VMEs for:

- a. Cold water corals and sponges;
- b. Hydrothermal vents; and
- c. Seamounts (see paragraph 50).

76. The SCG *recommended* that the COP consider identification of VMEs, their vulnerabilities, and conservation and management measures, as a first step, specific to coral, sponge habitat, hydrothermal vents, and seamounts in the CAOFA Area. The development of these particular CMMs will build a common understanding of VMEs and CMMs among the Parties (see paragraph 54).

77. The SCG *requested* that the COP assist the SCG in identifying a host for the SCG's 5th in-person meeting, to be held in the spring of 2027 (see paragraph 69).

Agenda item 12: Other business

78. No other business was raised.

Agenda item 13: Report of the meeting

79. As encouraged by the SCG's Rules of Procedure, the SCG was able to draft, review, and adopt its report of the Third Meeting of the CAOFA SCG prior to the meeting's adjournment.

80. All final, minor editorial adjustments (e.g., style, typographical and numerical corrections, citations, formatting) to be proposed for inclusion in the SCG report should be forwarded to the Chair no later than 27 March 2025 (i.e., 7 days after receiving the "unformatted, adopted version" of the report and 20 days after the conclusion of the SCG3 meeting).

² Chair's note: due to an oversight during adoption of its report, the SCG adopted two nearly identical paragraphs and recommendations regarding VMEs (see paragraphs 50/54 and 75/76). Both paragraphs have been retained in this final report to ensure that the full texts as adopted by the SCG are included here for future reference.

81. A “proof version” of the adopted report of the Third Meeting of the CAOFA SCG will be sent to all delegations by 31 March 2025. The final version of the report will be distributed to SCG3 participants by 7 April 2025.

82. To meet the COP’s Rules of Procedure, the SCG’s adopted final report must be submitted to the COP no later than 29 April 2025, (i.e., at least 35 calendar days prior to the COP’s next meeting, which commences on 3 June 2025).

Agenda item 14: Meeting closure

83. In closing the SCG3 meeting, the Chair extended his congratulations and thanks to all meeting participants for their contributions, dedication, and commitment to CAOFA’s goals, which resulted in a very successful Third Meeting of the SCG. He expressed his admiration of the SCG’s growing tradition of collegial collaboration displayed by SCG participants. In particular, he commended SCG participants for working together, learning from each other, increasing their common understanding, and seeking mutually acceptable solutions to the important issues being addressed by the SCG.

84. The Chair offered special thanks to the meeting’s key rapporteurs (Drs. Hauke Flores, Robert Foy, and Kevin Hedges), who played important roles in helping Dr. Bengtson to prepare this report, which documents the SCG’s excellent progress during its 4-day meeting.

85. On behalf of the SCG, the Chair thanked the meeting’s organizing committee and hosts for all that they did to arrange and host such an outstanding and memorable meeting: Thorvardur Atli Thorsson, Gudmundur J. Oskarsson, and Hauke Flores.

86. On behalf of the SCG, the European Union delegation thanked the Chair for leading the group through a productive and successful meeting.

87. The Third Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group was adjourned on Friday, 7 March 2025.

**THIRD MEETING OF THE
SCIENTIFIC COORDINATING GROUP (SCG) TO THE
AGREEMENT TO PREVENT UNREGULATED HIGH SEAS FISHERIES
IN THE CENTRAL ARCTIC OCEAN (CAOFA)**

Hafnarfjörður, Iceland

4-7 March 2025

Chairperson: Dr. John L. Bengtson

FINAL AGENDA

1. Call to order and introduction by Chairperson
2. Welcoming remarks by Vice Chairperson and local hosts
3. Adoption of agenda and appointment of rapporteurs
4. Opening remarks by Delegations
5. Review of the 2024 Interim Meeting of the SCG
6. Mapping and Monitoring Working Group (MM-WG)
 - a. Working Group Report
 - b. Science activity updates and reports on national program activities
 - 1) Recent and ongoing activities
 - 2) Future activities
 - c. Progress in implementing the Joint Program of Scientific Research and Monitoring (JPSRM)
 - 1) COP priorities for Implementation Plan tasks and products
 - 2) Implementation Plan sections: Section 7-Research Planning; Section 8-Logistics Coordination, and Section 10-Timelines
 - d. SCG recommendations to the Conference of Parties (COP) and key points
7. Data Management Working Group (DM-WG)
 - a. Working Group Report
 - b. Draft Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)
 - c. Progress in implementing the JPSRM
 - d. SCG recommendations to the COP and key points
8. Exploratory fishing
 - a. Defining Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VME)
 - b. Role of the SCG to respond to the COP's information needs
 - c. Procedural steps needed to achieve SCG's advisory goals
 - d. Terms of reference for new working group
 - e. SCG recommendations to the COP and key points

Appendix 1. Report of the Third Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group CAOFA-2025-COP4-02

9. Indigenous Knowledge and scientific knowledge working together
 - a. Examples across the Arctic
 - b. Improving ecological understanding
 - c. Developing SCG advice to the COP

 10. Future work of the SCG
 - a. Priority tasks and work plan 2025-2026
 - 1) Collaboration with international science programs: Ecosystem-based management workshop (December 2024) and update on potential JPSRM collaborators
 - b. Annual calendar of SCG and working group meetings
 - 1) Next meetings of SCG (specific dates and venue)
 - 2) Working group meetings (specific dates and venue)
 - c. SCG recommendations to the COP and key points

 11. Summary of SCG recommendations to the COP

 12. Other business

 13. Report of meeting
 - a. Report preparation
 - b. Review and adoption of the report

 14. Meeting closure
-

**THIRD MEETING OF THE
SCIENTIFIC COORDINATING GROUP (SCG) TO THE
AGREEMENT TO PREVENT UNREGULATED HIGH SEAS FISHERIES
IN THE CENTRAL ARCTIC OCEAN (CAOFA)**

Hafnarfjörður, Iceland

4-7 March 2025

Chairperson: Dr. John L. Bengtson

LIST OF WORKING MATERIALS/DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED TO THE MEETING

CAOFA-2025-SCG3-01.Rev.1	Final agenda
CAOFA-2025-SCG3-02	List of documents
CAOFA-2025-SCG3-03	List of participants
CAOFA-2025-SCG3-04	Final report of the 2024 Interim Meeting of the SCG (clean PDF copy)
CAOFA-2025-SCG3-04a	Final report of the 2024 Interim Meeting of the SCG (MS Word copy showing final revisions in track changes)
CAOFA-2025-SCG3-05	Proposals for implementing the JPSRM (China)
CAOFA-2025-SCG3-06	Guideline for data management and sharing (v. 2)
CAOFA-2025-SCG3-07	Recent report text regarding the SCG and exploratory fishing
CAOFA-2025-SCG3-08	Developing a CAOFA definition of Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems
CAOFA-2025-SCG3-09	SCG priorities and work plan for 2024-2026 (v. November 2024)
CAOFA-2025-SCG3-10	Draft calendar of SCG meetings in 2025-2026
CAOFA-2025-SCG3-11	Invitation to host the 2026 SCG4 meeting in China

Appendix 3. Report of the Third Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group

List of Participants: Third Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group 4-7 March 2025, Hafnarfjörður, Iceland									
Country	Participant name	Institutional title/ position	Institutional affiliation (with postal address)	Email address	"Head of Delegation" for the Third Meeting of the SCG?	CAOFA "Science Point of Contact"?	Other CAOFA designation (e.g., "Signatory Point of Contact," "Head of Delegation")?	Mapping/ Monitoring Working Group?	Data Management Working Group?
Canada	Kevin Hedges	Research Scientist	Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 501 University Crescent, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, R3T2N6	kevin.hedges@dfo-mpo.gc.ca	Yes	Yes	MM- WG Co- chair	Yes	No
Canada	Monika Pucko	Biologist	Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 501 University Crescent, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, R3T2N6	monika.pucko@dfo-mpo.gc.ca	No	No	No	Yes	No
Canada	Alain Dupuis	Science Advisor	Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 501 University Crescent, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, R3T2N6	alain.dupuis@dfo-mpo.gc.ca	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Canada	Herb Nakimayak	Vice President	Inuit Circumpolar Council Canada	hnakimayak@inuitcircmpolar.com	No	No	No	Yes	?
Canada	Benjamin McTaggart	Policy Advisor	Inuit Circumpolar Council Canada, 75 Albert Street, Suite 1001, Ottawa, ON K1P 5E7, Canada	bmctaggart@inuitcircmpolar.com	No	No	No	No	No
Canada	Rachel DeJong	Science Advisor	Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Gulf Fisheries Centre, 343 Université Ave. P.O. Box 5030, Moncton, NB E1C 9B6	rachel.dejong@dfo-mpo.gc.ca	No	Yes	no	yes	yes
Canada	Robert Apro	Senior Policy Advisor	Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 200 Kent St, Ottawa, ON, Canada, K1A 0E6	robert.apro@dfo-mpo.gc.ca	No	No		No	yes
Canada	Jaclyn Franceschini	Science Advisor	Fisheries and Oceans Canada	Jaclyn.Franceschini@dfo- mpo.gc.ca	No	No			
Canada	Rodd Laing	Director of Environment	Nunatsiavut Government	rodd.laing@nunatsiavut.com	No	No		No	No
Canada	Susanna Fuller	Advisor	Oceans North	susannafuller@oceansnorth.ca	No	No		No	No
China	Lei YANG	Head of Division	Chinese Arctic and Antarctic Administration	yanglei_caa@163.com	Yes	Yes			
China	Jian REN	Research Scientist	Second Institute of Oceanography, Ministry of Natural Resources of China	jian.ren@sio.org.cn	No		Yes		

Appendix 3. Report of the Third Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group

China	Xinliang WANG	Principal Research Scientist	Yellow Sea Fisheries Research Institute, CAFS (106 Nanjing Road, Qingdao, China)	wangxl@ysfri.ac.cn					
China	Xianyong ZHAO	Senior Scientist	Yellow Sea Fisheries Research Institute, CAFS (106 Nanjing Road, Qingdao, China)	zhaoxy@ysfri.ac.cn					
China	Zhiqiang XU	Assistant Professor	Institute of Oceanology, Chinese Academy of Sciences	xuzhq@qdio.ac.cn	No				
China	Jie LU	Officer	Bureau of Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, PRC	jamie_lu2013@126.com					
China	Jiangfeng ZHU	Professor	Shanghai Ocean University	jfzhu@shou.edu.cn	No				
China	Lizong WU	Senior Scientist	Polar Research Institute of China (No. 1000, Xuelong Road, Pudong New District, Shanghai 201209, China)	wulizong@pric.org.cn	No				Yes
China	Hui LIN	Research Scientist	Polar Research Institute of China (No. 1000, Xuelong Road, Pudong New District, Shanghai 201209, China)	linhui@pric.org.cn	No			Yes	
China	Yanyan SHAN	Assistant Professor	Polar Research Institute of China (No. 1000, Xuelong Road, Pudong New District, Shanghai 201209, China)	Shanyanyan@pric.org.cn					
Greenland/ DFG	Helle Siegstad	Head of Department	Greenland Institute of Natural Resources	helle@natur.gl	Yes				
Greenland/ DFG	Tindbaek Jorgensen	Marine Governance Advisor	Inuit Circumpolar Council Greenland	aviaja@inuit.org	No	No		No	No
Iceland	Guðmundur J. Óskarsson	Head of Pelagic Section	Marine & Freshwater Research Institute, Fornubudum 5, 220 Hafnarfjörður, Iceland	gudmundur.j.oskarsson@hafogvatn.is	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Japan	Kenji Taki	Principal Researcher	Japan Fisheries Research and Education Agency, 2-12-4 Fukuura, Kanazawa, Yokohama 236-8648, Japan			Yes		Yes	Yes
Japan	Yutaka HIROE	Principal Research Coordinator	Fisheries Agency of Japan, 1-2-1 Kasumigaseki, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100-8907, Japan	yutaka_hiroe540@maff.go.jp		Yes		Yes	Yes
Japan	Shigeto Nishino	Senior researcher	JAMSTEC, 2-15 Natsushima, Yokosuka, Kanagawa 237-0061, Japan	nishinos@jamstec.go.jp		Yes		Yes	Yes
Japan	Hiromichi Ueno	Professor	Hokkaido University Fisheries Science, 3-1-1, Minato-cho, Hakodate, Hokkaido 041-8611, Japan	ueno@fish.hokudai.ac.jp		Yes			
Japan	Kohei Matsuno	Assistant Professor	Hokkaido University Fisheries Science, 3-1-1, Minato-cho, Hakodate, Hokkaido 041-8611, Japan	k.matsuno@fish.hokudai.ac.jp		Yes			
Korea	Jeongseok Park	Senior Scientist	National Institute of Fisheries Science	jeongseokpark@korea.kr	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Korea	Hyoung Chul Shin	President	Korea Polar Research Institute	hcshin@kopri.re.kr					
Korea	Hyoung Sul La	Principal Research Scientist	Korea Polar Research Institute	hsla@kopri.re.kr					
Korea	Sangdeok Chung	Senior Scientist	National Institute of Fisheries Science	sdchung@korea.kr					

Appendix 3. Report of the Third Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group

Korea	Jee-Hoon Kim	Senior Research Scientist	Korea Polar Research Institute	jeehoonkim@kopri.re.kr					
Norway	Randi B. Ingvaldsen	Senior Scientist	Institute of Marine Research, Box 1870, N5817 Nordnes, Norway	randi@hi.no	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Norway	Benjamin Planque	Senior Scientist	Institute of Marine Research	benjamin.planque@hi.no	No	No	No	No	Yes
Norway	Alf Håkon Hoel	Professor	Arctic University of Tromsø, 9037, Tromsø, Norway	alf.hakon.hoel@uit.no					
Norway	Åge Høines	Senior Scientist	Institute of Marine Research, Box 1870, N5817 Nordnes, Norway	aage.hoines@hi.no	No	Yes	Explor. Fishing	No	No
Norway	Anne Frie	Research Scientist	Institute of Marine Research	anne.kirstine@hi.no	No	No	No	No	No
Russia	Alexander Glubokov	Head of Department	All Russian Research Institute for Fisheries and Oceanography	glubokov@vniro.ru	Yes				
Russia	Konstantin Sokolov	Deputy head	Russian Fed. Research Inst. of Fisheries and Oceanography (FSBSI "VNIRO"), Polar Branch, 6 Akademika Knipovicha St., 183038, Murmansk	sokolkm@pinro.vniro.ru	No				
Russia	Andrey Dolgov	principal scientist	Russian Fed. Research Inst. of Fisheries and Oceanography (FSBSI "VNIRO"), Polar Branch, 6 Akademika Knipovicha St., 183038, Murmansk	dolgov@pinro.vniro.ru					
Russia	Konstantin Fomin	principal specialist	Russian Fed. Research Inst. of Fisheries and Oceanography (FSBSI "VNIRO"), Polar Branch, 6 Akademika Knipovicha St., 183038, Murmansk	fomin@pinro.vniro.ru	No				
USA	Lauren Fields	Foreign Affairs Specialist	NOAA Fisheries Office of International Affairs, Trade, and Commerce, 1315 East West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910 USA	lauren.fields@noaa.gov	No	No		No	No
USA	Bob Foy	Director, Alaska Fisheries Science Center	Alaska Fisheries Science Center, 7600 Sand Point Way NE, Seattle, WA 98115, USA	robert.foy@noaa.gov	Yes	Yes	DM-WG Co-chair	Yes	Yes
USA	Libby Logerwell	Research Biologist	Alaska Fisheries Science Center, 7600 Sand Point Way NE, Seattle, WA 98115, USA	libby.logerwell@noaa.gov	No	No		Yes	No
USA	Catherine Berchok	Research Zoologist, Marine Mammal Laboratory	Alaska Fisheries Science Center, 7600 Sand Point Way NE, Seattle, WA 98115, USA	catherine.berchok@noaa.gov	No	No		Yes	No
USA	Hannah Dawson	Arctic Activities Coordinator	Alaska Fisheries Science Center, 7600 Sand Point Way NE, Seattle, WA 98115, USA	hannah.dawson@noaa.gov	No	No		Yes	Yes
USA	Candace Nachman	Senior Ocean Policy and Program Advisor	United States Coast Guard, Marine Transportation Systems Directorate, Polar Coordination Office	candace.a.nachman@uscg.mil	No	No		No	No
USA	Dave Benton	Advisor	Ocean Conservancy	davebenton@gci.net	No	No		Yes	No
USA	Marie Greene	President	Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska	marie@iccalaska.org	No	No		No	No

Appendix 3. Report of the Third Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group

USA	Vernae Angnaboogok	Advisor	Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska	vernae@iccalaska.org	No	No		No	No
USA	Leandra Sousa	Advisor	Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska/North Slope Borough Department of Wildlife Management	leandra.sousa@north-slope.org	No	No		No	No
USA	Samantha Wade	Inuit Strategy Specialist	Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska	samantha@iccalaska.org	No	No		No	No
EU	Sarah Davie	Technical Director	MRAG Europe, 3rd Floor, 40 Mespil Road, Dublin 4, Republic of Ireland	s.davie@mrag-europe.eu	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
Bureau									
SCG Chair	John L. Bengtson	Director, Marine Mammal Laboratory	Alaska Fisheries Science Center, 7600 Sand Point Way NE, Seattle, WA 98115, USA	john.bengtson@noaa.gov	No	No	SCG Chair	Yes	No
SCG Vice Chair	Hauke Flores	Senior Scientist	Alfred-Wegener-Institute, Am Handelshafen 12, 27570 Bremerhaven, Germany	hauke.flores@awi.de			SCG Vice Chair; MM-WG Co-chair	Yes	No
Observers									
ICES	Alan Haynie	General Secretary	International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), H.C. Andersens Boulevard 44-46, 1553 Copenhagen V., Denmark	alan.haynie@ices.dk	Yes	Yes			
ICES	Lis L. Jørgensen		Institute of Marine Research, Tromsø, Norway	lislin@hi.no					
	Steve MacLean	Managing Director, U.S. Arctic	WWF 1250 24th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20037-1193 USA	steve.maclean@wwfus.org	Yes	Yes		No	No
WWF	Vanessa Dick	Senior Governance Lead	WWF 1250 24th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20037-1193 USA	vanessa.dick@wwf.se	No	No		Yes	
UK	Michelle Hackett	Head of International Fisheries Science	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, 2 Marsham Street, London, SW1P 4DF	michelle.hackett@defra.gov.uk	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
UK	James Sharples	Policy Advisor	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, 2 Marsham Street, London, SW1P 4DF	james.sharples@defra.gov.uk		Yes			

**FINAL REPORT OF THE
2024 INTERIM MEETING OF THE
SCIENTIFIC COORDINATING GROUP (SCG)
TO THE AGREEMENT TO PREVENT UNREGULATED
HIGH SEAS FISHERIES IN THE
CENTRAL ARCTIC OCEAN (CAOFA)**

Held virtually
19-21 November 2024

Chairperson: Dr. John L. Bengtson

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**REPORT OF THE
2024 INTERIM MEETING OF THE
SCIENTIFIC COORDINATING GROUP (SCG) TO THE
AGREEMENT TO PREVENT UNREGULATED HIGH SEAS FISHERIES
IN THE CENTRAL ARCTIC OCEAN (CAOFA)**

Held virtually
19-21 November 2024
Chairperson: Dr. John L. Bengtson

Agenda item 1: Call to order and introduction by the Chairperson

1. The 2024 interim meeting of the Scientific Coordinating Group (SCG) to the Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean (CAOFA) was opened and chaired by the SCG Chair John L. Bengtson of the United States. The meeting was held virtually on 19-21 November 2024.
2. The Chair welcomed participants and thanked them for their work to prepare for the interim SCG meeting.

