

Report of ICES visit to Lithuania

On 4 September 2003, an ICES delegation consisting of the President Pentti Mälkki, David Griffith (General Secretary) and Jan Thulin (Coordinator, Baltic Sea Regional Project) travelled to Vilnius for consultations with the Foreign Ministry, Environment Ministry and the Ministry of Agriculture (which has responsibility for fisheries matters). The discussions were organised at the request of ICES, in order to seek to reactivate, and if possible facilitate, Lithuania's accession to the ICES Convention. Attached is a copy of the General Secretary's letter sent individually on 13 May 2003 to the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Environment, Agriculture and Finance. Our request to meet the Ministry of Finance was unsuccessful.

Lithuania applied to join ICES in 1997 under Article 16 (4) of the ICES Convention, and in 1998 the Danish Foreign Ministry informed the Lithuanian government, and ICES, that the requisite 75% of the ICES Member Countries had indicated their support for Lithuania's application. The Danish Foreign Ministry invited the Lithuanian government to deposit the necessary instrument of accession.

At that time, ICES had informed the Lithuanian authorities that their national contribution would be the same as the contributions from Estonia and Latvia (one share each). Lithuania was also offered the same transitional arrangements as had been offered to (and accepted by) Estonia and Latvia, namely DKK 50,000 for the first year of membership, DKK 150,000 for the second year, and one full share for the third and each subsequent year. Since then, the General Secretary has written to the Lithuanian authorities on several occasions, informing them that this offer is still on the table. Lithuania, however, has not been in a position to complete the accession process.

During the visit to Vilnius on 4 September, the ICES delegation met the following at three separate sessions:

Mr Arunas Kundrotas, (Minister of the Environment)

Mr Algirdas Stankevicius (Director of the Klaipeda Sea Research Centre)

Dr V. Narusevicius (Head of Division of Environmental Monitoring and Research, Environmental Protection Agency)

Mr Evaldas Vebra (Head of Division of International Relations and Agreements, Environmental Strategy Department, Ministry of the Environment)

Ms Jolita Jarmakauskiene (Leading Specialist of the Division of International Relations and Agreements, Environmental Strategy Department, Ministry of the Environment)

Ms Agne Kniezaite (Leading Specialist of Water Division, Environmental Quality Department, Ministry of Environment)

Mr Vidmantas Kanopa (State Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture)

Mr Vytautas Vaitiekunas (Director of the Department of Fisheries, Under Ministry of Agriculture)

Mr Algirdas Rusakevicius (Chief Specialist, International Relations, Integration to EU and Research Division, Fisheries Department, Under-Ministry of Agriculture)

Dr Sarunas Toliushis (Director of the Fisheries Research Laboratory)

Mr Darius Jurgelevicius (Under Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

Mrs Dalia Kadisiene (Acting Head, International Economic Organisations Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

At each session, the three ICES representatives made detailed verbal and visual presentations describing the aims and objectives of ICES, its structure, and our scientific and advisory activities. Similar information about the Baltic Sea Regional Project was presented. Copies of the ICES Basic Documents were given to the Lithuanian participants, together with copies of some recent publications.

The advantages to Lithuania of joining ICES were emphasised. These mainly referred, firstly, to the advantage to Lithuania of becoming involved in the scientific activities underpinning IBSFC and HELCOM, which would thus affording Lithuania the opportunity to participate in the early (scientific) stages of the decision-making processes which underlie the management of Baltic maritime affairs through these two Commissions, of which

Lithuania is a member. Secondly, the added value of becoming a member of the ICES international network was highlighted.

The representatives of all three Ministries (including the Minister of the Environment, the State Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Director of the Department of Fisheries of the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) assured the ICES delegation that all three Ministries support the case for completing the process of acceding to the ICES Convention, and that the respective budgets of these Ministries contain financial provision for the Lithuanian national contribution. We were informed, however, that they await final approval from the Ministry of

Finance (parliamentary approval will also be required, of course). Everybody we met was confident that the necessary approval would be forthcoming.

The Minister of the Environment assured us that he will be putting the issue of ICES membership onto the Parliamentary Agenda during the coming weeks

The President invited Lithuania to send two observers to the forthcoming Council Meeting, subject to approval by the Delegates. The Lithuanian representatives expressed their deep appreciation of this invitation.