

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

Russia

Discussions of Export Ban on Caspian Caviar?

More than 80 per cent of the world's caviar is produced by the various species of Caspian sturgeon, some of which are in danger of extinction from overfishing and poaching. At the end of June in Paris, Member States of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) decided to reinstate export quotas requested by the Caspian countries for this year.

In November 2000, CITES decided to reduce the 2001 export quotas of the former Soviet States bordering the Caspian Sea – Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan – by 80 per cent, since they did not seem to be doing enough to combat the sturgeon's slow demise. By contrast, Iran is seen as adhering to international environmental norms in harvesting its sturgeon.

Reinstating the quotas is conditional on the countries taking measures this year to combat illegal fishing, and on the five Caspian States to coordinate their efforts. To this end, the European Union's Caspian Environmental Programme (CEP), based in Azerbaijan, planned a meeting for 3-4 July to establish a commission for the joint

management of sturgeon fisheries. Russian officials, however, informed the meeting's organisers that their participation would be "inappropriate", since they themselves would be drafting their own proposal on how to manage the sea's sturgeon population. The CEP project manager said that "we cannot hide our disappointment ... and cannot



Acipenser ruthenus

underestimate the damage that it has done to the process." He added that the Russians had already made draft proposals over the past 10 years but that these were "flawed" and had failed to reach agreement. The Russian drafts did not address the issue of how to replenish Caspian Sea stocks, and leaned towards having Russian institutions making the key decisions.

A summit of the five Caspian leaders is planned for this autumn in Turkmenistan, and it is hoped that a general agreement on managing the sea's bio-resources can be agreed then. (MJ)