Agenda item 2: Welcoming remarks by the Vice-chairperson

3. The new SCG Vice-chair, Dr. Hauke Flores (EU) welcomed meeting participants and stated that he looks forward to serving the group in the spirit of the CAOFA.

Agenda item 3: Adoption of the agenda and appointment of rapporteurs

4. The Chair outlined the main points of the provisional agenda and asked SCG participants if they wished to suggest any revisions. No revisions were proposed.
5. A final agenda for the 2024 interim meeting of the Scientific Coordinating Group (SCG) was adopted (CAOFA-2024-SCG interim-01) and is provided in Appendix 1. A list of the working documents presented to the SCG (CAOFA-2024-SCG interim-02) is provided in Appendix 2.
6. The SCG Vice-chair and Co-chairs of the MM-WG and DM-WG were appointed as rapporteurs to assist the SCG Chair in preparing a report of the meeting.

Agenda item 4: Opening remarks by delegations

7. The Heads of Delegation and representatives of observer organizations delivered opening remarks.
8. A list of participants (CAOFA-2024- SCG interim-03) is provided in Appendix 3.

9. A total of 57 persons participated online in the interim meeting of the SCG including members from all ten Parties to the Agreement and representatives of three observer organizations.
10. Consistent with the SCG's Rules of Procedure, observer status was approved prior to the meeting for the following three organizations to attend meetings of the SCG and its working groups during the 2024/2025 meeting cycle:
 - World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Arctic Programme;
 - International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES); and
 - United Kingdom.

Agenda item 5: Overview of SCG tasks for 2024-2025

11. The SCG discussed the document "Draft SCG priorities and work plan: 2024-2026" (CAOFA-2024-SCG interim-02, attached as Appendix 4), which was based on the tasks that the SCG had identified at its April 2024 meeting in Boston.
12. Because several of the tasks listed in the initial draft work plan (Appendix 4) had overlapping elements, the plan was modified as follows:
 - Tasks 2,13,14,15 were merged into one task focusing on the coordination of research activities between the partners and their scientific programs;
 - Tasks 3 and 6 were merged into one task focusing on analyses needed to provide advice to the COP;
 - Tasks 4, 12, 16 were merged into one task focusing on reporting the progress of JPSRM implementation to the COP;
 - Tasks 7-11 were merged into one task focusing on exploratory fishing;
 - Tasks 17, 19-21 were merged into one task focusing on data and data management;
 - Task 18 was moved to just before Task 22; and
 - Tasks 20-31 were merged into one task.
13. Issues raised with regard to the MM-WG, DM-WG, and exploratory fishing are summarized below under agenda items 6, 7, and 9.b, respectively.
14. Additional topics regarding SCG tasks in the coming years include task numbers refer to initial draft work plan in Appendix 4:
 - Task 3 is considered of high priority. The SCG intends to draft a list of analyses needed for advice (lead: H. Flores, EU). Taxonomic drafting support from the MM-WG will be needed;
 - Task 4: The SCG needs to develop a suitable format for reports to the COP (J. Bengtson, USA);
 - Task 28: The SCG recognized that before discussing the distribution of vulnerable marine ecosystems (VME), a clear definition of VME is urgently needed. The SCG noted that there are already multiple definitions available in the scientific literature, but meeting participants noted the need for a definition tailored to the unique ecosystems of the Agreement Area and the Arctic Indigenous and local communities that rely on them. The United States (Lauren Fields) offered to develop, along with participants from other parties, a white paper of a CAOFA VME definition to be considered by the SCG at the March 2025 in-person meeting. A

thorough review process by the SCG is needed, including input from MM-WG, before a definition suitable for SCG can be evaluated. The COP EF-WG has an annex regarding VMEs that should be taken into account; and

- Task 32: the SCG will stand by for progress on an online platform as identified by the COP.

15. A revised version of the priorities and work plan, including prioritizations, is provided under agenda item 9 of this report (Table 1).

Agenda item 6: Mapping and Monitoring Working Group (MM-WG)

16. The MM-WG met virtually on 9 October 2024 to discuss tasks assigned to the MM-WG before the spring 2025 SCG meeting. The MM-WG's top priority in the coming months before the March 2025 SCG meeting is to work on refining the four draft standard methods for data collection in the Joint Program of Scientific Research and Monitoring (JPSRM), which were attached as appendices to the Report of the Second Meeting of the SCG, 2024.
17. Discussions focused on forming writing teams to complete these tasks. Writing teams were asked to prepare draft documents by mid-December that would then be shared with the full MM-WG for comments in January 2025, providing time for subsequent revisions before the spring 2025 SCG meeting. A goal should be to harmonize the JPSRM methods with those already being used and applied effectively. Where feasible, the drafting teams should consider building the JPSRM standard methods on previously drafted methods developed by other groups in the past (e.g., CCAMLR¹, ICES², PICES³). The current composition of writing team members includes:
 - Standard Methods – Fish species – EU (Flores, Snoeijls-leijonmalm), USA (Logerwell), [Norway], Iceland, China (Ying, Hai Li), Canada (Hedges, Westfall, Rooper);
 - Standard Methods – Marine mammal and seabird species – Canada, USA (Bengtson, Berchok), [Greenland], Iceland;
 - Standard Methods – Other taxa from key trophic levels – China (Zhiqiang Xu), USA, Canada, EU; and
 - Standard Methods – Ecological linkages and impacts (predator-prey interactions, trophic dynamics, climate, environment) – EU, China (Hui Lin, Haiyan Jin), Japan (Nishino), Canada (Hedges).
18. The MM-WG's next highest temporal priority is to coordinate a meeting(s) bringing parties together to promote and collaborate with program and vessel managers (as described in tasks numbered #1, #2, #14, #15 the original work plan, Appendix 4). The SCG noted that moving forward with this type of coordination will be difficult in the absence and without the assistance of a formal CAOFA Secretariat. Co-chair Hedges suggested convening three different meetings with regionally relevant partners in European, North American, and Asian time zones to facilitate participation by science and vessel managers from all Parties. Producing information and outreach material (e.g. brochures, website content) should be discussed at the SCG's next meeting in March 2025.

¹ Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR)

² International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES)

³ North Pacific Marine Research Organization (PICES)

Task No.	Temporal priority	Task description	SCG2 report paragraphs	SCG Group	To be completed before March 2025 SCG3 meeting		Before 2026 SCG4 meeting
					Team leaders & members (<i>Who</i>)	Product (<i>What</i>)	Team leaders & product (<i>Who & What</i>)
1	HI	<u>FURTHER DEVELOP THE FOUR JPSRM STANDARD METHODS DOCUMENTS:</u> To facilitate consistent development of JPSRM data collection (by March 2025).	23	MM	MM-WG Standard Methods groups	Revised Standard Methods	
2	HI	<u>IDENTIFY A LIST OF ANALYSES NEEDED TO DEVELOP RELIABLE ADVICE TO THE COP TO:</u> a. Provide advice to the COP regarding species distributions and abundance in JPSRM priority areas; b. Assess ecological linkages among species; and c. Forecast potential changes in CAO ecosystems that would affect resource availability.		MM	Ask Standard Methods groups to indicate what specific data will be needed		
3	HI	<u>REPORT TO THE COP ON JPSRM IMPLEMENTATION, INCLUDING:</u> a. Progress on developing information products as described in JPSRM Implementation Plan Section 10.3; and b. Effective science planning, vessel coordination, and integration of scientific information and Indigenous Knowledge.		SCG, MM-WG, DM-WG	Co-chairs of SCG, MM-WG, and DM-WG	MM-WG and DM-WG prepare a report for SCG meetings (perhaps as appendices to SCG reports) for review by SCG and submission to COP	
4	HI	<u>COLLABORATION WITH GROUPS EXTERNAL TO THE SCG AND JPSRM:</u> Noting the importance of collaborating with international science programs to support the JPSRM, SCG members will identify individuals from within the SCG membership with current membership in International bodies to initiate and report back on engagement/collaboration opportunities.	60	SCG	SCG Chair and Vice-chair	Report back to SCG	
5	HI	<u>IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNICATING AND COLLABORATING WITH HOLDERS OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE:</u> SCG members will identify opportunities for communicating among national research programs and collaborating with Indigenous Knowledge holders and local knowledge holders	59	SCG	Links to discussions in SCG and WGs	For example, SCG members may highlight their existing research programs and invite SCG participants to join projects	First step is to identify entities with various types of information, then clarify actions that would be appropriate
6	MED	<u>CONVENE A MEETING OF SCG MEMBERS AND MANAGERS OF NATIONAL ARCTIC PROGRAMS TO DEVELOP PROCESSES AND TIMELINES FOR:</u> a. Scheduling vessels for joint expeditions into the JPSRM study area; b. Organizing teams of scientists, Indigenous Knowledge holders, and local experts to plan and conduct joint research; c. Facilitating collaboration in meeting the data needs identified in the JPSRM Framework and the JPSRM Implementation Plan; d. Establishing annual meetings of SCG Members and program managers with Arctic research vessels to discuss planning and coordination of research cruises; and e. Beginning to design a process to discuss collaborative research planning for 2025.		MM	[defer to after March 2025]	[defer to after March 2025]	

Report of the 2024 Interim Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group

Task No.	Priority	Task description	SCG2 report paragraphs	SCG Group	To be completed before March 2025 SCG3 meeting		Before 2026 SCG4 meeting
					Team leaders & members (<i>Who</i>)	Product (<i>What</i>)	Team leaders & product (<i>Who/What</i>)
7	HI	<u>TASKS FOR DATA MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP:</u> <i>a. Re-establish the participant list from each SCG Member</i> with a focus on only one or two people per Party to manage the meetings that focus on technical aspects of data management [in November/December];	47.a	DM	DM-WG Co-chairs	DM-WG participant list	
		<i>b. Identify data and information to be made available on the Agreement website</i> (public). The SCG also discussed adding data to the secure portion of the portal to assess the sharing of existing national datasets (to be conducted in coordination with COP website WG -- next meeting on 15 January, SCG members welcome to join meeting); and	47.d	DM		Identify web content	
	MED	<i>c. Establish the Data Management Team and review the Terms of Reference</i> to address any gaps in guidance for operationalizing the DMSP; and	47.c	DM	DM-WG Co-chairs	[defer to after March 2025]	
		<i>d. Develop Standard Operating Procedure</i> to collate Data Sharing Protocol requirements that include core metadata standards (and include evaluation of external data) and collect and share metadata for other (National) scientific data relevant to JPSRM.	47.e, 47.f	DM		[defer to after March 2025]	
8	MED	<u>CONVENE A MEETING OF THE DM-WG TO ADDRESS THE FOLLOWING FOUR TASKS:</u> <i>a. Discuss bringing together all relevant knowledge systems</i> under the JPSRM	49.a	DM		[defer to after March 2025]	
		<i>b. Develop processes and procedures for incorporating Indigenous Knowledge and local knowledge into the JPSRM database.</i> The SCG should review guidelines and procedures regarding consultation, acquisition, and ownership of Indigenous Knowledge consistent with Section 6.2 of the JPSRM Implementation Plan and the DMSP with the intent that these guidelines and procedures be periodically reviewed and updated as necessary to ensure they remain up to date and culturally appropriate,	49.b	DM		[defer to after March 2025]	
		<i>c. Report to the COP with recommendations regarding Section 7.3: Involving Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Knowledge in the JPSRM.</i> Report will include recommendations for guidelines and procedures regarding consultation, acquisition, and ownership of Indigenous Knowledge, and procedures for incorporating Indigenous Knowledge into the JPSRM database, methods, and analysis	49.c	DM		[defer to after March 2025]	
	MED	<i>d. Develop a process to ensure the accuracy and authority of unpublished evaluations results;</i> all data and reports used by the JPSRM shall adhere to DMSP standards and processes, and be peer-reviewed and published.	49.d	DM		[defer to after March 2025]	
9	MED	<u>MAP THE ADOPTED JPSRM AND EF DATA TYPES AND STANDARD METHODS TO CURRENT DM PROTOCOLS IN THE DMSP</u> The SCG discussed the need for the DM-WG to work with the MM-WG to make sure there is not overlap in effort: first step may be to start listing existing data sets of relevance to JPSRM (in time for SCG 2025/26 meetings <u>after March 2025</u>).	47.b	DM	DM-WG and MM-WG Co-chairs	Preliminary discussions among MM-WG and DM-WG in connection with DM-WG meetings in January and March 2025	Pending progress in finishing the Standard Methods; then proceed to discussions between MM-WG and DM-WG

Report of the 2024 Interim Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group

Task No.	Priority	Task description	SCG2 report paragraphs	SCG Group	To be completed before March 2025 SCG3 meeting		Before 2026 SCG4 meeting
					Team leaders & members (<i>Who</i>)	Product (<i>What</i>)	Team leaders & product (<i>Who/What</i>)
10	HI	<p><u>UNDERSTANDING VULNERABLE MARINE ECOSYSTEM (VME) HABITATS, RELATED SPECIES, AND THEIR DISTRIBUTIONS:</u> Inform spatial and temporal restrictions under CMMs for exploratory fishing, sensitivity to different types of fishing/sampling gear, and development of encounter protocols or move-on provisions. This topic needs to be considered in connection with discussions being undertaken by EF-WG and within SCG. Therefore, this task can be addressed both prior to and after the SCG's March 2025 meeting.]</p>	57.a	SCG	U.S. Delegation offered to undertake this task and prepare a summary of VME definitions and report to the SCG for its consideration at its March 2025 meeting. All members are encouraged to contact U.S. Delegation with ideas and contributions.	Given that "VME" is used by several groups and literature, it would be useful to review the EF-WG work that is underway and work by others (literature, especially other work in high latitude areas) by preparing a short white paper to assist the SCG in confirming how it defines VME.	Link to EF WG process meeting above and MM-WG actions
11	MED	<p><u>REVIEW EXPLORATORY FISHING BY:</u> a. Creating a new SCG working group to review exploratory fishing plans; b. Providing advice to the SCG on minimum scientific requirements of exploratory fishing plans; c. Developing a process and procedures to facilitate the provision of comments and feedback on any exploratory fishing plans; d. Identifying opportunities for coordination among exploratory fishing plans to include Indigenous Knowledge, minimize duplication, maximize the scientific value of exploratory fishing data collection, and minimize the ecosystem impacts of exploratory fishing; and e. Ensuring data collected during exploratory fishing and subsequently provided to the Data Management Team meet standards established by the JPSRM Data Management and Sharing Protocol.</p>		SCG	[defer to after March 2025]	[defer to after March 2025]	
12	MED	<p><u>IDENTIFYING ONLINE COMMUNICATIONS PLATFORMS:</u> The SCG tasks itself and the DM-WG with identifying an online communications platform that is accessible to all SCG Members that can be used for online editing/revisions. Noting that the COP's WEB-WG is reviewing needs and options for communications, the SCG will maintain this task on our agenda, but will defer immediate action pending progress by WEB-WG.</p>	62.a	SCG, DM	[mostly defer to after March 2025]	[mostly defer to after March 2025]	Progress on this task will be undertaken after SCG March 2025 meeting as website capabilities become clearer
13	HI	<p><u>SOLICIT AN INVITATION FROM A SCG MEMBER TO HOST AN IN-PERSON MEETING IN 2025:</u> Note that 28 January 2025 is the deadline for submitting documents in advance of the SCG March 2025 meeting</p>	55	SCG	SCG Chair	Iceland has invited SCG to hold its March 2025 meeting in Iceland	Explore possible hosts for SCG in-person meeting in 2026

19. The SCG noted that: a) awareness for CAOFA needs to be raised in the science managers of the parties in order to enable JPSRM research; b) SCG needs to gather logistic information, timelines, and ship time planning; and c) China is planning a comprehensive survey in the CAO that could be utilized for the JPSRM.
20. As feasible, the following actions should be addressed:
 - Meeting dates of MM-WG in 2026 : October, interim SCG, January for draft appendices;
 - Appendices of draft standard methods finished by end of 2024 (writing team);
 - Holding a MM-WG meeting in January 2025 to discuss drafts (all (WG members); and
 - Prepare discussions of tools suitable for outreach to relevant entities for research collaboration for March 2025 meeting.
21. The revised SCG priorities and work plan provides additional details on MM-WG objectives and timing for 2024-2026 (Table 1).

