Creation and aims

For the last 200 years, fur seals have been commercially hunted. At the earliest stages this trade was carried out in the most rapacious manner: both males and females were taken, which brought about drastic losses of stock. During 1806-1820 over 400,000 fur seals were taken off the California shores; during 1800-1868 one Russian-American company took over 2,500,000 fur seals. A monopoly on the exploitation of fur seal herds was entrusted to the Alaskan Company, which in 1871-1881 took 760,000 fur seals.

At the end of the 19th century, the hunters mastered the pelagic sealing of fur seals beyond the 3-mile territorial waters. This method appeared from one angle to be ineffective, but from another angle, during a period of about 20 years, it drastically damaged the stock of mammals. First, it was difficult to determine the sex of the mammals, and females were shot together with males; second, fatally wounded beasts managed to escape in the depths of the sea or sank (especially pregnant females); third, the young of killed females mostly died of hunger.

Because of the pelagic trade, by 1911 fur seals had become available only on the Pribilof, Seal and Komandorskie Islands.

With the aim of preventing the total loss of marine mammals, Great Britain, Japan, Russia and the USA signed a Convention on the International Protection of Fur Seals on 1 July 1911. The Convention prohibited the sea hunting of fur seals in the Pacific north of 30°N including the Bering Sea, the Kamchatka Sea, the Sea of Okhotsk and the Sea of Japan. The Convention established minimum populations for fur seals on the islands of Russia (18,000) and Japan (6,500), below which sealing was prohibited.

Thanks to the Convention, the total quantity of fur seals increased in six years by 30%. In 1926 the Convention was extended for an additional 15 years. But in 1940 Japan denounced the Convention and it ceased to act. Since that time, pelagic sealing has been renewed and the population on the Seal and Komandorskie Islands have decreased considerably.
In 1955 negotiations were begun to reach agreement on the regulation of commercial sealing. The Diplomatic Conference in 1957 adopted the Temporary Convention on Conservation of Fur Seals in the North Pacific, which entered into force 14 October 1957. In 1969 it was extended for 6 years, and in 1976 for 4 years. In 1963 and 1975 amendments were also made to the Convention.

The Convention is summoned to provide for international cooperation in the achievement of the maximum acceptable productivity of fur seal resources. For the practical implementation of the aims and principles of the Convention, the North Pacific Fur Seal Commission was established.

The Commission is an intergovernmental organization. Its legal status is determined by the Convention of 1957, Rules of Procedure and other documents. The Commission has movable and immovable property, personnel, archives, a flag and an emblem. Its officials and representatives of member states enjoy legal immunity.

The power of the Commission extends to the waters of the North Pacific, including islands inhabited by fur seals (Pribilof, Seal, Komandorskie, etc.).

In accordance with Article V of the Convention of 1957, the duties of the Commission are: a) to draw up and coordinate programmes on research to achieve the aims of the Convention; b) to recommend these coordinated research programmes to the respective Parties for implementation; c) to study data obtained in the implementation of such coordinated research programmes; d) to recommend suitable measures to the Contracting Parties on the basis of data obtained in the implementation of such coordinated research programmes, including measures relating to the dimensional and age-sex composition of the season’s catch and relating to the decrease or interrupting of sealing on any island or groups of islands; e) to study whether sealing might be allowed in the sea in certain conditions in connection with shore hunting without infringing the aims of the Convention and to submit to the Contracting Parties recommendations on this matter at the end of the 21st year after the entry into force of the Convention of 1957; f) to determine the quantity of fur seals which may be taken at sea for scientific aims.

Membership

The Commission is a reserved organization. Its members may be those states in whose territory the layings of fur seals or the routes of their migrations are situated. In this connection, in the constituent act of the Commission there are no provisions on the adherence of any states other than the founders of the Commission.

In accordance with point 1 of the preamble of the Convention of 1957, the