



Agenda item 5.2(c)  
For information

**Council**

**CNL(03)31**

***National Salmon Rivers and Salmon Fjords  
Tabled by Norway***



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#### **Introduction**

In June 2002 the Norwegian government proposed to the Storting (parliament) the designation of national salmon rivers and salmon fjords. The aim was to grant unequivocal protection, as a clear priority, to a selection of the most important Norwegian stocks of wild salmon in river systems and fjords. Parliament approved the proposal, with a few amendments, in February 2003.

The concept of designating national salmon rivers and salmon fjords was a recommendation from the government-appointed Wild Salmon Committee, which submitted its report to the government in 1999. The proposal was controversial from the start, provoking strong feelings in many sectors of society. Conflicts involving fish farming and national salmon fjords have been a particular focus of the public debate. The decision of parliament has been criticized for not giving enough protection to the wild salmon on the one hand; and, on the other, for going too far in imposing restrictions on the fish-farming industry.

#### **Rationale**

As a consequence of the severe decline of wild salmon in the western and southern parts of its range, Norway's share of the North Atlantic salmon resource has increased. During the last ten years Norwegian wild salmon have come to account for about a quarter of the total stock of Atlantic salmon. Norway also has a very large number of salmon stocks, and thus a significant amount of the variation and diversity within the species. In these circumstances, Norway bears a special responsibility for protecting the Atlantic salmon stocks.

The Norwegian catch has doubled since 1997, almost certainly because of improved conditions at sea. However, the current catch represents less than half that achieved during the 1970s. Approximately 50 national salmon stocks have become extinct, and a third of the 405 remaining Norwegian stocks are still threatened or vulnerable, although Norway nevertheless continues to possess a unique range and incidence of wild salmon stocks.

Wild salmon also generate social and economic benefits in Norway: as a basis of commerce in the countryside, as a genetic resource for fish-farming, as a stimulus to recreational activity and appreciation of the natural environment, and as an important element in Sami culture.

#### **The Proposal**

The proposal for national salmon rivers and salmon fjords, as accepted by the parliament, entails the immediate protection of 37 of the most important salmon stocks. It has also been decided that the number of salmon stocks included in this management regime is to be extended to a total of about 50, which will account for three-quarters of the total wild salmon resource in Norway. A long-term commitment to protecting these stocks will, therefore, be of great significance to the conservation of Norwegian wild salmon.

Given that Norway has as many as 405 remaining wild salmon stocks, it follows that the most important of these must be given priority in the interest of rational and effective management.

Designating national salmon rivers and salmon fjords will be an important contribution to the work of safeguarding the Norwegian wild salmon, and with it a significant proportion of the world's total stock of Atlantic salmon. It will also promote compliance with the spirit of the Wild Salmon Committee's proposal for national salmon rivers and salmon fjords as a keystone in the management of Norwegian wild salmon.

### **The new management regime in more detail**

The designation of national salmon rivers and salmon fjords implies that the salmon populations covered by the system will be protected from encroachment and activity in the river systems and against fish-farming in nearby fjords and coastal areas. The river systems will be subject to a flexible management regime in that no activity will be banned outright, but each will be assessed in the context of the individual river and the potential damage to the salmon or to its salmon spawning and nursery habitats.

The management regime applies mainly to large and abundant stocks with high productivity, stocks with a high percentage of large salmon and stocks of a particular genetic character. The range of populations is also well distributed geographically.

As well as being guaranteed specific protection against harmful encroachment, designated rivers will also benefit from priority status in the general endeavour to strengthen salmon stocks. This will apply to treatment aimed at combating the salmon parasite *Gyrodactylus salaris*, restoring rivers, and other work deemed necessary for strengthening individual stocks.

Parliament's decision comprises three key features:

- establishment of 37 designated national salmon rivers and 21 salmon fjords within defined boundaries;
- specification of principles for future administration;
- elaboration of a framework for supplementing and amending the system.

In the national salmon rivers, projects or activities that might harm the wild salmon will not be permitted. The proposal includes a thorough analysis of all such activities, and criteria for prohibiting them. The aim here is not an absolute ban, but a flexible system of management capable of modifying the restrictions according to conditions in individual rivers. This will form the basis of new legislation for the administration of the national salmon rivers.

In the national salmon fjords, new sites for farming salmonids will not be permitted. Additionally, 13 of the 21 national salmon fjords will be designated aquaculture-free areas. In those national salmon fjords where fish-farming is still permitted, the farms will be subject to special regulations concerning security against escapes and health controls.

The system of temporary wild salmon protection fjords banning new salmon farming, which has existed since 1989, is to be replaced by national salmon fjords. Consequently, those temporary zones which are not designated as national salmon fjords will be declassified.

However, no new licences for farming salmonids will be issued in these declassified areas before parliament has decided which salmon rivers and fjord areas are to be included in the next phase of designating national salmon rivers and fjords. A proposal for supplements and amendments - to a total of about 50 stocks - is to be presented to the parliament in spring 2004, together with a proposal for supplements to the Protection Plan for Water Resources and revision of the national Master Plan for hydropower resources.

Management of the national salmon rivers and salmon fjords will be in accordance with the relevant legislation. Necessary changes to statutes will be presented to the parliament as soon as possible after the system has been finalized. Responsibility for applying regulations concerning the national salmon rivers and salmon fjords will be shared amongst various government authorities. The new management regime will also be firmly based at local level, and provisions will, therefore, be made for local authorities and owners of fishing rights to be involved in its administration.

The designation of national salmon rivers and salmon fjords is permanent. However, as new information, new technologies and new framework conditions for the commercial interests concerned arise, changes in the regulations for managing these areas may be necessary. The regime will, therefore, be reviewed when it has become possible to evaluate its effectiveness, within 10 years at the latest.

The designation of national salmon rivers and salmon fjords will be an extremely significant contribution to the work of protecting Norwegian wild salmon. In a number of important areas, however, the salmon stocks covered by the regime, like the other stocks, must be protected by other measures.