Agenda item 7: Data Management Working Group (DM-WG)

22. Bob Foy (USA) circulated a document (CAOFA-2024-SCG interim-05) summarizing the progress of the DM-WG in 2024 (attached as Appendix 5), covering agenda items 7.a. – 7.d.
23. The DM-WG will focus on defining how data are processed and shared, not actively managing the data. The DM-WG will undertake to develop standard operating procedures (“SOP”) referring to procedures to collect data and metadata.
24. A procedure is needed to collect data from data holders providing to the JPSRM.
25. The SCG notes that resources (staff, computers and software) are needed for data management. Without these resources, the DM-WG can only provide rules and standards and leave the responsibility to data providers to apply them and make data available for the JPSRM.
26. Dr. Flores (EU) suggested to motivate relevant data holders to tag JPSRM relevant datasets, publish them at a globally accessible data center. Public data can be easily tracked by the DM-WG based on their digital object identifier (doi).
27. As feasible, the following actions should be addressed:
 - Convene meeting to combine all relevant knowledge systems under the JPSRM (12/2024 – 01/2025);
 - Draft data SOPs (March 2025);
 - Report to COP with recommendations regarding section 7.3 of the JPSRM implementation plan (June 2025);
 - Create process to ensure accuracy and authority of unpublished evaluation results (June 2025); and
 - DM-WG meeting dates: January 2025, February 2025, March 2025.
28. The revised SCG priorities and work plan provides additional details on DM-WG objectives and timing for 2024-2026 (Table 1).

Agenda Item 8: Priority tasks to be addressed prior to the March 2025 SCG meetingVenue and arrangements for next SCG meeting

29. On behalf of the Iceland Delegation, Dr. Bárðarson (Iceland) kindly invited the SCG to hold their next meeting in March 2025 in Iceland, at the Marine and Freshwater Research Institute. This invitation was gratefully accepted by the SCG, which looks forward to gathering in Iceland. The Chair will work with the local hosts in Iceland to coordinate logistic arrangements and details for the March 2025 SCG meeting.
30. China informed the SCG that the Chinese Delegation is considering offering to host a meeting of the SCG in China in March or April of 2026. The Chair thanked the Chinese Delegation for this very welcome news and he stated that he looked forward to the possibility of receiving a formal invitation from China to host a meeting of the SCG in 2026.

Appointment of a second Co-chair for MM-WG

31. Recognizing that the MM-WG has been operating for more than one year without a Co-chair to help share responsibility for leading the working group with Dr. Hedges (Canada), the SCG was pleased to accept an offer from Dr. Hauke Flores (EU) to serve as acting Co-chair of the MM-WG until such time as someone is able to assume that role in a permanent capacity.

SCG communications, document sharing, and document distribution

32. The SCG noted that communication within the group is largely limited to e-mails. A shared, web-based platform would be very helpful, but it has been difficult to find one that enables equal access to all parties. This issue is being addressed at present by the COP's website working group.
33. The SCG appreciates the website working group's efforts to find and implement solutions that will help to alleviate this problem and improve the efficiency of the SCG's work.
34. Vernae Angnaboogok (USA) noted that the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) is very active in PAME and Arctic Council. She emphasized the need for the SCG to carefully navigate collaborations with external organizations. She noted that engagement processes are different for Arctic Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Knowledge in the Arctic Council and the CAOFA. She pointed out that, like the SCG is limited in funding and capacity, ICC experiences a lack of funding and capacity to be meaningfully engaged in implementing projects and initiatives. She stressed the importance of effective communication to facilitate efficient and timely sharing of information and underscored the need to work strategically to avoid the duplication of efforts.

Collaboration with international science programs in support of the JPSRM

35. The SCG acknowledged that collaboration with national and international science programs is essential to achieve the goals of the JPSRM. As described in the JPSRM Framework and Implementation Plan documents, there are many potential scientific groups and initiatives that share mutual goals with the JPSRM. Several of these groups have expressed interest informally in collaborating with the JPSRM, including CAFF's⁴ Circumpolar Biodiversity Monitoring Program

⁴ Arctic Council's working group on Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF)

(CBMP), the ICES/PICES/PAME Working Group for the Integrated Ecosystem Assessment of the Central Arctic Ocean (WGICA)⁵, Pacific Arctic Group, and PAME's expert group on Arctic Ecosystem-Based Management (EBM). Additional examples include using international efforts such as Ocean Decade, the International Polar Year (IPY), and others. The JPSRM Framework and Implementation Plan documents list many examples of groups that may be in a position to develop very constructive collaborations in support of the JPSRM.

36. A workshop to be held in December 2024 is being organized by Norway, in association with the Norwegian Chairship of the Arctic Council, to explore how science and management groups might work together to increase collaboration between groups needing information to inform ecosystem-based management (EBM) decisions – both management groups (i.e., governance of living marine resource issues) and those groups that produce such information (i.e., scientific knowledge and Indigenous Knowledge). As feasible, the SCG Chair and Vice-chair are hoping to participate in the workshop and will report back to the SCG at its meeting in March 2025.

Agenda Item 9: Future work of the SCG

Summary of 2024/2026 SCG products, work plan, and schedule

37. Table 1 presents a summary of the products and work plan currently envisioned by the SCG for its work over the remainder of 2024 and into JPSRM. This table is prioritized based on the relative urgency of tasks as well as the practical temporal constraints on what can still be accomplished in 2024 and early 2025 prior to the SCG's in-person meeting in March 2025.
38. The SCG intends to be able to further refine this work plan by clearly describing the following during its March 2025 meeting:
- specific tasks or products;
 - assignments of who will be working on which tasks;
 - a timetable for completion of tasks; and
 - a clear calendar of the dates when the SCG, the MM-WG, and the DM-WG will be meeting during 2025 and 2026 to evaluate progress in the advancement of their groups' work.
39. Planning ahead in this manner should help the SCG and its working groups to effectively plan and continue their work throughout the year on an ongoing basis rather than experiencing lapses in communication and work between meetings.

Proposed new working group to review exploratory fishing plans

40. With regard to exploratory fishing in the Agreement Area, the SCG awaits guidance from the COP regarding the specific role in reviewing exploratory fishing plans as envisioned in the report of the COP3 meeting.

⁵ International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), North Pacific Marine Science Organization (PICES), Arctic Council's working group on the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME)

41. The SCG recognizes that it should continue to provide the COP with input on potential terms of reference for a potential exploratory fishing group (EF-WG). Therefore, the topic of an EF-WG shall be discussed in more detail in the March 2025 meeting.
42. Dr. Glubakov (Russia) emphasized the important role that exploratory fishing can play for collecting basic scientific data that can be used to inform future management decisions.
43. The SCG noted that it would be helpful to draft a white paper describing aspects of the SCG's potential role in regard to exploratory fishing. Several delegations expressed interest in helping to prepare a draft paper on this topic for discussion by the SCG: China, USA, WWF, Canada, EU. The Chair will send out a letter seeking participants and a leader for this effort.
44. As noted in Task 10 in the SCG work plan (Table 1), it is important for the COP and SCG to have an agreed definition of the meaning of "Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VME)". The SCG will include a discussion of this topic on the agenda of its March 2025 meeting.

Inuit Circumpolar Council presentation on Indigenous Knowledge

45. The Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC) requested 2-3 hours of time on the SCG's agenda at its March 2025 to make a presentation on Indigenous Knowledge. The goal is to show how scientific knowledge and Indigenous Knowledge in combination can lead to better ecological understanding and management advice rather than utilizing each knowledge system independently.
46. The use of different types of knowledge can strengthen the JPSRM's ecosystem approach to gaining ecological knowledge and facilitating effective management. The SCG can help support this process by raising awareness in national programs and coordinated efforts of the value to CAOFA goals made possible by utilizing information from a variety of sources.

Agenda item 10: Other business

47. The SCG was reminded that Members who wish to circulate material or documents for consideration at the SCG's in-person meeting in March 2025 should provide electronic versions of these to the Chairperson at least thirty-five calendar days prior to the SCG meeting. The Chair shall subsequently make the material and documents for the SCG meeting available to all SCG Members and observers at least thirty calendar days in advance of the meeting.
48. To help raise the profile of current and recent scientific activities relevant to the JPSRM, the SCG welcomed the proposal to include an agenda item for reporting scientific activities at all future SCG meetings.

Agenda item 11: Report of the meeting

49. Because of time constraints, it was not possible to prepare and adopt a meeting report prior the adjournment. Therefore, the SCG Chair and rapporteurs will prepare a draft report including the meeting's main points of discussion.

50. The draft report will be distributed to meeting participants for review and comment, and will be adopted by correspondence.

Agenda item 12: Meeting closure

51. In closing the 2024 interim meeting of the SCG, the Chair thanked all meeting participants for their contributions and willingness to work together on the important issues addressed in this meeting.
52. The Chair offered special thanks to the SCG's Vice-chair and working group Co-chairs for serving as the meeting's rapporteurs.
53. On behalf of the SCG, the Vice-chair extended thanks to Chair John Bengtson for leading the SCG through a successful meeting.
54. The Interim Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group was adjourned on 21 November 2024.

**INTERIM MEETING OF THE
SCIENTIFIC COORDINATING GROUP (SCG) TO THE
AGREEMENT TO PREVENT UNREGULATED HIGH SEAS FISHERIES
IN THE CENTRAL ARCTIC OCEAN (CAOFA)**

19-21 November 2024

Held virtually

Chairperson: Dr. John L. Bengtson

FINAL AGENDA

1. Call to order and introduction by Chairperson
2. Welcoming remarks by Vice-Chairperson
3. Adoption of agenda and appointment of rapporteurs
4. Opening remarks by delegations
5. Overview of SCG tasks for 2024-2025
 - a. Action items adopted by the SCG at its second in-person meeting (April 2024)
 - b. Setting task priorities and developing work plans
6. Mapping and Monitoring Working Group (MM-WG)
 - a. Interim progress report of MM-WG
 - b. Priority tasks to be addressed prior to next SCG in-person meeting (March 2025)
 - c. Products, work plan (including personnel assignments), and schedule
 - d. MM-WG meeting dates in 2024-2026
7. Data Management Working Group (DM-WG)
 - a. Interim progress report of DM-WG
 - b. Priority tasks to be addressed prior to next SCG in-person meeting (March 2025)
 - c. Products, work plan (including personnel assignments), and schedule
 - d. DM-WG meeting dates in 2024-2026
8. Priority SCG tasks to be addressed prior to next SCG in-person meeting (March 2025)
 - a. Venue and arrangements for the next SCG in-person meeting: SCG3 – 4-7 March 2025
 - b. Appointment of a second Co-Chair for the MM-WG
 - c. SCG communications, document sharing, and document distribution
 - d. SCG collaboration with international science programs in support of the JPSRM
9. Future work of the SCG
 - a. Summary of 2024/26 SCG products, work plan (including personnel assignments), and schedule
 - b. Proposed new working group to review exploratory fishing plans
 - c. Inuit Circumpolar Council presentation at SCG3 regarding Indigenous Knowledge
 - d. Provisional SCG recommendations to the COP (to be finalized at SCG3 in March 2025)
10. Other business
11. Report of meeting
12. Meeting closure

**LIST OF DOCUMENTS (CAOFA-2024-SCG interim-02)
 CAOFA- 2024-SCG interim meeting**

CAOFA-2024-SCG interim-01	Final provisional agenda
CAOFA-2024-SCG interim-02	List of documents
CAOFA-2024-SCG interim-03	List of participants
CAOFA-2024-SCG interim-04	Draft SCG work plan for 2024-2026
CAOFA-2024-SCG interim-05	Data Management Working Group update (Nov. 2024)

Appendix 3. Report of the 2024 Interim Meeting of the CAOFA SCG

List of Participants: SCG 2024 Interim Meeting -- 19-21 November 2024									
Country	Participant name	Institutional title/ position	Institutional affiliation (with postal address)	Email address	"Head of Delegation" for the 2024 SCG Interim meeting?	CAOFA "Science Point of Contact"?	Other CAOFA designation (e.g., "Signatory Point of Contact," "Head of Delegation")?	Mapping/ Monitoring Working Group?	Data Management Working Group?
Canada	Kevin Hedges	Research Scientist	Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 501 University Crescent, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, R3T2N6	kevin.hedges@dfo-mpo.gc.ca	Yes	Yes	MM-WG Co-chair	Yes	No
Canada	Monika Pucko	Biologist	Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 501 University Crescent, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, R3T2N6	monika.pucko@dfo-mpo.gc.ca	No	No	No	Yes	No
Canada	Steven Ferguson	Research Scientist	Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 501 University Crescent, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, R3T2N6	steve.ferguson@dfo-mpo.gc.ca	No	No	No	Yes	No
Canada	Alain Dupuis	Science Advisor	Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 501 University Crescent, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, R3T2N6	alain.dupuis@dfo-mpo.gc.ca	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Canada	Mary Thiess	Science Advisor	Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 200 Kent St, Ottawa, ON, Canada, K1A 0E6	mary.thiess@dfo-mpo.gc.ca	No	No	No	No	No
Canada	Marjolaine Blais	Biologist	Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 850 route de la mer, Mont-Joli, G5H3Z4		No	No	No	Yes	No
Canada	Herb Nakimayak	Vice-president	Inuit Circumpolar Council Canada	hnakimayak@inuitcircmpolar.com	No	No	No	Yes	?
Canada	Benjamin McTaggart	Policy Advisor	Inuit Circumpolar Council Canada, 75 Albert Street, Suite 1001, Ottawa, ON K1P 5E7, Canada	bmctaggart@inuitcircmpolar.com	No	No	No	No	No
Canada	Rachel DeJong	Science Advisor	Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Gulf Fisheries Centre, 343 Université Ave. P.O. Box 5030, Moncton, NB E1C 9B6	rachel.dejong@dfo-mpo.gc.ca	No	Yes	no	yes	yes
Canada	Chris Rooper	Research Scientist	Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Pacific Biological Station, 3190 Hammond Bay Road, Nanaimo BC V9T 6N7, Canada	chris.rooper@dfo-mpo.gc.ca	No	No	No	No	No
Canada	Robert Apro	Senior Policy Advisor	Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 200 Kent St, Ottawa, ON, Canada, K1A 0E6	robert.apro@dfo-mpo.gc.ca	No	No		No	yes
Canada	Mollie Anderson	Advisor	Oceans North	manderson@oceansnorth.ca	no	no	no		no
China	Hai LI	Associate Researcher	Third Institute of Oceanography, Ministry of Natural Resources (No. 178, Daxue Road, Xiamen, China)	lihai@tio.org.cn	No	No	No	Yes	No

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China	Yiping Ying	Associate Researcher	Yellow Sea Fisheries Research Institute, CAFS (106 Nanjing Road, Qingdao, China)	yingyp@ysfri.ac.cn	No	No	No	Yes	No
China	Xinliang Wang	Principal investigator	Yellow Sea Fisheries Research Institute, CAFS (106 Nanjing Road, Qingdao, China)	wangxl@ysfri.ac.cn	No	No	No	No	Yes
China	Jichang Zhang	Assistant Researcher	Yellow Sea Fisheries Research Institute, CAFS (106 Nanjing Road, Qingdao, China)	zhangjc@ysfri.ac.cn	No	No	No	No	No
China	Zhiqiang Xu	Associate Researcher	Institute of Oceanology, Chinese Academy of Sciences	xuzhq@qdio.ac.cn	No	No	No	Yes	No
China	Yuyan Li	Assistant Researcher	East China Sea Fisheries Research Institute, Chinese Academy of Fishery Sciences. 300 Jungong Road, Shanghai, China	liyuyan@ecsf.ac.cn	No	No	No	No	No
China	Lizong WU	Associate Researcher	Polar Research Institute of China (No. 1000, Xuelong Road, Pudong New District, Shanghai 201209, China)	wulizong@pric.org.cn	No	No	DM-WG Co-chair	No	Yes
China	Meng CUI	Postdoctoral Researcher	Polar Research Institute of China (No. 1000, Xuelong Road, Pudong New District, Shanghai 201209, China)	cuiheng4227@163.com	No	No	No	No	Yes
China	Yong YU	Researcher	Polar Research Institute of China (No. 1000, Xuelong Road, Pudong New District, Shanghai 201209, China)	yuyong@pric.org.cn	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
China	Hui LIN	Assistant Researcher	Polar Research Institute of China (No. 1000, Xuelong Road, Pudong New District, Shanghai 201209, China)	linhui@pric.org.cn	No	No	No	Yes	No
China	Musheng LAN	Senior Engineer	Polar Research Institute of China (No. 1000, Xuelong Road, Pudong New District, Shanghai 201209, China)	Lanmusheng@pric.org.cn	No	No	No	Yes	No
China	Yanyan SHAN	Associate Researcher	Polar Research Institute of China (No. 1000, Xuelong Road, Pudong New District, Shanghai 201209, China)	Shanyanyan@pric.org.cn	No	No	No	Yes	No
China	Yongjun Tian	Professor	Ocean University of China (Yushan Road 5, Shinan-qu, Qingdao 266003, China)	yjtian@ouc.edu.cn	No	No	No	Yes	No
Greenland/DFG	Birgitte Jacobsen	Chief Advisor	Government of Greenland	bija@nanoq.gl	Yes	No	COP HoD	No	No
Greenland/DFG	Kuluk Lyberth	Marine Governance Policy Advisor	ICC Greenland	kuluk@inuit.org	No	No	No	No	No
Iceland	Birkir Bardarson	Fisheries Biologist	Marine & Freshwater Research Institute, Fornubudum 5, 220 Hafnarfjörður, Iceland	birkir.bardarson@hafogvatn.is	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Japan	Yutaka HIROE	Principal Research Coordinator	Fisheries Agency of Japan, 1-2-1 Kasumigaseki, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100-8907, JAPAN	yutaka_hiroe540@maff.go.jp	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Japan	Shigeto Nishino	Senior researcher	JAMSTEC, 2-15 Natsushima, Yokosuka, Kanagawa 237-0061, Japan	nishinos@jamstec.go.jp	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Korea	Jeongseok Park	senior scientist	National Institute of Fisheries Science	jeongseokpark@korea.kr	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Korea	Hyoung Chul Shin	President	Korea Polar Research Institute	hcshin@kopri.re.kr	No	Yes	No	No	No
Korea	Hyoung Sul La	Principal Research Scientist	Korea Polar Research Institute	hsla@kopri.re.kr	No	No	No	Yes	No

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Korea	Sangdeok Chung	Scientist	National Institute of Fisheries Science	sdchung@korea.kr	No	No	No	No	Yes
Norway	Randi B. Ingvaldsen	senior scientist	Institute of Marine Research, Box 1870, N5817 Nordnes, Norway	randi.ingvaldsen@hi.no	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Norway	Benjamin Planque	senior scientist	Institute of Marine Research, Tromsø, Norway	benjamin.planque@hi.no	No	No	No	No	Yes
Norway	Alf Håkon Hoel	senior scientist	Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø, Norway	alf.hakon.hoel@uit.no	No	Yes	No	No	No
Norway	Åge Høines	senior scientist	Institute of Marine Research, Box 1870, N5817 Nordnes, Norway	aage.hoines@hi.no	No	Yes	No	No	No
Russia	Alexander Glubokov	Head of Department	All Russian Research Institute for Fisheries and Oceanography	glubokov@vniro.ru	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Russia	Konstantin Sokolov	Deputy head	Russian Fed. Research Inst. of Fisheries and Oceanography (FSBSI "VNIRO"), Polar Branch, 6 Akademika Knipovicha St., 183038, Murmansk	sokolkm@pinro.vniro.ru	No	Yes	No	No	No
Russia	Andrey Dolgov	principal scientist	Russian Fed. Research Inst. of Fisheries and Oceanography (FSBSI "VNIRO"), Polar Branch, 6 Akademika Knipovicha St., 183038, Murmansk	dolgov@pinro.vniro.ru	No	?	No	No	No
Russia	Konstantin Fomin	principal specialist	Russian Fed. Research Inst. of Fisheries and Oceanography (FSBSI "VNIRO"), Polar Branch, 6 Akademika Knipovicha St., 183038, Murmansk	fomin@pinro.vniro.ru	No	?	No	No	No
USA	Lauren Fields	Foreign Affairs Specialist	NOAA Fisheries Office of International Affairs, Trade, and Commerce, 1315 East West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910 USA	lauren.fields@noaa.gov	Yes	No	Signatory Point of Contact	Yes	No
USA	Bob Foy	Director, Alaska Fisheries Science Center	Alaska Fisheries Science Center, 7600 Sand Point Way NE, Seattle, WA 98115, USA	robert.foy@noaa.gov	No	Yes	SCG Head of Delegation	Yes	DM-WG Co-chair
USA	Libby Logerwell	Research Biologist	Alaska Fisheries Science Center, 7600 Sand Point Way NE, Seattle, WA 98115, USA	libby.logerwell@noaa.gov	No	No	No	Yes	No
USA	Catherine Berchok	Research Zoologist, Marine Mammal Laboratory	Alaska Fisheries Science Center, 7600 Sand Point Way NE, Seattle, WA 98115, USA	Catherine.Berchok@noaa.gov	No	No	No	Yes	No
USA	Hannah Dawson	Arctic Activities Coordinator	Alaska Fisheries Science Center, 7600 Sand Point Way NE, Seattle, WA 98115, USA	Hannah.Dawson@noaa.gov	No	No	No	No	No
USA	Dave Benton	Advisor	Ocean Conservancy	davebenton@gci.net	No	No	No	Yes	No
USA	Marie Greene	President	Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska	marie@iccalaska.org	No	No	No	No	No
USA	Vernae Angnaboogok	Advisor	Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska	vernae@iccalaska.org	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
USA	Leandra Sousa	Advisor	Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska/North Slope Borough Dept. of Wildlife Management	leandra.sousa@north-slope.org	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
EU	Sarah Davie	Technical Director	MRAG Europe, 3rd Floor, 40 Mespil Road, Dublin 4, Republic of Ireland	s.davie@mrag-europe.eu	Yes	Yes	SCG Head of Delegation	Yes	Yes

Appendix 3. Report of the 2024 Interim Meeting of the CAOFA SCG

Bureau									
SCG Chair	John L. Bengtson	Director, Marine Mammal Laboratory	Alaska Fisheries Science Center, 7600 Sand Point Way NE, Seattle, WA 98115, USA	john.bengtson@noaa.gov	No	No	SCG Chair	Yes	No
SCG Vice-chair	Hauke Flores	Senior scientist	Alfred-Wegener-Institute, Am Handelshafen 12, 27570 Bremerhaven, Germany	hauke.flores@awi.de	No	No	SCG Vice-chair; MM-WG Co-chair	Yes	No
Observers									
ICES	Alan Haynie	General Secretary	International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), H.C. Andersens Boulevard 44-46, 1553 Copenhagen V., Denmark	alan.haynie@ices.dk	Yes	Yes	COP Contact	No	No
ICES	Lis L. Jørgensen	Scientist	Institute of Marine Research, Tromsø, Norway	lislin@hi.no	No	No	No	No	No
WWF	Steve MacLean	Managing Director – US Arctic	WWF – 810 N Street, Suite 300, Anchorage, AK 99501	steve.maclean@wwfus.org	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
WWF	Matt Spencer	Polar Oceans Specialist	WWF-UK, Living Planet Centre, Woking, UK	mspencer@wwf.org.uk	No	No	No	No	No
UK	Michelle Hackett	Head of International Fisheries Science	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, 2 Marsham Street, London, SW1P 4DF	Michelle.Hackett@defra.gov.uk	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
UK	Hayley Cox	Senior Policy Advisor	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, 2 Marsham Street, London, SW1P 4DF	Hayley.Cox@defra.gov.uk	No	Yes	COP Contact	Yes	Yes
UK	James Sharples	Head of NE Atlantic Multilateral Negotiations	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, 2 Marsham Street, London, SW1P 4DF	James.Sharples@defra.gov.uk	No	No	HoD CoP	Yes	Yes

Appendix 4. Report of the 2024 Interim Meeting of the CAOFA SCG

DRAFT CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group (SCG) Priorities and Work Plan: 2024 - 2026					Version: 1 November 2024		
Task No.	Priority	Task description	SCG2 report paragraphs	SCG Group	To be completed before March 2025 SCG3 meeting		Before 2026 SCG4 meeting
					Team leaders & members (<i>Who</i>)	Product (<i>What</i>)	Team leaders & product (<i>Who/What</i>)
1		[Meet in fall 2024 to...] Develop a process and timeline for consultation among the Parties for scheduling vessels for joint expeditions into the Agreement Area, peripheral seas, and gateways, and for organizing teams of scientists, Indigenous Knowledge holders, and local experts to plan and conduct the research on these expeditions	22.a, 25.b, 30.a	MM			
2		[Meet in fall 2024 to...] Develop a process to promote coordination between national programs to facilitate collaboration and meet the data needs identified in the JPSRM Framework and the JPSRM Implementation Plan, including establishing annual meetings of Parties and program managers with Arctic research vessels to discuss planning and coordination of research cruises and related activities	22.b, 25.c, 30.b	MM			
3		[Meet in fall 2024 to...] Identify a list of analyses to be conducted to provide advice to the COP regarding species distributions and abundances in the JPSRM priority geographic areas; linkages among species; and forecasting of potential changes in CAO ecosystems that would affect resource availability	22.c	MM			
4		[Meet in fall 2024 to...] Begin drafting a report to the COP regarding JPSRM Section 8.2: coordination of Arctic research vessels.	22.d, 30.c	MM			
5		The [four JPSRM] Standard Methods documents require further development by the SCG by March 2025 for subsequent review and endorsement by the COP	23	MM			
6		Identify a list of analyses to be conducted to provide advice to the COP regarding species distributions and abundances in the JPSRM priority geographic areas (i.e., Agreement Area, peripheral seas, and gateways); linkages among species; and forecasting of potential changes in CAO ecosystems that would affect resource availability	24	MM			
7		Create a new SCG working group to review exploratory fishing plans [four draft terms of reference follow] [this action is one of four principal activities proposed for the SCG regarding implementation of the JPSRM]	25.a, 26, 27, 28, 29	MM			
8		[TOR 1] Provide advice to the SCG on minimum scientific requirements of the development of exploratory fishing plans according to the requirements within Conservation and Management Measures (CMMs) developed by the COP	27.a, 57.b	MM			
9		[TOR 2] Develop a process and procedures to facilitate the provision of comments and feedback on any exploratory fishing plans	27.b, 57.b	MM			
10		[TOR 3] Identify opportunities for coordination among exploratory fishing plans to include Indigenous Knowledge, minimize duplication, maximize the scientific value of exploratory fishing data collection, and minimize the ecosystem impacts of exploratory fishing	27.c	MM			

Appendix 4. Report of the 2024 Interim Meeting of the CAOFA SCG

Task No.	Priority	Task description	SCG2 report paragraphs	SCG Group	To be completed before March 2025 SCG3 meeting		Before 2026 SCG4 meeting
					Team leaders & members (<i>Who</i>)	Product (<i>What</i>)	Team leaders & product (<i>Who/What</i>)
11		[TOR 4] Ensure data collected during exploratory fishing and subsequently provided to the Data Management Team meet standards established by the Data Management and Sharing Protocol (DMSP)	27.d	MM			
12		Report progress on JPSRM implementation [one of four principal activities proposed for the SCG regarding implementation of the JPSRM]	25.d, 30.c	MM			
13		Convene a meeting of the Parties and program managers of national research programs in first quarter of 2025 [to address following three tasks]	30	MM			
14		Begin consultation among the Parties for scheduling vessels for joint expeditions into the Agreement Area, peripheral seas, and gateways, and for organizing teams of scientists, Indigenous Knowledge holders, and local experts to plan and conduct the research on these expeditions	30.a	MM			
15		Begin designing a process to discuss collaborative research planning for 2025. The SCG may invite other national and international programs to participate, as appropriate	30.b	MM			
16		Report to the SCG regarding implementation pursuant to JPSRM Implementation Plan Section 7.2: Coordination and collaboration among Parties' national science programs	30.c	MM			
17		Re-establish the participant list from each Party with a focus on only one or two people per Party to manage the meetings that focus on technical aspects of data management	47.a	DM			
18		Map the adopted JPSRM and EF data types and standard methods to current DM protocols in the DMSP. The SCG discussed the need for the DM-WG to work with the MM-WG to make sure there is not overlap in effort	47.b	DM			
19		Establish the Data Management Team and review the Terms of Reference to address any gaps in guidance for operationalizing the DMSP	47.c	DM			
20		Identify data and information based on COP needs to be made available on the Agreement website (public). The SCG also discussed adding data to the secure portion of the portal to assess the sharing of existing national datasets	47.d	DM			
21		Develop Standard Operating Procedure to collate Data Sharing Protocol requirements that include core metadata standards (and include evaluation of external data) and collect and share metadata for other (National) scientific data relevant to JPSRM	47.e, 47.f	DM			
22		Convene a meeting of the DM-WG meeting in late 2024 to address the following four tasks:	49	DM			
23		Discuss bringing together all relevant knowledge systems under the JPSRM	49.a	DM			

Appendix 4. Report of the 2024 Interim Meeting of the CAOFA SCG

Task No.	Priority	Task description	SCG2 report paragraphs	SCG Group	To be completed before March 2025 SCG3 meeting		Before 2026 SCG4 meeting
					Team leaders & members (<i>Who</i>)	Product (<i>What</i>)	Team leaders & product (<i>Who/What</i>)
24		[By June 2025] Develop processes and procedures for incorporating Indigenous Knowledge and local knowledge into the JPSRM database. The SCG should review guidelines and procedures regarding consultation, acquisition, and ownership of Indigenous Knowledge consistent with Section 6.2 of the JPSRM Implementation Plan and the DMSP with the intent that these guidelines and procedures be periodically reviewed and updated as necessary to ensure they remain up to date and culturally appropriate,	49.b	DM			
25		Report to the COP with recommendations regarding Section 7.3: Involving Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Knowledge in the JPSRM. Report will include recommendations for guidelines and procedures regarding consultation, acquisition, and ownership of Indigenous Knowledge, and procedures for incorporating Indigenous Knowledge into the JPSRM database, methods, and analysis	49.c	DM			
26		[By June 2025] Develop a process to ensure the accuracy and authority of unpublished evaluations results; all data and reports used by the JPSRM shall adhere to DMSP standards and processes, and be peer-reviewed and published.	49.d	DM			
27		[Seek] an invitation from any SCG member to host an in-person SCG meeting in 2025.	55	SCG			
28		There is a priority need to understand VME habitats, related species, and their distributions to: Inform spatial and temporal restrictions under CMMs for exploratory fishing, sensitivity to different types of fishing/sampling gear, and development of encounter protocols or move-on provisions.	57.a	SCG			
29		SCG members will identify opportunities for communicating among national research programs and collaboration with Indigenous Knowledge holders and local knowledge holders	59	SCG			
30		[Noting the importance of communicating among national research programs and collaboration with Indigenous Knowledge holders and local knowledge holders, SCG members will identify opportunities for [such] collaboration. For examples, some SCG members highlighted their existing research programs and invited SCG participants to join projects and participate in research	59	SCG, MM			
31		[Noting] the importance of collaborating with international science programs [to support the JPSRM, SCG members] will identify individuals from within the SCG membership with current membership in International bodies to initiate and report back on engagement/collaboration opportunities	60	SCG			
32		The SCG tasks itself and the DM-WG with identifying an online communications platform that is accessible to all SCG Members that can be used for online editing/revisions	62.a	SCG, DM			

Appendix 5. Report of the 2024 Interim Meeting of the CAOFA SCG**Data Management Working Group (DM-WG) Update (November 2024)**

The DM-WG was established during COP 3 (June 2024) to be responsible for storing the JPSRM data in the centralized data archive and the coordinated metadata of other datasets being used by the Parties and provided in distributed data archives. In addition, the DM-WG is responsible for overseeing the data portal consistent with the Data Management and Sharing Protocol (DMSP) approved under the JPSRM.

Priority tasks

- Identify the Data Management Team (2-3 people) to review the Terms of Reference to address any gaps in guidance for operationalizing the Data Management Sharing Protocol.
- Develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for each type of data expected to be collected, used, or shared under the Agreement. This will be based on Data Management Sharing Protocol requirements that include core metadata standards,
- Develop and propose a procedure for how the SCG will evaluate and interpret external data and information that the SCG uses.
- Identify data and information based on COP needs to be made available on the Agreement website (public). Note: the development of guidelines for public sharing of Agreement information and reports was formally moved to a COP website working group.
- Collect and share metadata for other (National) scientific data relevant to JPSRM.
- Identify the content and method of sharing Indigenous Knowledge and Local Knowledge. Note: The Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) offered to share processes and existing datasets recently developed that could be shared on the secure portion of the Agreement website. The ICC will be giving a presentation at the March/April in person SCG.

Products and schedule

- December 2024-January 2025; Convene meeting to bring together all relevant knowledge systems under the JPSRM.
- March 2025; Draft data SOPs.
- June 2025; report to the COP with recommendations regarding Section 7.3 (of JPSRM Implementation Plan: Involving Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Knowledge in the JPSRM. Report will include recommendations for guidelines and procedures regarding consultation, acquisition, and ownership of Indigenous Knowledge, and procedures for incorporating Indigenous Knowledge into the JPSRM database, methods, and analysis.
- June 2025: Process to ensure the accuracy and authority of unpublished evaluations results; all data and reports used by the JPSRM shall adhere to DMSP standards and processes, and be peer-reviewed and published.

DM-WG meeting dates in 2024-2026

January 2025

February 2025

March 2025 (depending on in person SCG dates)

APPENDIX 5

Report of the Third Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group (SCG) - 2025



Hafnarfjörður, Iceland
4-7 March 2025

CAOFA-2025-COP4-03

John L. Bengtson
SCG Chairperson

3rd Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group – 2025

Outline of the SCG3 report

- *SCG meetings between COP3 and COP4*
- Progress on implementation of Joint Program of Scientific Research and Monitoring (JPSRM)
 - SCG priorities and work plan 2025-2026
 - Data management and linkages to CAOFA website
 - Definition and characteristics of vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs) in the context of exploratory fishing
 - Collaboration with Indigenous Knowledge holders
 - Collaboration with national and international science programs
- Resources to implement JPSRM and the work of the SCG and its working Groups

3rd Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group – 2025

SCG meetings since COP3

- The Third Meeting of the CAOFA SCG Scientific Coordinating Group (SCG) was hosted by Iceland and was held from 4-7 March 2025 in Hafnarfjörður, Iceland.
- The meeting was led by the SCG Chair, John L. Bengtson (United States) with assistance from the SCG Vice Chair, Hauke Flores (European Union).
- A total of 63 persons participated in the SCG3 meeting, including representatives from all ten Parties and four observer organizations (31 present in person and 32 online).
- The SCG also convened an Interim Meeting, held virtually, on 19-21 November 2024. A total of 57 persons participated online.

3rd Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group – 2025

SCG work plan and calendar

- The SCG's Mapping and Monitoring Working Group (MM-WG) reorganized its efforts to prioritize completion of its priorities and anticipated deliverables to the COP, which were combined into an updated table of the SCG's Priorities and Work Plan.

- The top priorities were to:
 - further develop the four JPSRM Standard Methods documents to facilitate consistent development of JPSRM data collection,
 - identify analyses/information products needed for reliable advice to COP
 - report to the COP on JPSRM implementation,
 - reach out and collaborate with groups external to the SCG and JPSRM,
 - identify opportunities for communicating and collaborating with holders of Indigenous Knowledge, and
 - convene a meeting of SCG and managers of national Arctic programs to develop processes and timelines to promote research coordination under the JPSRM.

3rd Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group – 2025

SCG work plan and calendar

- The SCG agreed to a new calendar of meetings over the next two years outlining the general times when meetings of the SCG and its working groups will be held; specific dates will be agreed in consultation with leaders, participants, and hosts.
- The SCG intends to meet twice per year (spring in person/autumn virtually). Each SCG WG is expected to meet at least once per quarter throughout the year (virtually).
- Both the SCG and its working groups will schedule their meetings to facilitate compliance with the SCG and COP rules for submitting documents prior to meetings.
- The SCG thanked the China Delegation and accepted its invitation to host the in-person SCG4 meeting in 2026.
- The SCG ***requested*** that the COP assist the SCG in identifying a host for the SCG's 5th in-person meeting, to be held in the spring of 2027.

3rd Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group – 2025

Data management and linkages

- Two important tasks for the Data Management Working Group (DM-WG) are to:
 - focus on identification of information to be made available on the CAOFA website, which will be addressed after the report from the Website Working Group is completed at COP4, and
 - to promote the incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge into the JPSRM database. Activities through 2025 will include identification of specific standards for each of the parameters and data types identified in the JPSRM Implementation Plan, including the development of metadata standards for historical data from multiple international sources.
- The SCG recognized that data currently available from CAOFA Parties could be incorporated into the SCG database when a formal data management plan is available.
- Efforts in 2026 will be to identify international data sets that may specifically inform the CAOFA Parties in implementing the JPSRM.

3rd Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group – 2025

Definition and characteristics of vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs) in the context of exploratory fishing

- The SCG had several productive discussions about potential characteristics of vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs) in the Central Arctic Ocean.
- Because the CAO has not been previously affected by fishing pressure and has had little to no mapping and monitoring, its VME characteristics could include attributes unique to the Central Arctic Ocean region.
- A list of essential ecosystem characteristics would help inform scientific research priorities and planning. Defining VME characteristics does not automatically mean that a VME will be identified.
- A risk assessment is required to inform future conservation and management measures (CMMs) to establish VMEs and avoid significant adverse impacts. The SCG will continue to develop a VME definition and provide future VME advice to the COP.

3rd Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group – 2025

Definition and characteristics of vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs) in the context of exploratory fishing

Two closely related recommendations to the COP are:

- Given the current data available, including risk assessments in other areas, the SCG ***recommended***, at least as a first step, that the COP consider identification of VMEs for:
 - Cold water corals and sponges,
 - Hydrothermal vents, and
 - Seamounts (see paragraph 50).

- The SCG ***recommended*** that the COP consider identification of VMEs, their vulnerabilities, and conservation and management measures, as a first step, specific to coral, sponge habitat, hydrothermal vents, and seamounts in the CAOFA Area. The development of these particular CMMs will build a common understanding of VMEs and CMMs among the Parties (see paragraph 54).

3rd Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group – 2025

JPSRM collaboration with Indigenous Knowledge holders

- The Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) provided a presentation on Indigenous Knowledge and scientific knowledge working together, including concrete examples of co-produced Indigenous and scientific research projects on a variety of topics.
- The presentation also touched on coordinated Inuit/government science and marine management frameworks as well as a basic overview Indigenous Knowledge and data management within CAOFA.
- ICC representatives described several impressive examples of co-production of knowledge through collaborations utilizing both scientific knowledge and Indigenous Knowledge. Those examples indicate great potential as research templates for future applications in the JPSRM.

ICC recap: Indigenous Knowledge and scientific knowledge working together

OVERVIEW OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE WORKING TOGETHER

Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC)

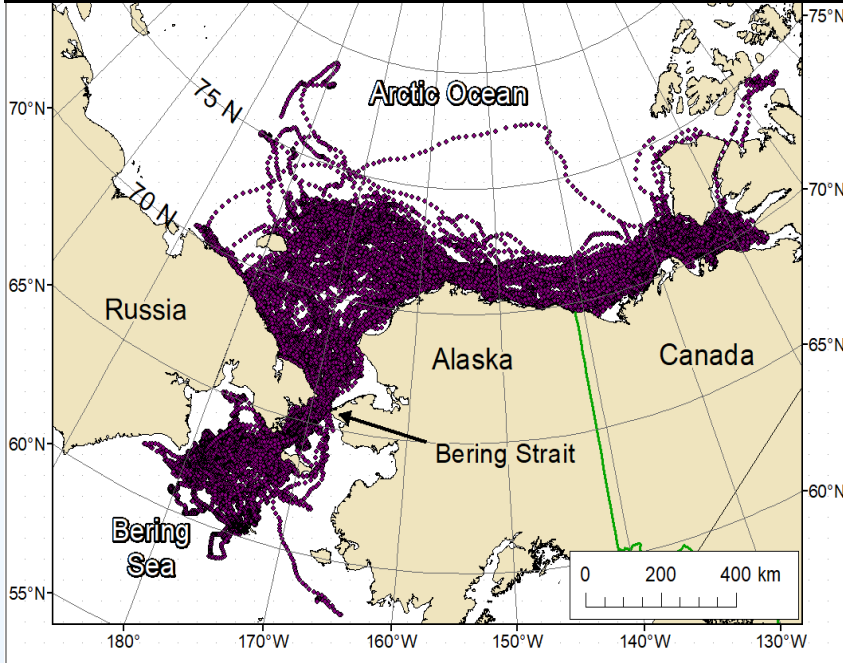
Presented at: 3rd Scientific Working Group (SGC) Meeting of the Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement (CAOFA)



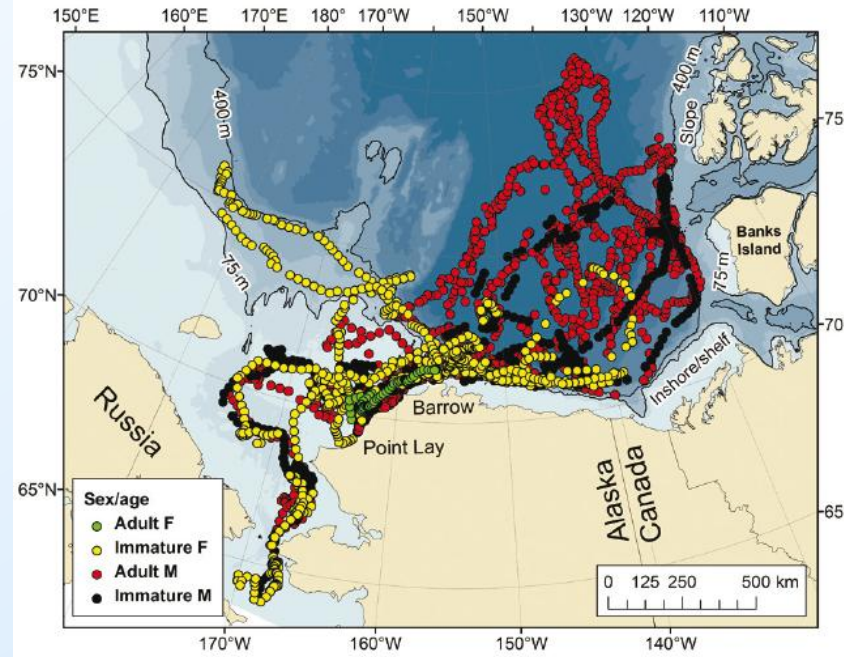
Strengths

Indigenous Knowledge	Scientific Knowledge
Holistic	Linear and works to understand in isolation
Takes in multiple variables and focuses on relationships between them	Works by drawing out variables and dissecting into many parts, which are broken down into smaller parts in order to analyze
Represents our collective knowledge passed down over many generations	Relies on individual experts informed by academic qualifications
Embedded with our cultural values and spirituality and relationships between all of life, land, water, air that sustains our people and way of life	Objective in the way of removing personal bias
Naturally in line with our environment and highly adaptable	Rigorous and takes time to complete and publish results
Not for profit and often not recognized in scientific research	Dominant system with dedicated funding

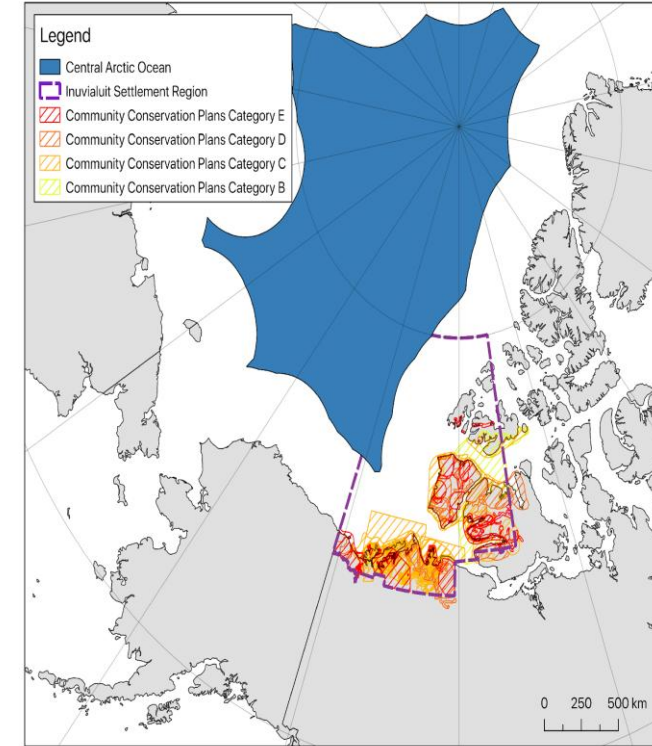
Satellite locations (2006-2018)



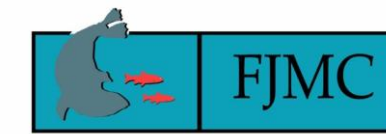
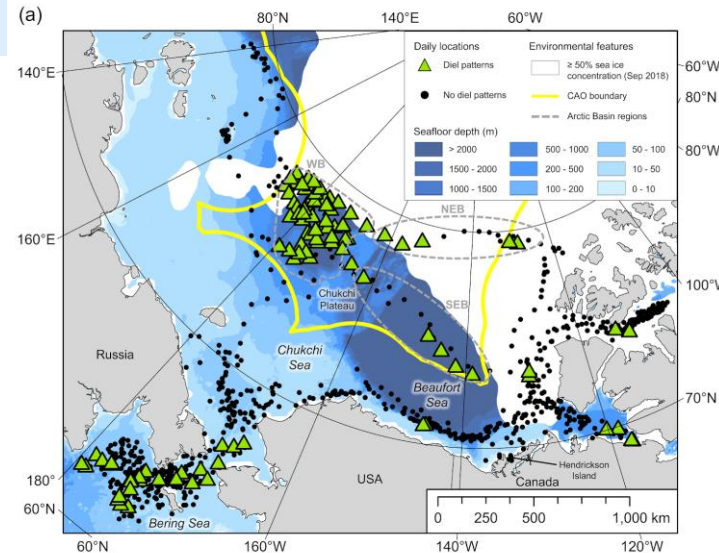
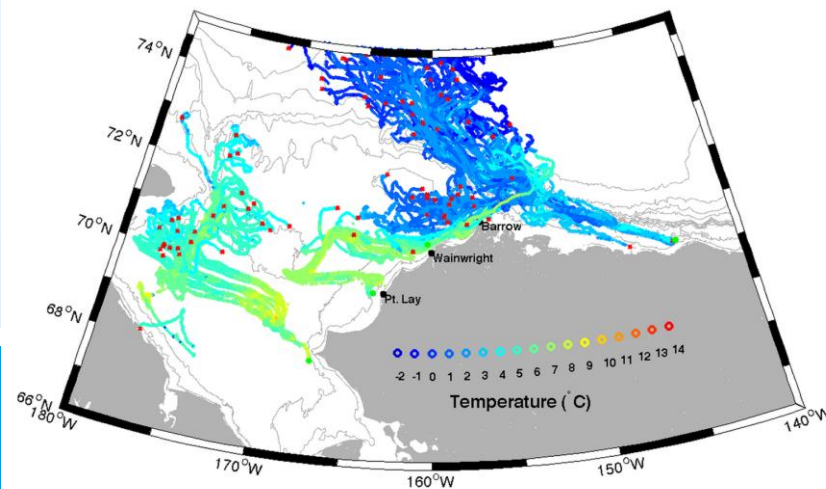
Beluga Whale movements Satellite locations (1998-2012)



Beluga Monitoring



Surface ocean currents



FISHERIES JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Beluga
Movements



3rd Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group – 2025

JPSRM collaboration with Indigenous Knowledge holders

The SCG recognized the importance of:

- Coordinating with Inuit organizations and communities to coordinate on action plans and outreach to ensure that Indigenous Knowledge holders continue to have access to and awareness of the CAOFA process.
- Addressing a Standard Operating Procedure for incorporating Indigenous Knowledge into JPSRM databases. Given the time needed to meaningfully engage Inuit and Indigenous Knowledge holders, this shall be an evolving, ongoing process that reflects the time scale needed for informed, equitable, and ethical engagement.
- Facilitating communications between the SCG and Inuit regions regarding planning and implementation of the JPSRM. As a part of that planning, ICC will make available appropriate links for communications with Inuit regions and their organizations, along with relevant publications and guidelines developed by those regions to facilitate JPSRM work.

3rd Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group – 2025

JPSRM collaboration with national and international science programs

- The SCG Chair and Vice Chair participated in a workshop entitled, “***Ecosystem-Based Management: Managing Arctic marine ecosystems requires international, multidisciplinary, and cross-sectoral cooperation,***” which was sponsored and organized by the Norwegian Chairmanship of the Arctic Council in Copenhagen, 10-12 December 2024.

- The main goals of the workshop were to:
 - ***Identify Arctic the marine living resource information needs*** of Arctic management bodies such as the CAOFA Conference of Parties (COP), North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC), and Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (OSPAR), and
 - Explore potential synergies and opportunities among scientific groups and Indigenous Knowledge groups ***to collaborate in acquiring and providing information*** to management bodies needing such information.

3rd Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group – 2025

JPSRM collaboration with national and international science programs

- The workshop highlighted the high potential of closer cooperation between different scientific organizations and knowledge holders involved in the Central Arctic Ocean.
- Several key organizations were identified that have expressed interest in collaborating with implementation of the JPSRM, including:
 - ICES/PICES/PAME Working Group for the Integrated Ecosystem Assessment of the Central Arctic Ocean (WGICA),
 - Arctic Council's Circumpolar Biodiversity Monitoring Programme (CBMP),
 - Pacific Arctic Group (PAG), and
 - Arctic Council's Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP).
- These organizations, along with other key groups such as the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), the North Pacific Marine Science Organization (PICES), and the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) were identified as important potential collaboration partners that could contribute to the JPSRM.

3rd Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group – 2025

Resources to implement JPSRM and the work of the SCG and its working Groups

- The SCG ***recommended*** that the COP complete development of a website to facilitate sharing of documents and to support outreach efforts by providing an online presence for the SCG and JPSRM (see paragraph 31).
- The SCG ***recommended*** that the COP support the SCG's continued coordination of national scientific programs toward implementation of the JPSRM, including the identification of priority areas as described in the JPSRM Implementation Plan and executed by national research programs (see paragraph 32).
- The SCG ***requested*** Parties and SCG Members to consider nominating representatives who could serve in the important role of co-chair for the SCG's Mapping and Monitoring Working Group (MM-WG) (see paragraph 37).

3rd Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group – 2025

Resources to implement JPSRM and the work of the SCG and its working Groups

- The SCG *recommended* that the COP be aware that the success of the JPSRM, with its related research and scientific advice, depends on the availability of sufficient resources, as provided by the Parties (see paragraph 38).
- The SCG *recommended* that the COP encourage Parties to support the involvement of their Arctic research programs, vessels, and personnel with the MM-WG, DM-WG, and JPSRM and to participate in their respective workshops in order to leverage synergies for scientific research in the Central Arctic Ocean (see paragraph 44).
- The SCG *requested* that the COP assist the SCG in identifying a host for the SCG's 5th in-person meeting, to be held in the spring of 2027 (see paragraph 69).

3rd Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group – 2025

Closing of the SCG3 meeting

- The SCG succeeded in drafting, reviewing, and adopting its report prior to the meeting's adjournment.
- The report included eight formal recommendations and requests to the COP for its consideration and action.
- In closing the SCG3 meeting, the Chair extended his congratulations and thanks to all of the meeting's hosts, organizers, leaders, and participants for their contributions, dedication, and commitment to the goals of CAOFA.
- The Third Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group was adjourned on Friday, 7 March 2025.

An aerial photograph showing a group of whales swimming in a dark, narrow channel of water. The channel is bordered by large, white, textured ice floes. The whales are silhouetted against the dark water, and their dorsal fins are visible. The overall scene is serene and majestic.

Thank you.

3rd Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group – 2025

SCG recommendations and requests to the COP

- The SCG ***recommended*** that the COP complete development of a website to facilitate sharing of documents and to support outreach efforts by providing an online presence for the SCG and JPSRM (see paragraph 31).
- The SCG ***recommended*** that the COP support the SCG's continued coordination of national scientific programs toward implementation of the JPSRM, including the identification of priority areas as described in the JPSRM Implementation Plan and executed by national research programs (see paragraph 32).
- The SCG ***recommended*** that the COP be aware that the success of the JPSRM, with its related research and scientific advice, depends on the availability of sufficient resources, as provided by the Parties (see paragraph 38).
- The SCG ***recommended*** that the COP encourage Parties to support the involvement of their Arctic research programs, vessels, and personnel with the MM-WG, DM-WG, and JPSRM and to participate in their respective workshops in order to leverage synergies for scientific research in the Central Arctic Ocean (see paragraph 44).

3rd Meeting of the CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group – 2025

SCG recommendations and requests to the COP

- Given the current data available, including risk assessments in other areas, the SCG ***recommended***, at least as a first step, that the COP consider identification of VMEs for:
 - Cold water corals and sponges;
 - Hydrothermal vents; and
 - Seamounts (see paragraph 50).

- The SCG ***recommended*** that the COP consider identification of VMEs, their vulnerabilities, and conservation and management measures, as a first step, specific to coral, sponge habitat, hydrothermal vents, and seamounts in the CAOFA Area. The development of these particular CMMs will build a common understanding of VMEs and CMMs among the Parties (see paragraph 54).

- The SCG ***requested*** Parties and SCG Members to consider nominating representatives who could serve in the important role of co-chair for the SCG's Mapping and Monitoring Working Group (MM-WG) (see paragraph 37).

- The SCG ***requested*** that the COP assist the SCG in identifying a host for the SCG's 5th in-person meeting, to be held in the spring of 2027 (see paragraph 69).



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Conservation and Management Measures for Exploratory Fishing

Preamble

The Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean (the Agreement),

Recalling the objective of the Agreement to prevent unregulated fishing in the high seas portion of the central Arctic Ocean through the application of precautionary conservation and management measures as part of a long-term strategy to safeguard healthy marine ecosystems and to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of fish stocks;

Recalling Article 1(e) of the Agreement, which reads: “‘exploratory fishing’ means fishing for the purpose of assessing the sustainability and feasibility of future commercial fisheries by contributing to scientific data relating to such fisheries”;

Recognizing the obligations set out in Article 5.1(d) of the Agreement regarding the establishment of conservation and management measures for exploratory fishing in the Agreement Area and the contribution of results of exploratory fishing activities toward an increased understanding of the central Arctic Ocean and the Joint Program of Scientific Research and Monitoring (JPSRM);

Noting in this regard Article 5(2) of the Agreement provides for the participation of Indigenous Knowledge holders and local knowledge holders in the implementation of the Agreement through any committees or similar bodies the Parties may establish, including the Scientific Coordinating Group, and its work with respect to exploratory fishing and other activities;

Acknowledging that central Arctic Ocean ecosystems are changing due to climate change and other phenomena, and that the effects of these changes are not well understood;

Conscious of the lack of data to identify vulnerable marine ecosystems in the Agreement Area and surrounding ecosystems and the substantial research efforts required to [conduct fishery-independent surveys and] collect data to assess the sustainability and feasibility of future commercial fisheries and the contribution of these data to the JPSRM;

Recalling the relevant provisions of the *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea* of 10 December 1982 and the *Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation*

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and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks of 4 August 1995, in particular Article 6 regarding the application of the precautionary approach;

Considering the work of the Exploratory Fishing Questions Working Group;

Adopts the following conservation and management measures for exploratory fishing:

1. General Provisions and Procedures

1.1 Exploratory fishing shall be conducted in accordance with its purpose as defined in Article 1(e) of the Agreement and in a manner consistent with the Agreement, and shall be consistent with the precautionary approach.

1.2 A Party may authorize exploratory fishing only on the basis of sound scientific research and when it is consistent with the JPSRM, the JPSRM Implementation Plan and its own national scientific programs.

1.3 To meet the objective of the Agreement, there shall be no exploratory fishing in the Agreement Area until such time as:

- a) [the Parties have conducted fishery-independent surveys¹ in the proposed exploratory fishing area in accordance with the JPSRM and the JPSRM Implementation Plan, and the outcome of the JPSRM mapping phase and baseline conditions are established for the [Agreement Area] [proposed EF areas], that include scientific data, Indigenous Knowledge, and local knowledge; and]
- b) [the COP, in coordination with the SCG, has adopted a vulnerable marine ecosystem definition and encounter and avoidance protocol taking into account Arctic ecosystems and habitats, and the environmental impact assessment according to **Annex XX.**]

1.4 Exploratory fishing shall be conducted pursuant to these conservation and management measures [consistent with paragraph 5.1(d) of the Agreement] and Exploratory Fishing Plans (as detailed in Section 2 and **Annex XX**) [and take into account comments from the Parties, recommendations and advice from the Scientific Coordinating Group (SCG) [and approved by the COP.]]

¹ The purpose of such fishery-independent surveys shall be to collect baseline data including collecting relevant data on fish stocks, key life stages, ecosystem functions including predator/prey relationships, and habitat use by fish and shellfish, marine mammals and seabirds, and their relationship with Arctic Indigenous Peoples, as well as to identify vulnerable marine ecosystems where fishing could cause long-term or irreversible changes.

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[1.5 A Party may authorize exploratory fishing only after it has notified the other Parties and provided the other Parties the opportunity to comment on its Exploratory Fishing Plans (as detailed in Section 2 and Annex **XX**).]

1.6 A Party shall only permit its vessels to employ fishing and related gear that will have the least impact on species and their habitats in the Agreement Area. The SCG shall discuss specific restrictions on exploratory fishing in the Agreement Area and make recommendations to the COP.

[1.6bis The use of fish aggregating devices [is prohibited][should be limited to low levels] in the Agreement Area.]

1.7 A Party shall not authorize a vessel to conduct exploratory fishing if the vessel is listed on an IUU vessel list of a regional fishery management organization or arrangement.

1.7bis A Party shall prohibit its [fishing] vessels engaging in exploratory fishing activities from engaging in transshipment in the Agreement Area [or transshipment of any catch taken from the Agreement Area.]

2. Requirements for Exploratory Fishing Plans

2.1 Exploratory Fishing Plans shall include the components in Annex **XX**.

2.2.2.3 chair's alt The protocol for approval of exploratory fishing activities is as follows:

1. A Party seeking to undertake exploratory fishing activities shall submit an Exploratory Fishing Plan to the chairperson of the SCG at least [35][60][90] calendar days in advance of the next scheduled SCG meeting[. and at least six months prior to a Party's planned exploratory fishing activity].

2. The Chairperson of the SCG shall distribute within five calendar days the Exploratory Fishing Plan to the [SCG] members [and observers] of the SCG.

3. The SCG, [including, inter alia, Indigenous Knowledge holders and local knowledge holders] shall review the Exploratory Fishing Plan and [may][shall] provide [comments] [advice, and recommendations] to the submitting Party, [taking into account of the interests of] [including [modifications to the Exploratory Fishing Plan that would

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mitigate the impacts on] Arctic Indigenous Peoples and local communities[, and the resources on which they depend].

4. The submitting party shall submit its final Exploratory Fishing Plan, taking into account any [comments] [advice] [and recommendations] by the SCG referred to in Paragraph 2(3), to the COP for [information] [comment] [approval].

2.3 Exploratory Fishing Plans shall be accompanied by certifications of insurance and bonding to cover costs associated with vessel emergencies or pollution and clean-up.

2.4 Parties shall ensure that exploratory fishing activities are not carried out for profit and that catches and fishing effort are limited to a level to be established by the COP.

2.5 Each Exploratory Fishing Plan shall be limited in duration to two years.

2bis. Overlap Area between CAOFA and NEAFC

2bis.1 These conservation and management measures shall neither undermine nor conflict with the role and mandate of the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC)

2bis.2 Parties shall promote cooperation and coordination between the COP and NEAFC to advance their respective objectives, particularly with respect to the portion of the Agreement Area that overlaps with NEAFC's regulatory area (Overlap Area) and other matters of common interest.

[2bis.3 A Party shall not authorize its flagged vessels to conduct exploratory fishing in the Overlap Area until the COP and NEAFC have established an appropriate mechanism for cooperation.]

3. Coordination

3.1 The SCG shall develop a mechanism for the Parties to coordinate Exploratory Fishing Plans and activities.

3.2 The Parties shall coordinate their Exploratory Fishing Plans and activities through such mechanism to include Indigenous Knowledge, minimize duplication, maximize the scientific value of exploratory fishing data collection, minimize the ecosystem impacts of exploratory fishing, and prevent cumulative impacts on marine ecosystems and Arctic communities prior to the authorization of exploratory fishing.

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3.3 The Exploratory Fishing Plan shall take into account other exploratory fishing efforts, via such mechanism.

4. Monitoring and Reporting

4.1 A Party that authorizes vessels to conduct exploratory fishing, pursuant to the Agreement, these measures, and their Exploratory Fishing Plan shall ensure that while these vessels are operating in the Agreement Area:

- (a) vessels are equipped with functioning Automated Identification System (AIS) for safety purposes;
- (b) all catch and bycatch are reported on a daily basis to the flag State Party preferably via an e-reporting system adopted by the Party and the Party will report these data every [14][30] days to the SCG; and
- (c) vessels are equipped with functioning Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) equipment and, pursuant to annex XX shall report catch locations and ensure continuous location reporting to the flag State Party and other Parties may request the flag State Party share VMS data. The COP shall establish procedures for requesting, receiving and storing VMS data.

4.2 A Party shall ensure that any of its flagged vessels undertaking authorized exploratory fishing in the Agreement Area report each entry into and exit from the Agreement Area, as well as entry into and exit from the Overlap Area between CAOFA and NEAFC, to the flag State Party, and the Party shall share the data with other Parties. The reported information must include anticipated entry date and location 96 hours prior to entry into the Agreement Area (check in) and exit date and time and location upon exit from the Agreement Area (check out).

[4.3 Until such time as the COP adopts a measure for high seas boarding and inspection of vessels in the Agreement Area, the Parties shall apply Articles 21 and 22 of the 1995 Agreement in the Agreement Area.]

4.4 Each vessel authorized to conduct exploratory fishing in the Agreement Area shall carry on board at a minimum one independent, impartial, and qualified scientific observer [from an international observer provider]. [of a Party other than its flag State Party to [monitor the fulfillment of the requirements of these CMMs]. If[, following consultation with the Parties,] [,following a request to the other Parties,] such an observer [has not been made] [is not] available, the fishing vessel shall have on board one independent, impartial, and qualified

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scientific observer from its flag State Party.] An observer is deemed to be independent, impartial, and qualified if the observer:

- a) is deployed from a Party's national observer program or similar international observer program and familiar with this CMM and other CAOFA-related matters;
- b) is neither part of the crew, nor has any employment or family relationship to the ownership or operator of the fishing vessel; and
- c) does not have any shared business interests with the owner or operator of the fishing vessel.

4.5 Data collected by observers shall be reported to the SCG and the COP in accordance with the Data Management and Sharing Protocol.

4.6 Scientific data collected under the Exploratory Fishing Plan, consistent with the JPSRM Implementation Plan, shall be reported to the SCG by a Party with vessels undertaking exploratory fishing in accordance with the Data Management and Sharing Protocol.

4.7 A Party with vessels undertaking exploratory fishing shall submit a report to the COP and the SCG within [60][90] days of exiting the Agreement Area upon completion of the exploratory fishing activity. The data included in the report shall be archived on the Agreement's data-sharing portion of the website. The report shall [be in accordance with the Exploratory Fishing Plan submitted by the Party.] [include, for each individual vessel undertaking exploratory fishing, the following information:

- a. a detailed report of exploratory fishing activities, including the completed activities within the Exploratory Fishing Plan and all cruise metadata;
- b. any interactions with marine mammals, seabirds or any endangered, threatened, or protected species;
- c. [any interactions with VMEs, associated and dependent species, or other sensitive habitats consistent with the JPSRM Implementation Plan;]
- d. any known impacts to Arctic Indigenous communities, or other impacts to the marine environment;
- e. any mitigation measures taken in response to or in prevention of such interactions or impacts;
- f. any fishing gear lost during the course of exploratory fishing activity; and
- g. sightings of any vessels that are not authorized to engage in fishing in the Agreement Area.]

[4bis. Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems [and Other Sensitive Habitats] [and Vulnerable Marine Indicators]

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4*bis*.1 Vessels conducting exploratory fishing in the Agreement Area shall apply the VME encounter and avoidance protocol set out in Annex **XX**.]

5 Compliance

5.1 A Party shall maintain management and control of vessels it authorizes in the Agreement Area.

5.1 *bis* ALT proposal: [To ensure exploratory fishing activities are carried out in accordance with the Agreement, the COP shall establish:

- (a) a compliance committee to evaluate the activity of exploratory fishing in accordance with the Agreement and relevant conservation measures;
- (b) At-sea boarding requirements and procedures;
- (c) Observer protocols;
- (d) Collection and sharing of VMS data; and
- (e) Other monitoring and compliance measures.]
- (f) [Corrective actions policy [against] [on] non-compliance.]

5.1*ter* (former chair's proposal for 5.1 *ALT*)

A Party shall ensure that its fishing vessels conduct exploratory fishing in accordance with its Exploratory Fishing Plan and these conservation and management measures. A Party shall investigate any potential non-compliance with these conservation and management measures by its vessels, take corrective actions based on that investigation, and report the progress and results to the COP to ensure any future exploratory fishing activities are carried out in accordance with the Agreement. [The COP may then make recommendations to the Party for further actions to be taken.]

6 Periodic Review

6.1 The COP shall review these Conservation and Management Measures at least every 5 years and, taking into account *inter alia*, the most recent advice of the SCG, amend these measures as necessary.

7. Termination of Interim Conservation and Management Measures

7.1 [These measures replace the Interim Conservation and Management Measures for Exploratory Fishing in the High Seas of the Central Arctic Ocean adopted by the COP 12 June 2024.]

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Annex XX – Requirements for Exploratory Fishing Plans

Exploratory Fishing Plans shall include:

aante. a purpose,

- a. the location of the planned activity, including geographic area and anticipated fishing depth range relative to the bottom,
- b. schedule of proposed exploratory fishing activities, including proposed routes, dates, and duration of fishing activities, and planned entry into and exit from the Agreement Area, and, if applicable, any anticipated entry into and exit from the Overlap Area,
- c. identification and details of vessels to be authorized to conduct exploratory fishing in the Agreement Area pursuant to the plan, including name, international radio call sign, IMO number, and Flag, vessel length and tonnage, vessel horsepower and catch storage capacity in gross tons, and ice-class rating,

cbisante. Information on supporting vessels, if any.

cbis. name and contact information for the responsible person and institution, and, for each vessel to be authorized, the name of the vessel master,

d. [information on when the [preliminary] [data] [and final] results of the exploratory fishing activities will be presented to the SCG,]

e. detailed description of fishing gear to be used (e.g., trawl, hook and line, pot gear, other), including anticipated fishing depth and whether the gear is pelagic or demersal, or intermittent bottom tending, and which gear mitigation modifications will be used, if any, including those recommended by the SCG,

[*ebis.* Documentation of the presence or absence of VMEs or VME indicators and their distribution from fishery-independent surveys:]

f. [estimated catch and effort by [taxa and][species and] area, [anticipated non-target species taken as bycatch by species and area], [and [catch] control measures to ensure harvest amounts are at, or below, [any allowable catch and effort limits established by the COP for target [and bycatch] species,]

[*gbis.*for each of the ETP species by area: estimated bycatch and control measures to ensure the bycatch for these species is minimized.]

ALT from CHN for paragraph h (*hante*)

hante. monitoring plan consistent with the JPSRM;]

g. mitigation procedures to safeguard:

- i. marine mammals[, including against ship strikes, interactions, and entanglements];
- ii. seabirds;
- iii. [non-target fish species] [species not expected to be harvested];

Commented [MS1]: Will return pending discussion of next annex

Commented [MS2]: To be discussed when discussing VMEs

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- [*iiibis*. ETP species other than fish];
- [*iiiter*. dependent species];
- iv. vulnerable marine ecosystems, [including their associated or dependent species];
- v. [other] sensitive [and potentially sensitive] habitats, where applicable;
- vi. [key life history stages]

✖

- vi-vii. the Agreement Area from the introduction of invasive species; [and]
- viii. [species in the Agreement Area] against exposure to harmful levels of underwater noise [by the vessels conducting exploratory fishing activities][, ship strikes of marine mammals, entanglements], [and pollution (including grey water), and-]
- [viiibis. the Agreement Area from pollution (including grey water), [by vessels conducting exploratory fishing activities.]

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ALT from CHN for paragraph h

[mitigation measures to minimize the impact of exploratory fishing on the marine ecosystem, including but not limited to those: i. minimizing or avoiding the introduction of invasive species; [and] ii. reducing of underwater noise under harmful levels to marine mammals iii. avoiding ship strikes of marine mammals, entanglements] iv. reducing pollution (including grey water)]

✖

- h. reporting procedures by the vessel to the [Flag State][Parties], [consistent with these measures,]

ALT from USA

- h- reporting procedures consistent with these measures
- i. biological and environmental data to be collected and reported, including sampling protocols as defined by the JPSRM Implementation Plan,
- j. [opportunities for participation by] [means for participation of and knowledge sharing by] Indigenous Knowledge holders, local knowledge holders, and scientists from other Parties,
- k. [potential impacts on Arctic Indigenous Peoples and local communities from indicators developed in the JPSRM,] [and mitigation efforts for such impacts, including:
 - i. on fish stocks and marine mammals which may be directly harvested by Indigenous Peoples, and fish species which may be prey for subsistence-harvested species (e.g., abundances, population dynamics, contaminants);

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- ii. of ship or gear noise on subsistence-harvested species (e.g., bowhead and beluga whales, ringed and bearded seals), which are transiting or feeding;
 - iii. on sea ice (coverage, thickness, and extent); and
 - k.iv. additional aspects of data collection to be determined in consultation with Arctic Indigenous Peoples.]
 - [i]bis. potential impacts, including cumulative impacts, on the ecosystem from indicators developed in the JPSRM]
 - l. ~~and~~ any other methods and means for collecting additional scientific information as informed by the JPSRM or SCG [where applicable],
 - m. [the intended scientific use which will not be for profit of any fish species harvested][caught], -consistent with the JPSRM], and
[n]bis. reporting procedures for any fishing gear lost during the course of exploratory fishing activity]
 - ~~##-~~
 - n. details on vessel safety [for each vessel] [authorized pursuant to these measures/proposed to participate], including:
 - i. vessel call sign and tracking information,
 - ii. a communications plan, radio and satellite contact information, and, [when needed,] communications procedures to ensure continuous and reliable communication with the vessel(s) [when needed],
 - iii. [if possible,] an emergency communication plan [coordinated] with [the closest] [a] Party or Parties in the event of an emergency,
 - iv. a specific Search and Rescue (SAR) Plan that details personnel, equipment, and procedures to be deployed in case of an emergency, [consistent with the Agreement on Cooperation in Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic,] and
 - v. an Oil Spill Contingency Plan that details personnel, equipment, and procedures to be deployed in case of an emergency [consistent with the Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic], and[v]bis. information on compliance with generally accepted international regulations, procedures and practices relating to safety at sea, including the International Code for Ships Operating in Polar Waters and the Guidelines for Safety Measures for Fishing Vessels of 24 M in Length and Over Operating in Polar Waters.]
[v]ter. [adhere to and maintain applicable] vessel stability instructions/safe stability loading conditions (factor ice accumulation situations; and master/crew understanding of relevant stability concepts).]

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[vquater. [ensure] [the standards for] appliances [to] remain functional in freezing elements and maintain watertight integrity.]

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[vquinquies. [maintain] [an inventory of] applicable lifesaving appliances and keep accessible and ready for use.]

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[vxixies. [ensure] [a scheme of] escape routes [remain accessible] (internal and on open decks).]

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[vsepties. [ensure] [certification for] installed fire safety systems are maintained and functional (accessible at all times and protected from ice/snow accumulation).]

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[obis. Link of para. 4.4 in CMMs]

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[Annex XX – Procedures for position and catch reporting]

1. Each Party shall implement a ~~tamper-proof~~ vessel monitoring system (VMS) for its ~~fishing~~ vessels engaged in exploratory fishing ~~within the agreement area~~ and require its ~~fishing~~ vessels to be equipped with an autonomous system able to automatically transmit messages to a land-based fisheries monitoring center (FMC) allowing a continuous tracking of the position of a ~~fishing~~ vessel and ~~hourly communication of reports to the Party by satellite including ensure that the satellite device shall enable a fishing vessel to communicate by satellite to the Party messages hourly reports relating to~~ the following data:
 - a. the vessel identification;
 - b. the most recent geographical position of the vessel (longitude, latitude) with a position error which shall be less than 500 meters, with a confidence interval of 99%;
 - c. the date and time of the fixing of the said position of the vessel;
 - d. the speed and course at the time of fixing of the said position of the vessel;
 - e. where applicable, data relating to the catch on board ~~[such as...]~~; and
 - f. where applicable, data relating to transshipment ~~[such as...]~~.

2. Each Party shall ~~require ensure that the masters of fishing~~ vessels flying its flag ~~shall to maintain ensure that the satellite tracking devices VMS that are, upon commencement, and~~ at all times fully operational and that the information in paragraph 1 of this Annex is transmitted ~~to the FMC~~. In the event of a technical failure or non-operation of the satellite tracking device fitted on board a ~~fishing~~ vessel, ~~the vessel master is required to manually report their vessel's position [and other information per paragraph 1] to the FMC every hour [4 hours] until the defective device is repaired or replaced or the vessel exits the Agreement Area. If this cannot be done within [15 days][30 days], the vessel is required to cease fishing activities, stow all gear, and exit the Agreement Area. the device shall be repaired or replaced within one month. After this period, the master of a fishing vessel shall not be authorized to commence a fishing trip with a defective satellite tracking device. Where a device stops functioning and a fishing trip lasts more than one month, the repair or the replacement has to take place as soon as the vessel enters a port, (The fishing vessel shall not be authorized to continue or commence a fishing trip without a fullythe operational satellite tracking deviceVMS, having been repaired or replaced.~~

3. ~~Each Contracting Party shall ensure that a fishing vessel with a defective VMS tracking device shall communicate, at least every 4 hours, reports containing the information in Paragraph of this Annex to the FMC.~~

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CAOFA-2024-COP3-04-REV2
EF-WG CHAIR PROPOSAL

Communication of catches

4. Each Party shall ~~require that ensure that~~ its fishing vessels engaged in exploratory fishing activities in the Agreement Area ~~shall~~ communicate catch reports, ~~[including discards,]~~ to its FMC. ~~The Party shall submit the catch reports to the SCG and the COP Exploratory Fishing WG. The catch reports shall~~ contain:
- a. ~~[the quantities [and species][of all catch][of all catch in the Arctic Ocean]~~ on board when entering the Agreement Area. This report shall be made no more than 12 hours and at least 2 hours in advance of each entry into the Agreement Area;]
 - b. daily catches: this report shall be transmitted on a daily basis at the latest at 1200 UTC the following day after commencement of the exploratory fishing activity. This report shall include information on the number of fishing days, ~~location of~~ and ~~total~~ catch taken in the Agreement Area since the commencement of fishing, ~~or since and total catch since~~ the last ~~catch~~ report. On days when no catch has been taken a nil catch shall be reported. ~~[Discarded catches [and bycatch of non-target species] shall be also included be reported].~~
 - c. ~~[when exiting the Agreement Area: this report shall be made available no more than 8 hours and at least 2 hours in advance of each exit from the Agreement Area. It shall include, where appropriate, the number of fishing days and the catch taken in the Agreement Area since the commencement of fishing, or since the last catch report. It shall also include discarded catches.-]~~
- ~~4.5.~~ The reports on catches referred to in paragraph 4 shall be given in kilograms ~~[(rounded to the nearest 100kg)]~~ total ~~round~~ ~~[live]~~ weight ~~[and catch per unit effort (such as 100kgs/fishing unit)]~~ by species or the lowest identifiable taxa, as appropriate. ~~[Fishing units shall be based on gear type (e.g. minutes towed)].-by s~~Species shall be identified using the FAO code.]

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APPENDIX 6
CAOFA-2024-COP3-04-REV2
EF-WG CHAIR PROPOSAL

Annex XX - VME protocol

1. ~~[1 anteanteante -Prior to engaging in exploratory fishing, any Party wishing to conduct exploratory fishing shall:~~
 - a. ~~Identify the area under consideration for exploratory fishing in its Exploratory Fishing Plan,~~
 - b. ~~Conduct fishery -independent surveys to document the presence or absence of VMEs or VME indicators;~~
 - c. ~~Document the types of VMEs or VME indicators present and their distribution;~~
~~and~~
 - a. ~~Describe in their Exploratory Fishing Plan mitigation measures to be employed to avoid or prevent any adverse impact on any VME or VME indicator in the proposed exploratory fishing area.]~~

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~~1 anteante The information collected in paragraph 1 anteanteante shall be incorporated into the proposed Exploratory Fishing Plan to inform the SCG and COP plan review process.~~

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2. ~~1 ante Parties may cooperate to jointly conduct such surveys and develop such information described in paragraph 1 anteanteante as part of the JPSRM Implementation Plan.]~~

~~2.3 Each Party shall ensure that fishing vessels engaged in exploratory fishing activities flying its flag abide by the following rules, where, [in the course of bottom-contact fishing gear], evidence of VMEs [or VME indicators] [is][are] encountered;~~

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- a. ~~fishing vessels shall quantify catch of [or encounters with VMEs or] VME indicators;~~
- b. ~~[If an encounter with a VME or VME indicators as defined in paragraph 3 occurs, or] if the quantity of VME indicators caught in a fishing operation [(such as trawl tow or set of a gillnet or longline)] is beyond the thresholds defined in paragraph 3, the following shall apply:~~
 - ~~b. [i ante if an encounter is discovered in connection with the hauling of [bottom contact] fishing gear, the fishing vessel shall cease fishing and move out of the area, as described below, until additional fishery-independent surveys are conducted to better define the presence, type, and distribution of VME or VME indicators in the area]~~
 - i. ~~if an encounter is discovered in connection with the hauling of a trawl gear, the fishing vessel shall cease fishing and move out of the area defined as a [2][5]-nautical mile wide band (polygon) on both sides of the "track" of the trawl haul during which the area encounter occurred. The "track" is defined as the line joining consecutive positions, supplemented by more exact information, between the start and the end of the tow, extended by [2][5] nautical miles at both ends;~~

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- ii. if an encounter is discovered in connection with the use of other [bottom] fishing gears the fishing vessel shall cease fishing and move away at least [2] [5] nautical miles from the position that the evidence suggests is closest to the exact encounter location. The master shall use his or her best judgment to determine the position closest to the exact encounter location based on all available sources of information; and
 - iii. the master shall report the incident, including the “track” or position closest to the exact encounter location determined under sub-paragraphs (i) and (ii), ~~without delays soon as practicable but no later than [24 hours]~~ from the time that evidence of VMEs is first encountered to its flag state, ~~which shall forward the information to the Exploratory Fishing WG immediately.~~
4. ~~The Party shall immediately inform the COP’s Exploratory Fishing WG and the [SCG] [other Parties], and archive the information received pursuant to paragraph 1.~~
5. ~~The Parties and shall immediately at the same time implement a temporary closure in the areas identified in paragraph 1(b) of this Annex.~~
6. In order to assess accurately the position and the extent of the VME encountered in terms of paragraph 1, seabed mapping, preferably, should be carried out using echosounders, and if practicable multi-beam sounders. The result of any mapping shall be submitted to the SCG for its evaluation and advice [in consistence with FAO international guidelines for the management of deep-sea fisheries in the high sea] [consistent with the CAOFA VME definition process].
7. If, on the basis of assessment by the SCG ~~and the COP’s Exploratory Fishery WG~~, the area has or is likely to have a VME, Parties shall maintain the temporary closure until such time that the COP has acted upon the advice from the SCG ~~and the COP’s Exploratory Fishery WG~~. If the evaluation does not conclude that the temporary closed area has or is likely to have a VME, Parties may re-open the area to their fishing vessels.
8. Threshold levels
- 1. [An encounter with a possible VME is defined as:
 - a. for a trawl tow and any fishing gear other than longlines or pot gears, the presence of: [and other fishing gear than longlines: the presence of]
 - i. more than [xx kg] of [live coral and/or [xx kg][per unit of time or distance] of live sponge] ~~any of~~ VME indicators; and
 - ii. bottom features that provide important habitats for biota and biodiversity including sea mounts, geothermal vents, subsea ridges, canyons, and slopes an encounter is defined as any physical contact; and.

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- a.iii. sea ice features, including polynyas, leads, and ice edge or under ice features an encounter is defined as fishing within [2] [5] nautical miles of such features.
- b. for a longline set: the presence of:
 - i. VME indicators on 10 hooks per caught per 1000 hook segment or per 1200 m section of long line, whichever is the shorter.
 - ii. bottom features that provide important habitats for biota and biodiversity including sea mounts, geothermal vents, subsea ridges, canyons, and slopes an encounter is defined as any physical contact; and,
 - iii. sea ice features, including polynyas, leads, and ice edge or under ice features an encounter is defined as fishing within [2] [5] nautical miles of such features.]
- c. for pot or trap gear, the presence of:
 - i. [xx kg] any VME indicator that is retrieved with, or present in, the pot or associated line;
 - ii. bottom features that provide important habitats for biota and biodiversity including sea mounts, geothermal vents, subsea ridges, canyons, and slopes an encounter is defined as any physical contact; and,
- b.iii. sea ice features, including polynyas, leads, and ice edge or under ice features an encounter is defined as fishing within [2] [5] nautical miles of such features.]

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PROPOSED RULES FOR POSTING AND ACCESSING MATERIAL AND DOCUMENTS ON THE PUBLIC AND THE RESTRICTED PORTIONS OF THE CAOFA WEBSITE FROM WEBSITE WORKING GROUP

Introduction

During its third in-person meeting June 10-12, 2024, the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement (CAOFA) thanked the United States for offering to host the website for the CAOFA containing public and restricted access portions. The COP also agreed to form a working group reporting to the COP and chaired by the COP Chairperson to assist in developing this website for the CAOFA. Terms of Reference were adopted requesting that the Working Group:

- a) Develop criteria for what information should be on the “public” and “secure” sites.
- b) Consider how to best share material for CAOFA meetings within the timelines provided by the Rules of Procedure, with Parties, observers and the public.
- c) Examine appropriate structure of the website, to facilitate access by various users. This would include the process for how many delegates from each party should have access to the secure login.
- d) Determine what level of Party access is needed for secure access.
- e) Recommend who should have access to the secure site.

The Website Working Group consisting of representatives from Canada, Denmark in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland, Iceland, Japan, Russia, the United States and the Chairperson of the SCG met five times from October 2024 to February 2025. To address the Terms of Reference, the attached proposed **Rules for posting and accessing material and documents on the public and the restricted portions of the CAOFA website** were developed by consensus of the Working Group and are submitted for adoption by the COP at its meeting scheduled for June 3-5, 2025.

**RULES FOR POSTING AND ACCESSING MATERIAL AND DOCUMENTS
ON THE PUBLIC AND THE RESTRICTED PORTIONS OF THE CAOFA WEBSITE**

RECOGNIZING that a website would provide a useful means of sharing knowledge, information, data, documents and material related to the Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement (CAOFA), its Conference of the Parties (COP), the Scientific Coordinating Group (SCG) and their respective subsidiary bodies;

GRATEFUL to the United States for hosting the CAOFA website;

MINDFUL of the Data Management and Sharing Protocol for the Joint Program of Scientific Research and Monitoring (JPSRM) adopted by the Parties;

The CAOFA Parties agreed to the following:

Website Objectives

1. The following objectives shall guide decisions regarding the management of the CAOFA website content, including decisions regarding information to be included and the posting of material and documents on the public and restricted portions of the CAOFA website:

- (a) Transparency: to ensure open, inclusive and transparent content for the CAOFA website as the general principle for accessing information, documents, material and data, including those provided through Indigenous Knowledge processes, recognizing there may be a need to protect and restrict access to some of these items in the restricted portion of the website;
- (b) Single Authoritative Place: to find and access reliable information, documents, material and data regarding the CAOFA;
- (c) Communications: to ensure the timely and accurate communications of CAOFA information to the Parties, to Observers, to interested stakeholders such as Arctic residents, researchers and the academic community, and to the general public;
- (d) Meeting Management: to share meeting dates, places, documents and material, logistics information for CAOFA meetings, including information on visa requirements and travel for in-person meetings, and links to host registration;
- (e) Record Keeping: to provide access to past and historical material, documents and data related to the CAOFA.

Website Governance and Process

2. (1) The management of the CAOFA public and restricted website shall be governed by the Data Management Team of the Data Management Working Group (DM-WG) reporting to the Scientific Coordinating Group (SCG), in consultation with the SCG Chairperson and the COP Chairperson, based on these Rules.

(2) If permission to publicly release or disclose material or documents is not clear, the Data Management Team shall seek clarity from the submitting participant or the author.

(3) In the event that an issue arises regarding material or documents for posting on the public or restricted portions of the CAOFA website which is not covered or addressed by these Rules, the DM-WG, through the SCG, may seek to have the matter discussed and addressed by the Parties.

(4) A Party may seek for the Parties to discuss the benefits of making a material or document public and posted on the CAOFA public website which otherwise would not be posted pursuant to these Rules. In such circumstances, following the discussion which could be by correspondence, the Parties may agree to release the document on the public website as is, or they may agree to changes to be made to the material or document prior to its disclosure or they may decide to post the material or document on the restricted portion of the website.

Public Portion of CAOFA Website

3. As a general principle, information, including data, contained in material and documents provided to or produced by meetings of the Conference of the Parties or the Scientific Coordinating Group may be accessed by the public including posted on the CAOFA public website, unless the material or documents contain confidential information as per Rule 12 and Appendix 1 in the COP Rules of Procedure.

Publication of Scientific Knowledge, Indigenous Knowledge, Local Knowledge, and Data

4. Any material or document proposed to be included in the CAOFA website containing scientific knowledge, Indigenous Knowledge, local knowledge or data shall adhere to the Data Management and Sharing Protocol for the Joint Program of Scientific Research and Monitoring (JPSRM). When considering access, storage, sharing, and use of this material or document containing Indigenous Knowledge, users acknowledge that Indigenous Knowledge holders continue to own and control their information, data,

material and documents pertaining to their knowledge, people, culture, resources and homelands.

Public Material and Documents

5. (1) Material and documents to be included in the CAOFA public website include the following:

- (a) Adopted reports of COP and SCG meetings, including annexes and appendices, within the timelines provided by the respective rules of procedure;
- (b) Other documents adopted or approved by the COP such as governance documents, resolutions, conservation and management measures, policies, and plans;
- (c) Meeting details, including schedules, venues, requirements, and logistic details;
- (d) Documents and material already published or otherwise released in the public domain;
- (e) Documents and materials that are:
 - i) not identified as confidential by its author or by the submitting participant, or not deemed to be confidential as per Appendix 1 of the COP Rules of Procedure;
 - ii) permitted to be released or disclosed pursuant to paragraph 4 of Appendix 1 of the COP Rules of Procedure; and,
 - iii) permitted to be released or disclosed by the author or the submitting participant;
- (f) material or documents containing knowledge or data referred to in section 4;
- (g) draft documents referred to in Rule 8.

(2) A participant, with appropriate permissions, who wishes to submit material or documents to be posted on the CAOFA website shall complete the [online form](#).

Restricted Access

Access

Commented [NB1]: Form #1 to be generated by the Data Management Team. The Form will include a requirement to identify the nature of the document as public or confidential, and whether the document should be posted on the public or restricted portion of the website.

6. (1) The CAOFA website shall contain a portion providing restricted access by the meeting participants and the chairpersons of the COP, the SCG and of any subsidiary bodies to draft or final material and documents considered confidential or not permitted to be released or disclosed to the public pursuant to these Rules.

(2) Each head of delegation of the participant shall provide the names of designated representatives to the Data Management Team of the Data Management Working Group (DM-WG) who may access the restricted portion of the website. Any changes to these representatives shall be signaled by the head of delegation.

(3) Any request for access to any material or document on the restricted portion of the website may be submitted to the Data Management Team of the Data Management Working Group (DM-WG) by filing the online form to this effect. The Data Management Team shall assess the risks, in consultation with the owner of the material or document, and may provide a copy of the specific material or document sought with conditions as appropriate, or it may seek that the DM-WG, through the SCG, have the matter discussed and addressed by the Parties.

Commented [NB2]: Note to Data Management Team: a 2nd online form required.

Documents

7. Material and documents to be included in the restricted portion of the CAOFA website could include the following:

- (a) Documents and material containing information that is deemed to be confidential pursuant to Rule 12 and Appendix 1 in the COP Rules of Procedure and not permitted to be released or disclosed pursuant to paragraph 4 of Appendix 1 of the COP Rules of Procedure;
- (b) Documents and material identified in the online form by its author or submitting party as confidential or otherwise requiring protection;
- (c) Documents and material submitted for negotiation or discussion by the COP, such as draft proposals and working papers referred to in Rule 8 ;

Draft Material or Documents

8. (1) A Party to the Agreement, an admitted observer or the Chairperson of the COP, the SCG or their subsidiary bodies may submit draft material or documents for discussion, consideration and decision or approval by the Parties, including during a meeting. These may include draft proposals for resolutions, draft proposals for conservation and management measures and observer requests.

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(2) Draft material and documents submitted by a meeting participant at least 35 days prior to a meeting shall be posted on the public portion of the website unless the submitting participant requests that it be posted on the restricted portion of the website. The final adopted material or document shall be posted on the public portion of the website.

(3) Draft material and documents generated and submitted by a Chairperson of the COP, the SCG or their subsidiary bodies at least 35 days prior to a meeting shall be circulated to the Parties for posting on the public portion of the website. A Party could request that such document or material be posted to the restricted portion of the website due to proprietary or confidential information defined in the Data Management and Sharing Protocol, or containing sensitive negotiating positions. The draft material or document shall be posted within 30 days of the meeting. The final adopted material or document shall be posted on the public portion of the website.

Proposal from Canada
CAOFA Accession Process and Real Interest

Purpose

The prospect of expanding the membership in the *Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean* (CAOFA) prompted debate at the last meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) in June 2024. To date, the United Kingdom has expressed an interest in acceding to the CAOFA, while current Parties to the Agreement have expressed views about the accession process to the CAOFA. However, the COP currently does not have a process in place by which prospective Parties would be invited to join the Agreement. In order to facilitate a more thorough discussion of prospective membership in the CAOFA, and agreement on the accession process, Canada submits the following paper for consideration. Note that the purpose of this paper does not include consideration of any specific Parties interest in acceding to the Agreement; this will only be considered once a formal process has been agreed to.

Background

On October 3, 2018, ten parties (Canada, China, Denmark in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland, the European Union, Iceland, Japan, Norway, Russia, Republic of Korea and the United States) signed the CAOFA. The Agreement came into force on June 25, 2021 following the Agreement’s ratification by all ten signatories, per the dates below. Per Article 13, the Agreement shall remain in force for an initial period of 16 years (until June 2037).

Signatory	Ratification Date
Russia	January 29, 2019
European Union	March 4, 2019
Canada	May 30, 2019
Japan	July 23, 2019
United States	July 29, 2019
Iceland	September 2, 2019
Korea	October 11, 2019
Denmark (in respect of Faroe Islands and Greenland)	February 18, 2020
Norway	April 17, 2020
China	May 26, 2021

Following the Agreement’s entry into force, the Parties may now invite other states with a real interest to accede to the CAOFA, in accordance with Article 10(2), as follows:

Article 10

Accession

2. After the entry into force of this Agreement, the Parties may invite other States

with a real interest to accede to this Agreement.

Brief History of Membership Discussion at CAOFA

To date, only the United Kingdom (UK) has expressed an interest in joining the CAOFA. At the third meeting of the COP in the Republic of Korea, June 10-12, 2024, at the request of Norway, the COP Chairperson introduced the agenda item to discuss the UK's interest in acceding to the Agreement.

During the discussion, one Party opposed substantive consideration of the matter during the COP3 meeting in the absence of documentation providing information to evaluate the interest of the United Kingdom. While most delegations expressed support for the United Kingdom's interest in joining the CAOFA, the COP noted that the first request would set a precedent for future requests, and it agreed that processes and procedures needed to be developed to address such proposals. The COP agreed to take up later the development of processes and procedures for receiving and considering proposals for accession to the Agreement. Most Parties noted the need to address the UK's outstanding request in this regard.

International Legal Context

Membership in regional fisheries bodies, including regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) and arrangements (RFMAs), should be considered in the context of relevant legal instruments. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) was a critical development in international law of the sea and protection of the marine environment. Central to UNCLOS is the principle of cooperation amongst state for the protection and preservation of the marine environment. In this regard, UNCLOS specifically codifies the responsibility of coastal States to cooperate with one another in the protection and preservation of the marine environment, as well as in other activities related to the preservation of the marine living resources and in the management of highly migratory species. The international duty to cooperate is embedded in a number of articles, including:

- Article 65, with a view to conserving marine mammals.
- Article 118, with a view to conserving and managing living marine resources in the high seas.
- Articles 192 and 194, with a view to protecting and preserving the marine environment.
- Article 197, at the global or regional levels, directly or through international organizations to formulate and elaborate international rules, standards and recommended practices and procedures for the protection and preservation of the marine environment, taking into account characteristic regional features.

An important mechanism of fulfilling the duty to cooperate is by inviting interested parties to the table to directly participate and negotiate in the management of the high seas and the

international marine environment. Importantly, the 1995 UN Fish Stocks Agreement (UNFSA) further clarifies and expands upon what it refers to as a “duty to cooperate,” and calls upon states to become members of existing RFMOs or agree to apply their management measures. The UNFSA contains provisions relevant to RFMO membership, including as follows:

Article 8/Cooperation for conservation and management

3. Where a subregional or regional fisheries management organization or arrangement has the competence to establish conservation and management measures for particular straddling fish stocks or highly migratory fish stocks, States fishing for the stocks on the high seas and relevant coastal States shall give effect to their duty to cooperate by becoming members of such organization or participants in such arrangement, or by agreeing to apply the conservation and management measures established by such organization or arrangement. States having a real interest in the fisheries concerned may become members of such organization or participants in such arrangement. The terms of participation in such organization or arrangement shall not preclude such States from membership or participation; nor shall they be applied in a manner which discriminates against any State or group of States having a real interest in the fisheries concerned.

Article 9/Subregional and regional fisheries management organizations and arrangements

2. States cooperating in the formation of a subregional or regional fisheries management organization or arrangement shall inform other States which they are aware have a real interest in the work of the proposed organization or arrangement of such cooperation.

The UN General Assembly has built upon this legal framework by encouraging relevant states to consider becoming members of RFMOs, and RFMOs to consider extending invitations of membership. That includes, most recently, the UN General Assembly resolution 79/145 on sustainable fisheries adopted on December 12, 2024, where paragraph 175 of the resolution specifically states:

175. *Invites*, in this regard, subregional and regional fisheries management organizations and arrangements to ensure that all States having a real interest in the fisheries concerned may become members of such organizations or participants in such arrangements, in accordance with the Convention, the Agreement and the Code, provided they have shown their interest in and capacity to comply with the measures adopted by the regional fisheries management organizations and arrangements concerned, including their willingness to effectively exercise flag State control, while recognizing the need to enhance the capacity of developing States in this regard;

Similarly, countries represented at the UNFSA resumed Review Conference in 2016 emphasized the need to promote participation in RFMOs, including the development of mechanisms to invite states to become members of these organizations.

What is Real Interest?

While the concept of “real interest” is integral to the UNFSA, and satisfying it being a fundamental condition for states to join regional fisheries bodies, neither the UNFSA or the CAOFA define or specify what constitutes a “real interest”, nor what the interest must be in.

While the UNFSA does not define the term, the context within which real interest is used can be revealing. Namely, Article 8(3) places a duty on “States fishing for the stocks on the high seas and relevant coastal States” to become members/participants in fisheries management entities. It further goes on to note that “States having a real interest in the fisheries concerned” may join as well and that the terms of membership cannot be applied in a manner which discriminates against any State or group of States having a real interest in the fisheries concerned. This strongly implies that fishing States and relevant coastal States have an inherent “real interest”, but that membership/participation should not be limited to those States alone.

In the academic literature, there are various types of States that have been proposed as to have a “real interest” under the UNFSA as follows:

1. States that have fished in the application area previously and want to resume fishing;
2. States without a catch history that want to fish in the future;
3. States with no intention of fishing, but who nevertheless want to participate;
4. Coastal states; or,
5. Port States involved in landings and transshipments of fish stocks.

While some of the aforementioned conditions are not applicable in the CAOFA context, items two, three and four do have merit for consideration for the purposes of accession. In terms of item two, while there is no catch history in the central Arctic Ocean, it is quite possible that a new Party would be interested in participating in exploratory fishing in order to determine the potential for a future fishery and to contribute to enhanced data and knowledge of the Agreement Area. Similarly, prospective states that fall under condition three could express interest in joining the CAOFA in order to further the overarching objective and intent of the Agreement by contributing to the knowledge base of the organization. In keeping with item four, the five Arctic coastal states are Parties to the Agreement. According to Erik Jaap Molenaar’s paper, *The Concept of “Real Interest” and Other Aspects of Co-operation through Regional Fisheries Management Mechanisms*, the main reason why a state would want to apply under category three above would be to further the international community's interest in sustainable management and safe-guarding biodiversity in the Agreement area.

Proposed Criteria for Demonstrating Real Interest

It can be proposed that a State with a “real interest” to join the CAOFA would need to make a connection to the Agreement’s overarching objective, to prevent unregulated fishing in the high seas portion of the CAO through the application of precautionary conservation and

management measures as part of a long-term strategy to safeguard healthy marine ecosystems and to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of fish stocks. Further, a State would need to demonstrate that its real interest pertains to fulfilling and/or adhering to one or more of the core actions implemented under the Agreement and in furtherance of the CAOFA's aforementioned objective:

1. Scientific research, as embodied by the Joint Program of Scientific Research and Monitoring;
2. Exploratory fishing in the Agreement area;
3. Compliance with all adopted conservation and management measures; and,
4. Marine conservation.

In practical terms, real interest can be demonstrated by:

- A commitment to the objective of the Agreement, specifically to prevent unregulated fishing in the high seas portion of the central Arctic Ocean through the application of precautionary conservation and management measures as part of a long-term strategy to safeguard healthy marine ecosystems and to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of fish stocks.;
- A commitment to implement and comply with conservation and management measures adopted by the COP;
- A commitment to the sustainable use of fish stocks;
- Detailing its existing and prospective scientific contributions in the Agreement area and adjacent regions; and,
- Observer status history and participation at CAOFA-related meetings.

Draft Proposal for Accession Process

We, the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the *Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean* (the Agreement),

Recognizing that the Agreement provides that the Parties may invite other States with a real interest to accede to this Agreement, following its entry into force;

Recalling the principles and provisions of the 1982 *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea* which reflects an international duty to cooperate in the protection and preservation of the living marine environment;

Recognizing the 1995 United Nations Fish Stock Agreement (UNFSA);

Recalling the relevant provisions of the UNFSA and UN General Assembly resolution 79/145 on sustainable fisheries;

Emphasizing that under relevant instruments, States having a real interest may become members of a fisheries management organization or arrangement, or participants in such organization or arrangement, and that the terms of participation are not to preclude such States from membership or participation, nor shall they be applied in a manner which discriminates against any State or group of States having a real interest;

Mindful of the utility of establishing a process for inviting States with a real interest to accede to the Agreement;

Acknowledging that, pursuant to Article 10(2) of the Agreement, the COP has the authority to invite States with a real interest to accede to the Agreement;

Adopts a process for inviting States to accede to the Agreement, pursuant to Article 10(2), as follows:

1. Any State with a real interest in acceding to the Agreement shall submit a written statement to the Chairperson of the Conference of the Parties for consideration by the Conference of the Parties at a minimum of 35 days before the COP meeting, setting out its interest in acceding to the Agreement.
2. The requesting State shall be given the opportunity to present its application at the COP meeting in order to demonstrate its real interest in acceding to the Agreement.
3. The COP shall review the application and decide whether to invite the requesting State to accede pursuant to Article 10(2) of the Agreement.
4. If decided in the affirmative, the COP shall invite the requesting State to join the Agreement and deposit its instrument of accession with the depositary.

COP MEETING

Early June 2026 CAOFA COP5 In-person Meeting in Europe (Venue to be confirmed)
(Dates to be confirmed)

Provisional meeting dates for CAOFA Scientific Coordinating Group (SCG) and working groups
(These provisional dates to be confirmed)

22-23 July 2025	Mapping and Monitoring Working Group (virtual)
24-25 July 2025	Data Management Working Group (virtual)
24-26 September 2025	Scientific Coordinating Group (virtual)
13-14 October 2025	Mapping and Monitoring Working Group (virtual)
15-16 October 2025	Data Management Working Group (virtual)
12-13 January 2026	Mapping and Monitoring Working Group (virtual)
14-15 January 2026	Data Management Working Group (virtual)
24-27 March 2026	Scientific Coordinating Group (in person, hosted by China at a venue to be confirmed)
13-14 April 2026	Mapping and Monitoring Working Group (virtual)
15-16 April 2026	Data Management Working Group (virtual)